The Art and Tactics of Job Interviews for the Introverted: An Information Perspective

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Abstract

This exploratory research studies the relationship between information, personality, and job interviews. The purpose of this research is to reveal the nature of information embedded in the process of interview preparation with a focus on introverted job seekers, which is an understudied topic in the LIS field. This research employed a qualitative approach, using information horizon interviews and information horizon maps to gather textual and visual data from three participants who self-identified as introverts. The results were analyzed through *Hektor's model* of *information behaviour* and the *sense-making model*. Three main findings were: 1) nervousness motivated introverted interviewees to research excessively; 2) introverted interviewees tended not to utilize socially constructed information resources; 3) information behaviours practiced by introverts for job interview preparation unfulded in a cascading pattern. The findings provided some insights into how introversion as a personality type shapes information behaviours and dictates introverts' choice for information resources. In a positive light, we hope the findings of this research could help introverts understand their own information behavioral patterns and take the most advantage of their preferred information resources to land their dream jobs.

INTRODUCTION

This research explored the relationship between information, personality, and job interviews. This particular theme emerged naturally when I thought of my friends who recently graduated from university. The post-graduation job hunting experience was overwhelming for most; a lot of my introverted friends came to me to speak of their fear for job interviews. One thing that had been brought up repeatedly in our conversations was not knowing how to prepare for job interviews as introverts. Their concerns sparked my interest in studying the nature of information in job interview preparation with a focus on the introverted population.

Job interviews are information demanding as successful interviews ask interviewees to gather relevant, high-quality information and organize it effectively impress the interviewers. Often, high-quality information is not easily accessible and may only be acquired through networking and talking to insiders. This may not be something introverted interviewees feel comfortable doing. Then, how do introverted interviewees prepare for job interviews and how do they obtain high-quality of information?

This study addressed this knowledge gap by interviewing three self-identified introverts who had positive interview experiences before. The study employed a qualitative research approach, using semi-structured, information horizon interviews (IHI) to gather textual and visual data from participants. To follow up on the interviews, transcripts were analyzed through two sensitizing concepts: *Hektor's*

model of information behaviours and the *sense-making model*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An exhaustive search using the LIS resources available in the University of Toronto library catalogue and the Wilson Web database identified very little literature on the research topic of interest. Therefore, an alternative searching strategy was used.

In order to answer the research question raised, we must establish that there is a relationship between personality types and the use of information. With this approach, we were able to identify a handful of articles that addressed how personality types impact research styles and information-seeking behaviors. A study by Al-Samarrie *et al* (2016) showed character traits relate to behavioural differences in information-seeking through tracking participants' eye movements. People who share the same character traits were placed in the same cluster. The three experimental clusters with varied character traits were: high conscientiousness, high agreeableness, and high extraversion. His research results suggested that people who were conscientious were the best information seekers using digital, online resources while extroverts were the poorest information seekers (Al-Samarrie *et al*, 2016). Our exploratory study aims to expand and build on this finding by limiting personality driven information seeking behaviours to a specific, job interview preparation type of setting.

Another way to approach the research question we proposed is to search for literature that links personality to job

interviews. This search found an abundant amount of highly-cited literature. In Caldwell and Burger's paper (1998), they stated that conscitentiousness encouraged more non-social preparations for job interviews. Also, Caldwell and Burger's paper (1998) claimed that interview success was shaped largely by interviewee's actions before the interview, a point that was assumed by our research as a pre-condition. Graham (2009) studied the relationship between personality types and job search behaviours in her PhD dissertation. She found traits such as "outgoing, friendly, and social" positively correlated with networking comfort. However, she did not elucidate whether traits related to introversion correlated with unwillingness to network. I hope our exploratory research could, to an extent, address this missing point.

RESEARCH METHODS

Participants Recruitment

The research population was self-identified introverts who had job interview experience, with introversion and interview experience being the cutting points.

Recruitment was voluntary. A screener titled "Invitation to Participate" (see Appendix 1A) was distributed to interested participants in-person. This instrument determined the whether interested participants were suitable for this research. The researcher arranged an interview with those who fit the recruitment criteria.

Inforamtion Horizon Interview (IHI)

Individual information horizon interviews (Sonnenwald, Wildermuth, & Harmon, 2001) took place in a semi-structured format. The IHI prompt (See Appendix 1B) had 12 pre-designed questions for every participant to answer. The last question was a drawing activity which asked participants to draw an Information Horizon Map, the concept of which was explained to each participant before they started the activity for clarification purposes.

In addition to IHI prompt, the researcher asked 5-6 extra questions during each participant's interview when she felt like investigating certain statements more. In general, the interview was 35-45 minutes long.

Methods for Data Collection

The researcher collected textual and visual data using field notes, audio-recording, and transcription collectively. Field notes highlighted key points raised by participants in the interview, helping the researcher to follow along converstions. Audio-recording ensured the research results were not entirely dependent on the field notes as the researcher might not have time to write down every detail the participant discussed. Audio recordings gave the researcher opportunities to look for what had been missed in the field notes. Audio recordings were also transcribed for coding. Different concepts had different coding schemes. Yellow highlights denoted common themes in all the transcripts. Pink highlihts denoted information resources participants used.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed primary through two sensitizing concepts (SC): *Hektor's information behavior model* (Hektor, 2001) and the *sense-making model* (Dervin, 1983). Both models are well-accepted in the LIS discipline.

For use of information resources specifically, a table summarized the types of the information resources and their frequency of use.

FINDINGS

Nervousness motivated introverted interviewees to perform excessive research before interviews

We selected *Sense-making* (Dervin, 1983) for data analysis because the components of the model: situation, information gap, and outcomes were found present in the data collected.

In the interview, all three participants said they were nervous about job interviews. Feeling nervous could be interpreted as a situation.

The interviews also identified when participants felt nervous:

> *Before the interview, yes. After the interview is okay, but during the interview I wouldn't notice how stressed I am because I would be focusing on what they are asking and how I formulate my responses. (P3)*

Feeling nervous before a job interview led participants to think that they were underprepared. The perception of underpreparedness created an information gap that motivated information searching. As an outcome, participants searched excessively, but quite often, the extra information they gathered was not relevant to the job interview:

> *somehow through my research, I found out the interviewer likes ballet! (laughing). (P2)*

P1 showed a similar information behavior, she stated:

> *I generally continue to go through the answers that I'm going to give even on the way to the interview, during the commute. So, I prepare down to the last minute. (P1)*

Participants' information behaviours regarding job interview preparation unfold in a cascading pattern

Participants engaged in an Information Horizon Map drawing activity. The maps illustrated the types of information resources (digital, print, social etc.) participants utilized as well as their step-by-step process for preparing for

a job interview. We selected Hektor's model of information behaivours (Hektor, 2001) to explain the maps because each stage of the interview preparation could be viewed as an information activity. This model allowed us to categorize and classify information behaviours exhibited participants during job interview preparation.

Hektor's information behavior model consisted of eight information activities: search & retrieve, browse, monitor, unfold; exchange, dress, instruct, and publish. Stages of the interview preparation process (shown in maps below) were categorized according to the eight information activities, suggested by the 'name of information activity' in brackets.
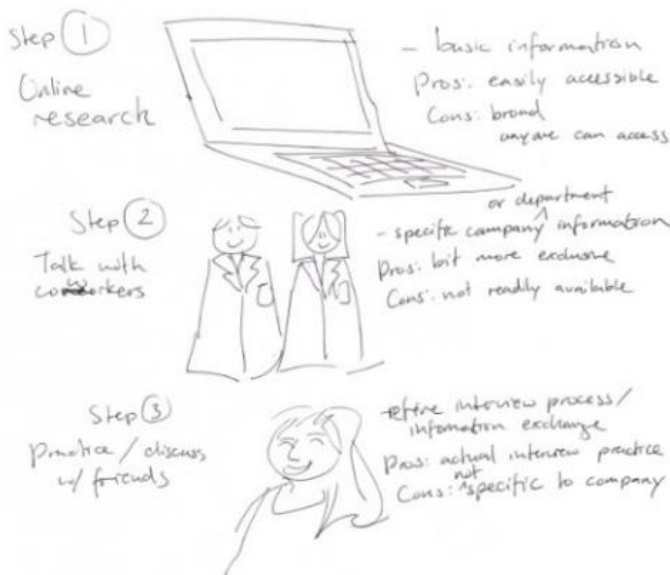

Figure 1. P1 Information Horizon Map: internal interview.

Figure 2. Information Horizon Map (P2).

P1 began with online browsing (browse) and searching (search & retrieve). Then, she sought information from co-workers who already worked in that department to learn more about duties of the job she applied to (search & retrieve). Leading to the interview, she practiced common interview questions listed online (unfolding).
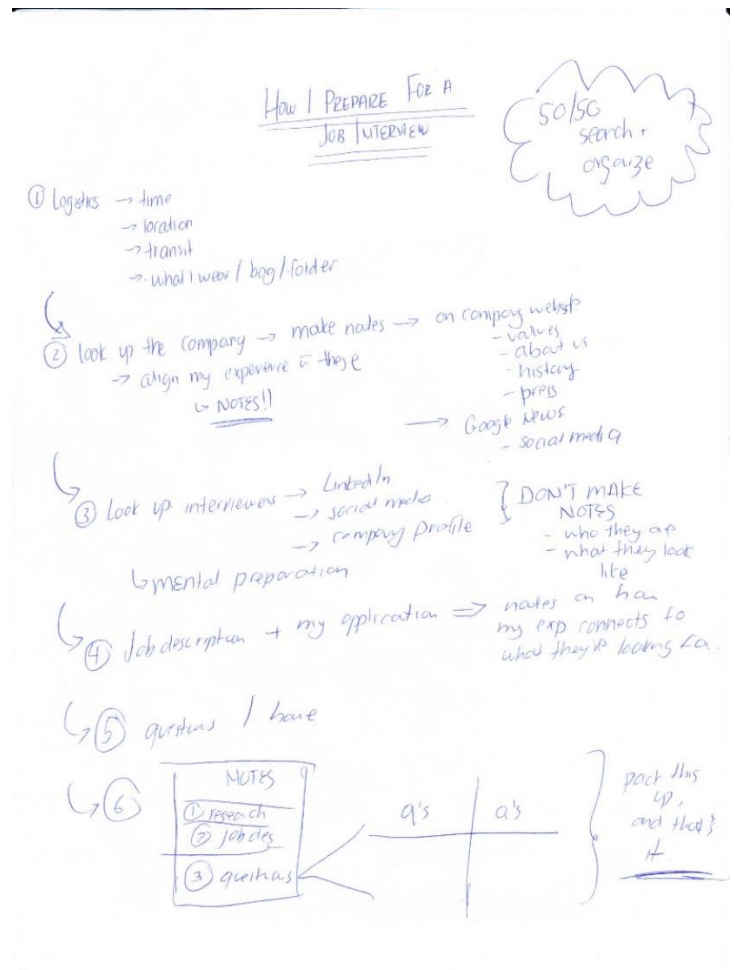
In this map, P2 started her preparation with attending to logistic details (browse). Then, she looked up the company generally on the internet (browse, search and retrieve) and researched specifically about her interviewers (search & retrieve). Then, she revisited the job description and her application to craft her interview presentation accordingly (dress). Lastly, she practiced questions (unfold).
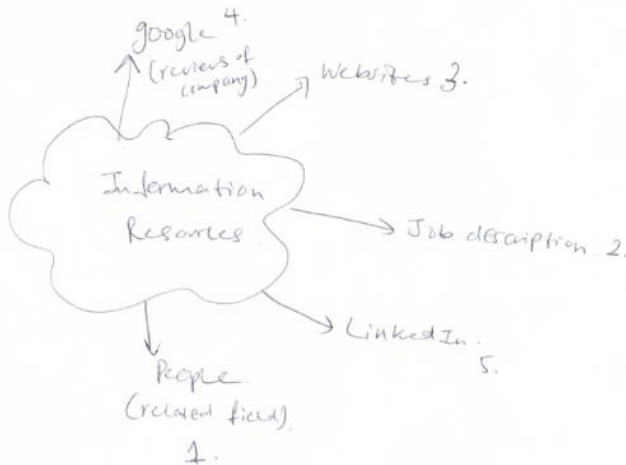
Figure 3. Information Horizon Map (P3)

P3 started at the top. She first used Google to look up the company (browse). Then, she went to the company's website for specific information about the company (search & retrieve). She looked up the job description, similar jobs on LinkedIn and people who worked at the same position (search & retrieve). The numbers represented a ranking of resource importance, although she reported that she never reached out to strangers online.

Introverted interviewees tend to avoid uisng socially constructed information resources

Based on the codes and the IHI maps, we developed a table that summarized the types and usage of information resources by participants in the information seeking stage where social information resource avoidance is the strongest.

Table 1. Information resources and their utilization.

Resource Name:	Type:	Frequency of use
Google	Digital	Very frequent
Glassdoor	Digital	Frequent
LinkedIn (lookup only)	Digital	Frequent
Indeed	Digital	Very frequent
Company Website	Digital	Very frequent
Library	Mostly print	Not at all
Social Media	Digital and social	Infrequent
Career/Community Centre Sevices	Social	Not at all
Friends and Family	Social	Infrequent

DISCUSSION

In our study, we found out nervousness was a motivator for participants to carry out excessively in-depth research that did not offer additional useful information. Both responses discussed in the finding section made convincing cases about the impact of nervousness on introverted participants' information seeking behaviors during interview preparation. We explained this phenomenon through Dervin's *sense-making model* (1983) by dissecting the interview preparation scenarios described by participants into situation, information gap, and outcomes. From doing so, we identified a fit between the *sense-making model* and participants' interview preparation.

One thing that caught our attention was that the information gap participants experienced when they were nevous could be an illusion (a feeling of needing information) rather than an actual need for information. This discovery was concluded based on participants' descriptions about excessive researching and finding out irrelevant information. This was a profoundly interesting discovery because it challenged the definition of "information gap". The questions that require answering are: must "information gap" be an actual need for information? Or is the feeling of having an information gap (psychologically assumed) enough to drive people to look for information? Golman and Loewenstein (2016) landed on a similar thought and proposed that the feeling about uncertainty is an information gap iteself. However, there might be subtle differences between a feeling and an information gap. Thus, Golman and Loewenstein's view requires more validations and should not be taken for granted.

Aftering reading and comparing all three Information Horizon Maps carefully, a commonality emerged. Despite participants' idiosyncratic routines and habits, their information behaviours for job interview preparation unfold in a similar cascading pattern composed of three stages and four common information activities described by Hektor.

The first stage of the job interview preparation is "browsing." Regardless of information resources used, all participants started with general or causal information seeking and hoped to encounter some valuable information. If we were to put this behaviour in an analogy, the browsing activity is much like an omnivorous animal scavenging for food.

The second stage was "searching & retrieve." The motivating factors for this stage were likely to be nervousness induced by the feeling of underpreparedness or a dissatisfaction with quality of information found through browsing. During this stage, the participants moved into in-depth searching. As suggested by the information horizon map by P3, she transitioned from using google as an information source to using the company's website.

The final was comprised of "unfolding" and "dressing." Unfolding referred to behaviours that expand or develop

information (Hektor, 2001). Practicing interview questions (P1 and P3) was an unfolding activity. Dressing referred to behaviours that organize information in various formats. All three participants employed dressing in their information behaviours regarding job interview preparation.

Table 1 suggested that participants tended not to utilize social resources as their source of information. This was particularly obvious during information seeking & retrieving. This finding aligned with Caldwell and Burger's (1998) finding about more conscientious, introverted people prefer non-social information resources.

METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS
One limitation to this study was that participants selected were self-identified as introverts. Self assessment of personality might not be very accurate or reliable because the criteria each participant used to determine their own personality could vary quite significantly. It is possible to improve to the recruitment process by asking participants to perform a standardized personality test. Goldberg's Big Five personality test (1992) has been widely used in both scientific research and LIS research before. For the current study setup, risk for ethical concerns was low because no personal identifiable information was collected, and proper ethical protocol was followed. However, if recruitment procedure changes from self-identification of personality to using the Big Five, the risk for ethical concerns may increase as participants might not agree with or be acceptable of the personality test results.

CONCLUSION
In summary, this exploratory study attempted to define the nature of information in job interviews preparation focusing specifically on the introverted population. The dynamic yet tightly interwoven relationship between information, personality, and job interviews was explored through Information Horizon Interviews with three self-identified introverts who had job interview experiences.

Through this exploratory journey, we were able to learn how introverted interviewees utilize certain types of information resources to prepare for job interviews and make sense of their information behaviours. The three major findings were 1) nervousness motivated introverted interviewees to conduct excessive research during job interview preparation; 2) information behaviours of introverted interviewees unfold in a similar, cascading pattern; 3) introverted interviewees tend to avoid using socially constructed information resources despite some desire to do so. The research study can be further improved through methodological adjustments regarding recruitment.

It may also be possible to construct the current study into a concatenated study based on our research findings. A

potential research topic we came up with based on the third major finding is 'how do introverts mange and use social information resources?' This is one example but there are more questions that can be asked and explored in the future. The expanding scope of research is not at all surprising to us for the nature of information is such a rich topic to study.

This exploratory study on the nature of information in introverted people preparing for job inerviews hopes to inform the broader audience about the diversity of information behaviours shown by people of different personalities. It is natural for people to have preferences in information resources, as this is similar to people having preferences in music, seasons, and snacks. With increasing job competitions, it seems like introverts are placed under increasing pressure to network, mingle, and express themselves openly. This research wants to help introverts understand their own information behaviours, so they can manage their preferred information resources to prepare for successful job interviews.

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AUTHOR'S BIO

Dandi Feng is a first year Master of Information student. Dandi obtained her BSc from the University of Toronto in 2017. Ever since she was a kid, she loved reading and always immersed herself in books. Currently, Dandi is receiving librarianship training and she aspires to work in a medical library upon graduation in 2019. Her friends' experience in job hunting and interiews after graduating university sparked her interest in the topic of relationships between information, personality and job interviews.

APPENDIX 1A and 1B

1A. Invitation to Participate (Participant Screener)

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Jennal Hartel in the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. For our INF1323 Information Experience course, I am conducting a research study to better understand the nature of information in how introverted interviewees prepare for job interviews.

Participants of the study will be invited for an information horizaon interview which will last approximately 30 minutes. If you are interested in participating in this study, please answer the three questions below.

1. Do you identify yourself as an introvertd? (Yes/No)

2. Have you had any experience in job interviews? (Yes/No)

3. The research will be collecting data through audio-recording. However, the recording will be processed and transcribed within one week after the intervie and the original recording will be destroyed. All identifiable personal information will be erased both transcripts and reports to comply with confidentiality and privacy protocol. Do you give consent to participate in the study? (Yes/No)

Thank you for your interest in the study! Hope to see you at the information horizon interview.

1B. Interview Guideline and Prompt

<Briefing: introducing research study more in-depth. Inform the participant about audio-recording and rights to withdraw without penalty anytime during the interview>

General questions:

1. How do you describe/feel about job interviews in general?
2. How do you go about preparing for a job interview?
3. Are there any steps that are particularly important while you are preparing for your interview? If yes, what are they?

Questions about an "episode":

4. Can you tell me about your most recent interview experience?
5. How did you prepare for your interview step-by-step in a systematic/chronological way?
6. How did you decide which information is relevant or good to bring up during your interview?

7. In what order did you organize the information you gather in preparation for the interview?

Red thread of information questions

8. What information resources do you find to be the most beneficial for preparing for a job interview? And what is the format of these resources? (e.g. digital? Physically printed? Or social?)
9. Why do you consider these the most useful resources?
10. Are there any information resources you think will be useful for preparing for a job interview, but you don't use? (any format, be it social, digital, or physical)
11. What are the factors that stop you from accessing these resources you are not currently using?

Drawing activity:

12. Draw an Information Horizon Map that covers all the information resources (including people) that you use when you prepare for a job interview. Please describe each information resource's importance to you (you may rank them if you want) and explain the role each information resource plays in your process of preparing for an interview. Please think out loud when you do this activity.

<Thank the participant for their time and debrief>

APPENDIX 2

Collection of best quotes heard during interviews:

Participant #1 – Featured Quotes from Interview

Q: How do you describe/feel about job interviews in general?

A: I generally don't enjoy speaking with people that I'm not familiar with…I believe speaking with strangers in a way that properly conveys what I'm trying to say.

Q: What are the factors that stop you from accessing these resources you are not currently using? *< after P1 said she does not use socially constructed information resources >*

A: I am just not a very social person. (laughing).

Participant #2 – Featured Quotes from Interview

Q: How did you decide which information is relevant or good to bring up during your interview?

A: …I was so desperate to find out more about the interviewers. I wasn't feeling ready for the position, it was a good job, with a good pay, and I just really wanted it...and somehow through my research, I found out the interviewer likes ballet! (laughing).

Participant #3 – Featured Quotes from Interview

Q: So, you mentioned you are nervous about interviews, are you nervous during the interview or before the interview?

A: Before the interview, yes. After the interview is okay, but during the interview I wouldn't notice how stressed I am because I would be focusing on what they are asking and how I formulate my responses. During the interview, it's not a bit deal.

Q: What about after the interview, you just don't worry about it?

A: No, I don't! (delighted).