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## Exposing charlatans

There seems a broad consensus among occupational psychologists that the job interview is one of the least objective ways of selecting new recruits.

But the frustration of those who promote testing is not going to remove the attraction of the interview to employers. The enduring appeal of the interview has everything to do with the human equation.

Most of us believe we are a reasonable judge of character and trust our gut feeling about an individual. We might use a test as an aid to selection but we invariably choose a candidate who interviews well and has a good set of qualifications supporting an impressive work record.

But suppose we are being taken in by the applicant; suppose the individual is lying or being less than candid. Mike Comer, chief executive of the Maxima Group, corporate investigators, outlined some techniques for uncovering deception at interviews in a recent seminar. While the advice was aimed mainly at those looking for evidence of fraud or malpractice, it can be equally useful, he says, when considering job applications or appraisals.

Some of the most difficult liars to detect are those that tell part-truths, rather than pure fabrication. Mr Comer quotes research in the US suggesting that 75 per cent of curriculum vitae (known as resumes in the US) are false in some respect. He believes the UK figure is much lower and suggests that the most common sin is that of omission.

Interviewers should concentrate, therefore, on areas of uncertainty such as dates that appear not to tally or previous job descriptions that seem vague or boastful. Homing in on these areas will force the candidate to come clean or enter into further concealment. Once an individual begins to concoct a story he exposes himself to inconsistencies which can emerge when the interviewer presses for more details.

This is the stage, says Mr Comer, when people often signal their anxiety by their body language. A single gesture might be dismissed but a cluster of gestures can be more telling. Sweat on the upper lip, false smiles, stony faces, faster blinking, dilated pupils, tight lips, false yawns or sighing can all indicate untruthful behaviour.

None of this suggests that the interview should be some kind of interrogation designed to expose a criminal. But it does suggest that close scrutiny of a CV can form the basis of a detailed line of questioning that will either confirm the suitability of the candidate or unnerve the charlatan.

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