INSEAD Wave #29

Jürn-F. Konitzer

First impressions in job interviews: a phenomenological study of how first impressions affect the decision making of top executives in career transition during professional interviews.

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Executive Masters in Coaching and Consulting for Change

02.08.2020

"Your face, my thane, is a book where men read very strange matters."

William Shakespeare – The Tragedy of Macbeth

Table of Contents

I. Abstract

The first impressions formed by interviewees in job interviews can have a positive or negative impact on their process and result. There is comprehensive academic literature available on this topic.

What has not been researched so far is if and how first impressions affect the highly specific and professional interview processes of *executive interviewees*.

This qualitative study of 17 executives in Germany will examine what they know about first impressions, what influences their decision-making, and how they use their first perceptions in the course of job interviews. It aims to shed light on the unconscious decision-making of top executives in this context, and will suggest how they might apply its findings to improve their performance.

II. Keywords

First impression, decision-making, systems psychodynamics, CCRT, transference, professional interviewing, interview performance, top executives, career transition.

III. Introduction

This research was triggered by Professor Ziv Carmon's presentation *"Understanding People: A Behavioral Economics Perspective"* at INSEAD in 2019. His essential point was that there is so much distortion in our perceptions that our decision-making is definitely not as good as we assume – including the formation of our first impressions. Some authors maintain that first impressions are influenced by several biases, but others say that they are often remarkably accurate, even if the impression is of another person or situation perceived for just a few seconds. And so I wondered how these opposing ideas apply in the context of job interviews where tiny aspects of behavior and speaking can determine whether or not an interviewee gets the dream job.

There has been much research published about first impressions in job interviews, but it essentially deals in a rather general way with how interviewees should dress and behave. The majority of research subjects are students, office workers and middle managers, and it is consulted by a variety of organizations in order to improve their recruitment processes.

I could not find any research specifically relevant to executives in a career transition phase in relation to first impression formation. I think it may be said that interviews for executive level jobs are special due to the greater responsibilities and issues – strategy and leadership for example – that they entail, and that interviewees' first impressions of them will be correspondingly more complex. I believe that this area would benefit from more examination and analysis. Therefore, I interviewed 17 Participants from the exclusive group of executives with leadership track records in well renowned companies in Germany regarding their experiences with first impressions in job interviews. I wanted to know exactly what was going on in their minds in the first moments of an interview, and how this specific group perceived their interviewers, the interview environment and the situation as a whole. I was also very interested to find out whether they used any special ploys, tactics even, to give an excellent first impression of themselves in order to get off to a good start. With all this in mind, I hope my research will complement that already done on the rapid formation of judgments in job interviews and their effects on decision-making.

IV. Research Aims and Objectives

In order to evaluate executives in the context of recruitment, company representatives usually conduct so-called semi-standardized interviews. This means "a purposeful oral communication between one or more interviewers and an interviewee with the emphasis on gathering information about the behavior and experience of the interviewee" (Keßler, 1988, p. 363). Thus, the 17 Participants in this study reported exclusively on this form of evaluation when relating their 33 experiences.

The aim of executives undergoing job interviews is to gather information about the specific responsibility of the task, the supervisors, the shareholder, the stakeholder, the company and its culture in order to decide how they should behave in the interaction.

However, there is a problem with distortions in the collection and evaluation of such information, and the subsequent drawing of false inferences. The first source of distortions is the setting of the semi-standardized interview itself and the way it is conducted. The second is in the executive interviewees themselves, especially their biases, stress and possible false expectations.

According to Sarges (2000), a good interviewer essentially asks questions and listens. Thus, they should speak for no more than 20% of the duration of the interview. The interviewer's questions create a narrative stream which results in a mass of information for diagnosis. The interviewee could therefore be speaking for at least 80% of the time – which leaves little room for them to ask questions and listen, and little time for them to gather and use information. Spitznagel (1982) refers to this as "asymmetrical self-disclosure". In addition, there is often an asymmetrical distribution of participants: up to four interviewers could sit opposite one interviewee.

Further possible evaluation errors are inherent in the executives themselves, and in the interview situation itself. According to Graudenz (1987), the interview is a stress factor that produces feelings of insecurity, tension and restlessness before and during the experience. The causes lie in the unknown variables of all involved, and, especially in the case of very attractive job opportunities, in the inner pressure felt by interviewees who want to present themselves well.

In addition to the problems created by the stress factor, information is absorbed and evaluated through the filters of personal biases. These are individually very different and can therefore only be assessed on a personal level. But there are also situation-immanent distortions such as the halo, primacy and recency effects (compare Greenwald, 1980; Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984; Spitznagel, 2000; Mai, n.d.), which should be carefully considered.

In my opinion, since both the interview setting and their own perceptions can be subject to distortions and thus influence the decision-making in the interview process and afterwards, executive interviewees in general need an additional source of information. In this study I aim to explore the question of whether this source could be their first impressions. Such impressions can have lasting consequences on the ability of the perceiver to establish positive relationships and to gain spontaneous information on the personality traits of the interlocutors. Among others, Uleman, Newman, and Moskovitz (1996) say that this usually happens unconsciously.

In addition to the sensitive perception and interpretation of transferences and counter-transferences with and between the interview partners, first impressions can provide valuable information, for example through emotion recognition, mind reading, observation of the environment, and compliance with social norms (see Literature Review). This process is supported by knowing one's "inner theatre" and "core conceptual relationship themes" (see Data Gathering and Reporting) made evident during the interview through, for instance, using the self-as-instrument.

A further aim of this study is to discover whether the first impressions formed by executive interviewees are in fact already recognized and made use of in job interviews. I am interested to know how this may happen, and in addition whether first impressions are not only gained in face-to-face interviews, but also through other media such as video calls (VCs), telephone calls, e-mails, or via the field of social media. The decisive factor here is whether the information provided by first impressions can be integrated into an interview in such a way that it leads to an improvement in the quality of decision-making, in particular in the assessment of the interviewers, the task and the company.

So, to try to establish how interviewees can capture what Ghoshal (1995) calls the "smell of the place" entirely before and during job interviews, the two primary questions of this study are:

1. How do executive interviewees perceive and describe the experience of their first impressions in job interviews?

2. To what extent do their first impressions influence their decision-making?

The answers will probably lead to further questions, for example, exactly what factors influence first impressions, and how accurate are these initial perceptions? And, even more importantly, just how reliable are first impressions?

Finally, I hope that this study will be of interest and use to executives in career transition, and to companies wanting to attract such executives by giving an excellent first impression of themselves.

V. Literature Review

Since the 1950s, management literature has been pointing to the significance of first impressions in recruitment interviews.

In an early study, Springbett (1958, p. 22) concluded that "the appearance of the applicant and his application form in the first two or three minutes of the interview provide information that decisively influences the final result in 85% of cases". This positive correlation has since been repeatedly confirmed by further research (compare Buckley & Eder, 1988; Macan & Dipboye, 1990; Posthuma et al., 2002). Thus, regardless of how applicants prepare for an interview, they are already confronted with expectations that are difficult to assess, as they are not explicitly stated.

These expectations are formed firstly by studying the application documents such as CVs, evidence of educational background, certificates and references, and secondly by the interviewee's appearance. Biases as representative heuristics ensure that someone who *looks like* a good computer programmer, assistant or cook *will be* a good programmer, assistant or cook (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Gilovich, Griffin, & Kahneman, 2002). This means that interviewers are biased, either positively or negatively.

Correspondingly, the evaluation risk of the self-fulfilling prophecy defined by Merton (1948) arises. This means that an originally false judgment of a situation evokes behavior that results in a false conception that can easily become true. An analysis of a comprehensive study by Dougherty, Turban and Callendar (1994) showed that the more favorable the first impressions of the interviewers were, the more benevolent was their communication with and treatment of the applicant. Demanding questions were hardly asked. On the contrary, the interviewers presented the vacant position very well and comprehensively, and tried to "sell" it to the applicant.

In a previous study by Dougherty, Ebert, and Callender (1986), the influence of this positive treatment of the applicant was evaluated by objective assessors who proved that positive expectations and appreciative communication have a motivating and positively stimulating effect on the behavior and communication style of the applicant.

Moreover, Snyder and Swann (1978) were the first to observe the phenomenon that interviewers often formulate their questions in a hypothesis-confirming manner (Leyens, Dardenne, & Fiske, 1998; Dougherty & Turban, 1999). They base such questions on their perceptions of the interviewee's profile and personality. For instance, they asked perceived extraverts questions such as "What would you do to liven up a party?".

In the majority of cases, applicants for executive positions are evaluated in semi-structured interviews. It is assumed that this enables company representatives, such as the potential supervisor and human resources executive, to obtain a comprehensive picture and make judgments about an interviewee's personal and professional qualities. However, expectation effects, personal sensitivities, distortions of perception, and the different interests of the interviewers are given little consideration. Research, including that of Dawes, Faust, and Meehl (1989), has repeatedly demonstrated the shortcomings and errors of this decision-making process. In order to rule out distortions of any kind as far as possible, these researchers suggest an impartial evaluation of paper references. There is even criticism that personal interviews hinder rather than facilitate qualified hiring decisions. The reason given for this lies in the irrelevant details of the interviews with only low validity, for example in hypothesis-driven questioning behavior or the excessive weighting of predictors such as external appearance.

Rational decision-making in humans is limited by distortions. This has an effect, especially in semi-standardized interviews, by which the majority of applicants at executive level are assessed. For example, in Germany alone there are about 3.9 million executives, measured by function and income over EUR 150,000 (Fröhlich, 2015). But what characterizes the first impressions of executive interviewees in job interviews, and how do they deal with the distortions of the interviewers? If, when being interviewed, they draw inferences regarding their professional futures based on distorted information and biased company representatives, how can they act successfully in their new jobs?

First impressions can provide the executive in career transition with important information about the internal perception, and at the same time be a valuable addition to the objective information about the new company and its specific situation. Furthermore, conscious perceptions of the interviewers and the environment can support the relationship building process. Knowing that the quality of the relationship is decisive for the success of the

application, and beyond that for their success in the new task, the formation of first impressions plays an important role within the decision-making process.

Surprisingly however, my review of the literature created the impression that there is hardly any research relating to how executives in job application situations make decisions. I hope, that my research will fill that gap. Therefore, the literature reviewed below addresses the most important influential factors on impression formation – the prerequisites for a better understanding of the first impressions executives make in interviews. It will serve as a reference point and provide explanations for their experiences in job interviews.

Definition and Explanations

Literally every interaction we have with a new person entails a first impression. The impressions that others form of us will determine in large part whether they'll want to become a friend or hire us for a dream job. But what exactly happens in that moment? What are the neural and cognitive processes that occur as a result of that first impression?

Ambady and Rule (2006) define the first impression as the first perception and thinking regarding another individual or object. This happens fast. Estimates vary between in a blink of an eye and several minutes depending on neural and cognitive processes, and how quickly we can access our thoughts – when our first impression becomes conscious. The first perception is made through our five senses, most often sight or hearing. This information is filtered in the subcortical structures, specifically the amygdala, and the upper cortex, where it is transformed from a social thought into a truly social meaning. The exterior stimulus will finally be processed in the frontal and prefrontal cortices and become conscious in the mind. At that moment, our impression of another person is formed, and is the starting point for all subsequent, relevant cognitive processes.

The reasons why mankind developed the ability to form first impressions can be deduced from evolutionary concepts. Specific characteristics of human cognition may have evolved in the social evolutionary context that facilitates the detection and physical avoidance of disease-bearing conspecifics (Schaller, Park, & Kenrick, 2007). This may explain why people form first impressions spontaneously and with minimal cognitive effort (Carlston & Skowronski, 2005; Gilbert & Melone, 1995; Newman & Uleman, 1989). Human beings recognize positive opportunities and avoid perils in order to strengthen their own, in evolutionary terms, 'fitness-

performance'. It makes sense to detect, for example, dishonesty and untrustworthiness in others, fast in order to avoid harm. The relatively effortless creation of this fast perception can be improved by repeated practice (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Palmeri, 1999). Thus, over a long period of human evolutionary history, this spontaneity was adaptive (Schaller, 2008).

Personality

Understanding an interlocutor's personality and predicting their behavior is a competitive advantage. But exactly what is it that defines a personality, and what are its characteristics?

In probably the first study of its kind, Estes (1938) recorded perceptual impressions of target persons and compared them with the target persons' self-assessments. In 1992, Borkenau and Liebler systematically examined the agreement between perceivers and self-assessors and more or less confirmed Estes' findings. The five factors that in their view best summarize individual personality differences are: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness. Gray and Ambady (2006) showed that extraversion and conscientiousness are relatively easy to recognize, while neuroticism, agreeableness and openness are less easily assessed.

Across many studies, extraversion has emerged as the facet of personality that is most easily judged by naive observers (Albright at al., 1988; Borkenau and Liebler, 1993; Kenny at al., 1992). Funder and Dobroth (1987) found that the behaviors that express extraversion (for example being cheerful and talkative) tend to be relatively easily detected in social behavior, whereas the behaviors that express other traits, particularly neuroticism and openness, are much less visible. In some special situations, however, these less transparent traits begin to emerge more clearly. For instance, situations that involve relatively high levels of creativity and cognitive complexity, like discussing philosophical issues or musical preferences, reveal openness (Borkenau, Mauer Riemann, Spinath, & Angleitner, 2004; Funder & Sneed, 1993).

Human beings seem to be adaptively preconditioned to form perceptions more readily about certain kinds of information than about others. For example, the information one perceives can lead to the evaluation that somebody's behavior and facial expression is friendly or hostile. Thus, it is not surprising that the most classic evaluative dimension is that of agreeableness and its related expression of warmth (Kelley, 1950; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990; Cotrell, Neuberg, & Li, 2007), as it excludes all kinds of negative behavior and intentions.

There are significant benefits to forming valid first impressions of personality. Successful people in this endeavor have the ability to predict a wide range of behaviors, including job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Thoresen, Bradley, Bliese, & Thoresen, 2004), and even subtle tactics of manipulation (Buss, 1992).

Mind Reading of Thoughts

Apart from identifying an interlocutor's personality traits, the ability to understand their mental states is also extremely helpful. According to Dunbar's (1998) hypothesis of the social brain, the large human brain reflects the computational demands of life in complex social groups. These computational capacities are used for demanding social skills. Prerequisite therefore is the ability of mind reading: to recognize that other people have mental states such as thinking, believing, intentions and wanting that are different from one's own, and which reflect a different reality. However, because mental states are not directly observable, mind reading requires external clues such as facial expressions and body language (Siegal & Varley, 2002). In addition, there are studies that show that humans can also draw conclusions even about the goals and intentions of target persons. This is usually done subconsciously and without high cognitive resource consumption. If, for example, a person is seen running after a taxi, most perceivers spontaneously concluded that he or she needs a ride – and is not jogging (Hassin, Bargh, & Uleman, 2002; Hassin, Aarts, & Ferguson, 2005).

Emotion Recognition

Another competitive advantage is an understanding of the interlocutor's emotional state. Recognizing subtle clues about affective states such as sadness, happiness and anger is a *sine qua non* for a successful conversation (Custrini & Feldman, 1989).

Most reliable information about the emotional state is provided by non-verbal cues, especially facial expressions and voice pitch (Nowicki & Duke, 2001). It is therefore not surprising that, according to, among others, Isaacowitz et al. (2007), most healthy adults are experts in recognizing emotions in the face, and voice (Johnstone & Scherer, 2000). Researchers, for example Dimberg (1997), Dimberg, Thunberg, and Elmehed (2000), and Whalen et al. (1998), have identified biologically programmed systems that control this automatic and accurate recognition of emotional representations. In this process, the so-called "basic" emotions are recognized with an extremely high degree of accuracy in all groups and cultures (Ekman, 1972;

Izard, 1971). Finally, it should be noticed that perceivers spontaneously create inferences from both thoughts and emotions (Ickes, Stinson Bissonnette, & Garcia, 1990).

Deception

There should be no deceptions in interviews as both sides want to know and understand each other as well as possible in order to see if they are a good match. Nevertheless, both sides are motivated to sell the job and themselves as best they can. To be "economical with the truth" may be a tactical advantage and so information could be withheld. Accordingly, Bond and DePaulo (2006), for various reasons, regard lying as an omnipresent part of social life. But, it is easier to commit a deception than to detect it. The average accuracy rate for detecting deceptions is 54%, which is only slightly better than that achieved by random attempts. Keysar (1994), for example, says that detecting a lie requires a lot of cognitive resources (including assessing clues from verbal and non-verbal behavior) and stepping outside one's own experiences – which sounds difficult to do during an interview. But even professional deception identifiers such as police officers or secret service agents only reach an average 'hit rate' of 56%, which is just 2% higher than non-professionals. (Wilson & Schooler, 1991; Kassin & Fong, 1999).

Knowledge of these facts could easily stimulate an improved self-presentation strategy involving exaggerations about personal and managerial abilities and skills, and the playing down of weak points. Apart from being unethical, it wouldn't be a recommended strategy as there are many risks involved. The principle risk would be for the middle and long-term consequences in the new job. Even if it is difficult to detect a deception in the first meeting, there is a good chance doing so in the course of a longer working relationship.

Motivation

The literature reviewed so far has been related to thoughts, feelings and personal character as factors that influence a first impression and, moreover, promote the ability to understand and predict a person's behavior. All these constructs exist simultaneously. The first impression is also influenced by the executive's personality and the degree of motivation to detect clues from the environment, the relationship with their interlocutors, and the social relationships between them (Bernieri & Gillis, 2001). Bernieri, Gillis, Davis and, Grahe (1996) have investigated the question of how well interlocutors can assign and interpret the behavior of the other person.

Surprisingly, the necessary information is revealed in "thin slices of expressive behavior", and even brief impressions allow a relatively accurate interpretation.

Motivation and the willingness to get involved with an interlocutor is of particular importance in forming first impressions (Bernieri & Gilles, 1995). People who are more motivated to understand others have better social skills and competences, and achieve better performance in interpersonal perception, (Costanzo & Archer, 1989, Schroeder, 1995) for example. It is therefore not surprising that people who are strongly concerned with themselves and their shortcomings achieve worse results in interpersonal perception for the same task than others who are also motivated (Aube & Whiffen, 1996). The motivation of interviewees should be high, assuming the new job offers several advantages, for example meaningful activity, income, and social status.

Belongingness and Similarity

Another factor in the formation of first impressions is the wish to belong to a group – to be an accepted member in a social construct (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Brewer & Caporael, 2006). Social exclusion from a group jeopardizes the benefits of belonging. Therefore, it's reasonable that individuals seek to regain group membership and are highly motivated to do so in the interview process. Their chances are increased by showing social optimism and consideration for others (Maner, deWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007). When people are at risk of social exclusion, they have a greater interest in making new friends, and their proclivity to work with others increases. People tend to have more positive first impressions of new interaction conspecifics. Importantly, these effects are only evident when these new fellow human beings are sincerely considered as realistic social connections (Schaller, 2008).

The emotional side of the perceived 'not-belonging' is vulnerability. All Participants in this study have lost their jobs for different reasons and are now looking for new ones, and so it could be assumed that this emotion filters and influences their perceptions. Maner et al. (2005) describe different types and degrees of vulnerability which can be caused by being in an unknown and unpredictable environment, the job market, or an interview situation.

Research into the social development of human beings since ancient times has revealed similarities in the context of kinship and social groups. According to De Bruine (2002, 2005) facial similarity leads to perceptions of strong trustworthiness. It has also demonstrated the

impact of attitude similarity on greater liking (Byrne et al., 1971). For Germany in particular, Hartman (2002) has shown that social background determines access to top positions in the business world more than factors such as education and experience. He says that there is a very sensitive perception of the habitus attached to the belongingness and attitude similarity of interviewees. Concrete characteristics are a dress and etiquette code, which signals a knowledge of the unspoken rules in management; a broad entrepreneurial attitude and optimistic outlook on life; personal sovereignty in appearance and behavior is a further connecting element. Such engrained personality traits are primarily acquired from the milieu in which one grew up. They cannot be acquired through professional or personal achievement. It can be safely assumed that interviewees also have a keen sense of whether they fit in with the company and their interviewers according to the attitudes of the latter, and that this perception is incorporated into the formation of their first impressions.

Social norms

Closely related to strong perceptions of belonging and similarity are social norms. Puccinelli, Tickle-Degnen and Rosenthal (2004) have shown that it is difficult to develop a relationship in circumstances that restrict behavior. They say that in such situations, behavior is determined more by social norms than by true feelings and beliefs.

Attractiveness

Attractiveness is the facial quality that has received the most sustained attention. More attractive faces are judged more positively in a variety of dimensions, an effect dubbed the "attractive halo". People with attractive faces are perceived as more likable, outgoing, and socially competent, as well as higher in sexual responsiveness, social power, intelligence, and health (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijani, & Longo, 1991; Zebrowitz, Hall, Murphy, & Rhodes, 2002; Zebrowitz & Rhodes, 2004). Thus, it appears to be proven that attractive people make more positive first impressions than the less attractive. The question of what exactly constitutes attractiveness on an individual basis is difficult to answer, because stereotypes influence reasoning. However, from the socio-psychological and evolutionary perspectives it seems that facial physiognomy, especially prototypicality and symmetry, indicate attractiveness (Fink & Penton-Voak, 2002; Thornhill & Gangestad, 1999).

Environment

Interaction theorists have shown that human beings select and design their social environments (relations among colleagues, offices for example) in such a way that they express their own preferences and self-images (Swann 1984; Buss, 1987). Among other things, individuals make spaces their own by underlaying them with "identity claims" – conscious symbolic statements about how they would like to be perceived (Baumeister, 1982; Swann, 1987; Swann, Rentfrow & Guinn, 2003). It is quite conceivable that information from the environment, digital or analogue, has an effect on the perceptions of executives and shapes their first impressions.

Accuracy

According to Ambady, Bernieri and Richeson (2000), first impressions are often remarkably accurate, even if another person or situation is experienced for just a few seconds. If spontaneous impressions are even minimally diagnostic, it may be more advantageous to trust these first impressions rather than to deliberate. The science of social psychology does not provide a clear statement about the accuracy of interpersonal perceptions. Some scientists, including Jones and Harris (1967) and Ross, Amabile and Steinmetz (1977), point to frequent errors in social assessment and argue that first impressions are generally erroneous. The “fundamental error of attribution” (also called correspondence bias) describes the tendency to systematically overestimate the influence of dispositional factors such as personality traits, attitudes and opinions on the behavior of others, and to underestimate the situational influences of external factors.

However, the attribution error can work quite effectively for some people, usually those who are more socially engaged, more competent and more satisfied with their lives. From this, Block and Funder (1986) conclude that in most situations in real life the attribution of behavior is due to a mixture of dispositional and situational forces that help the individual to come to a judgment, although it could be wrong. Keysar, Ginzel and Bazerman (1995) and Ross, Greene and House (1977) are among those who say that a further bias of perception can be caused by egocentrism, which consists of mistakenly assuming that others share one's knowledge, preferences and attitudes.

But Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin and Dolderman (2002) maintain that, just like the fundamental attribution error, egocentrism can be an advantage in real life when people actually do have similar knowledge, preferences and attitudes.

In conclusion, this review of the literature shows how difficult it is to assess the accuracy of first impressions. Nevertheless, as long as people trust their perceptions, they remain their truth. It is a disadvantage of the concept of half-structured interviews that it does not provide access to the interviewers' reactions to their interviewees' impressions.

The formation of first impressions has for some time been a subject of intensive research across various scientific fields. It seems that the topic of executives' perceptions of first impressions in interviews might particularly benefit from further research. Consequently, writing on the subjects of personality, mind reading, emotion recognition, deception, motivation, belongingness and similarity, social norms, attractiveness, the interview environment and the accuracy of the first impression was given special consideration in the choice of methodologies, the creation of the research setting, and the gathering and analysis of data in this study.

VI. Methodology

The main sources of the clinical material for this study were semi-structured, in-depth, socio-analytical, one-to-one interviews that I conducted. My intention was to reveal the experiences of the research Participants based on their personal perceptions and the psychodynamics apparent to them as interviewee in executive job interviews (Long & Harding, 2013). I created a questionnaire[1] that included general questions about their first impressions of, and a request for two stories about, their recent involvement in just this situation.

Using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) model, I focused on how the Participants described their experiences and feelings during their job interviews. The IPA-model comprises a unique combination of psychological, interpretative, and idiographic components, and, according to Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005), facilitates the value of small, homogeneous groups as research subjects. The narrative style of the interviews makes it possible to reduce the influence of the researcher's own prejudices, and allows the phenomena to speak for themselves. This results in a two-step interpretation process in which the interviewee describes the experience of his world, and the interviewer tries to decipher this meaning (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

An interview is characterized by both rational, conscious communication, and unconscious dynamics. Therefore, during my interviews with the Participants, I focused on understanding the very particular situation of each one of them from a psychodynamic perspective, and tried to see a larger picture of what might have happened between those involved in the circumstances they were describing (Long & Harding, 2013).

In relation to this, Armstrong and Rustin (2014) say that unconscious dynamics which were created by individual experiences in childhood and later influenced by professional life can lead to uncertainties in behavior. These uncertainties can in turn increase social resistance that leads to information distortions on the part of the interviewer. However, hidden experiences and dynamics can be discovered by considering the actual experiences of the interviewees as interviewers, and then putting them into the contexts of childhood experiences and their current professional experience. I kept this idea in mind during my research, and applied it when appropriate and possible. According to Kets de Vries, Korotov, Florent-Treacy and Rook

[1] See Appendix #1 for questionnaire

(2015), experiences during interviews, as well as subsequent observations from further reflections on them, enrich researchers' insights. These authors say that, through projections and transfers, the researcher is able to find himself in a world of thought and feeling that has its origins in the system under investigation.

While I led the conversations with the Participants along a semi-structured path through the areas to be explored, I focused on listening and mentalization. I tried to understand what the Participants had perceived during their job interviews. Why were these perceptions important for them? What thoughts, memories and emotions were triggered, and to which behaviors did they lead? Were wishes, needs, fears or hopes perceived? Observations like these allowed me to draw conclusions about the Participants' behavior and context, and to come back to them iteratively in case of further questions. And observations from the literature, from socio-analytical interviews, and from IPA analysis regarding themes and patterns, led to the development of hypotheses about what might have been going on in the Participants' minds during their job interviews at both the conscious and unconscious levels.

VII. Description of the Research Setting

The 17 Participants in this research were selected from among the clients of Konitzer & Tafel Managementberatung GmbH. The company, which I founded in 1997, is based in Düsseldorf, Germany, advises Executives in career transition. Its clients come from German stock exchange listed and medium-sized companies, and also from German affiliates of leading international companies listed on, for example, Euro Stoxx and Fortune 500. The company provides its Executive clients with consulting services right up to their professional re-entry, principally in German companies, but also in Europe and indeed worldwide. In addition to my management tasks I act as a career coach and advisor to Executives in career transition. I advise about 15 clients per year. The company has nine consultants who advise about 80 to 100 clients annually. Through these activities I have gained deep insights into the rules of the career transition game, and am familiar with the major companies in Germany and their decision-makers.

The development of a clear and comprehensible market positioning for the client, and a story that puts their past, present, and future goals into a logical context are essential aspects of the first stage of our consulting services. Once this is done, we identify compatible discussion partners, and then interviews are arranged. Clients are accompanied until they succeed.

The consultation process is rather fact-oriented and objective. Psychological aspects, including dealing with emotions and disappointment after rejection for instance, are taken very seriously by the company's consultants, but are not integral to its overall concept. This may sound somewhat dry at first, but it's a consequence of the target group being rather skeptical about psychology in general, and some aspects of coaching.

After consultation with my colleagues, the 17 Participants were selected not only because of our common ground in terms of content criteria, but especially because of their ability to reflect, and their openness to the clinical approach. The following criteria:

Criteria	**Comment**
Executive level	Measured by scope of responsibility and leadership, position in company hierarchy and minimum income of EUR 350.000 p.a. (fixed and variable, excluding long-term incentives and other fringe benefits, e.g. car, pension payments).

In-between jobs	All Participants were actively searching for a new position. The advantages of this were that they were all involved in interviews in different stages (e.g. a first, second or third interview with one potential employer), and their memories of their first impressions were fresh.
Career principally in Germany	Because of the rather small number of Participants in this research, the focus was kept quite sharp in order to recognize patterns and other similarities. Thus only Participants whose careers have mainly been in Germany were involved.
Openness and time to share their experiences	The success of this research depended on the willingness of the Participants to share their experiences openly, and to invest considerable time in the interviewing process. They all expressed their motivation, and interest in the thesis topic.

As there was no attention paid to the Participants' sex, function, industry, age, job experience, social and educational backgrounds, values, motivations, personal targets and nationalities, the selected group represented a random profile of business leaders in Germany. Three of the 17 Participants were female. Three were from Spain or had a Spanish background, one had a North African, and another an English background. Two were East Germans, and there were seven from West Germany. The Participants were between 40 and 58 years of age, and from different social classes and family backgrounds.

VIII. Data Gathering and Reporting

Following the recommendation of Moustakas (1994) about how to conduct a phenomenological study, at the beginning of March 2020 I emailed[2] my request-for-meeting note to a selected group of 17 potential Participants to support me in my research. The potential Participants were Executives, some of whom I knew and some who were recommended by my colleagues. All of them agreed to be Participants, and to share their experiences with me.

Due to the Covid-19 crisis[3] and the consequent lockdown in Germany, I could only meet three out of the 17 Participants in person. I interviewed the rest – some known to me and some not – by video call (VC), principally using Skype, Zoom or Facetime. As my first interview was so intense (it lasted almost three hours!), I asked the other 16 Participants to prepare for a two-hour session.

The first part of each interview (lasting around 10 minutes) consisted of small talk to warm things up – this was especially important if the Participant and I were new acquaintances. In the second part of each session (lasting between 1 to 2 hours), I shared more detailed information about my project, provided background and context, and in doing so touched on the precise research topic itself.

Besides the Participants' positive first reactions to the topic, they were impressed by my studying at INSEAD, and this was certainly an initial advantage in the context of the interviews. In fact, the combination of my role as career advisor, being a recommended contact, the Participants having been selected for the interviewing, my obvious interest and careful listening, my INSEAD connection and my thesis topic itself, created a trusting and open atmosphere in which reflective conversations, including several profound moments, were possible. The interview phase took almost 6 weeks starting on March 2nd 2020, although follow-up and further interviews took place until the beginning of June. These interviews became very important for me, because I was learning an immense amount throughout the course of my research, and, in the light of this newly acquired knowledge, the data gathered in four of my interviews with Participants needed to be clarified in various respects.

[2] See Appendix #2 for the adapted invitation letter.
[3] A global pandemic, slowing down public and economic life in Germany, starting in mid-March 2020, and leading to a lockdown of the country on 22nd of March. "Ausbreitung des Virus…", 2020).

I began the interviews by telling the Participants that I would be making notes, which they all accepted. The conversations were in German throughout and recorded almost verbatim in Microsoft word documents. My questions were in English in the documents I had given to the Participants, and I typed their responses in German stenographically. Sometimes, this procedure led to pauses and moments of silence, but all the interviewees behaved understandingly, patiently, indeed almost amicably. The interview process was not disrupted.

In the interviews, all the Participants were asked to respond to my questions about their experiences of 'first impressions', and to tell two stories about them which, so as to avoid the risks of hindsight bias, had to be less than two months old. My aim was to try to ensure that they would speak spontaneously and authentically, so no preparation for the interviews was allowed.

My request at the end of each interview that I would like to continue the conversation should there be further questions or a need for them to say more about their experiences of first impressions in interviews, was positively received by all the Participants, and taken up by four. Most of them said that they had benefitted from the whole process as it had resulted in conscious and unconscious insights, and provided them with helpful information.

After each interview, I made further notes, remembering their nature, tone and pace, and the emotions I had observed in both the interviewees and myself. Again, the self-as-instrument approach was very helpful. In doing this, I brought my own emotions into consciousness and analyzed them in order to better understand and assign colors to my point of view. Moreover, in terms of content, the review of the interviews was helpful, as new starting points for the improvement of my questions and topics for conversation constantly emerged. The learning effect was especially helpful during the early interviews. From about the sixth interview onwards I had to be careful with what had become a kind of routine. My new focus was on not trying to classify information too stereotypically, but on remaining as receptive as possible. I wanted to avoid any expectation bias on my part. Here, too, the return to self-as-instrument – now being strongly applied to myself – helped me to remain receptive to new information and insights. This was my approach to ensure both personal and epistemological reflexivity.

As a theory began to emerge, I shared it frequently with colleagues, INSEAD faculty and staff, EMCCC classmates, and the Participants. Sharing my ideas elicited feedback and, very

importantly, questions, which made me check the literature and data, collect more of the latter for validation, and reply to the Participants. This iterative process continued until the end of the study.

Systems Psychodynamic Analysis

The observation of aspects of human perception in interviews through the psychoanalytical lens provides theoretical and clinical evidence to explain them. Psychoanalytic theory has been used in the effective and credible diagnosis of problems and challenges in work situations for both groups and individuals (Kilburg, 1995; Gould, 2001; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle & Pooley, 2004; Arnaud, 2012; Long & Harding, 2013; Kets de Vries & Cheak, 2014).

Among other theories, the transmission of Freud and the projection and splitting of Melanie Klein are often used diagnostically to explain human experience and behavior. The Tavistock Institute in London, England, has performed particularly well in this regard (Huffington et al., 2004). The clinical paradigm by which these concepts are oriented in organizational work (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984) is based on two assumptions: irrational actions occur frequently, but have rational reasons, and human behavior remains hidden behind an unconscious blind spot and is not immediately revealed. However, we do have patterns of behavior that can be detected by analysis and from which human behavior can be justified, and even become predictable. The patterns in turn are based on transferences of our feelings towards early caregivers.

I applied these theories throughout the development of this thesis to understand the meaning behind the perceptions and the decision-making in the Participants' narratives. Matching the gathered data with psychodynamic concepts provided a way of accessing the unspoken located in the subconscious, and to begin the process of tracing the sources of the behavior back to the experiences that might have caused it (Neumann & Hirschhorn, 1999). Meaningful investigation of such behaviors, while difficult, is vital for understanding such phenomena (Kets de Vries & Cheak, 2014).

The clinical application of psychodynamic concepts is developed through the "core conflictual relationship theme" (CCRT) (Luborsky & Crits-Christoph, 1989, 1990; Kets de Vries, 2006; Book, 2018). Luborsky states that the CCRT is a "defined and measured version" of Freud's transference contributing to the comprehension of it (1990, p. 11). Defining a person's CCRT

requires evaluating the relationship patterns that relate to transference, projection, and repetition compulsion (the act of repeating self-sabotaging behaviors as a way of forgetting traumatic childhood experiences) that emerge when we interact with others. The transference states that happen in contact with an unknown person, our patterns of dealing with our conflict triggers, and the power of projection, may form mental states that effect an unconscious defense mechanism. Within a blink of an eye we blur the lines between perception and reality in terms of what and how we believe the other person means or does (Kets de Vries & Cheak, 2014).

When assessing the data from the interviews, my special interest was raised when narratives didn't immediately make sense. In these cases the CCRT was helpful to understand the rationale behind them. These stories revealed what the Participants were hoping for (their "wish" [W]), what they did (the "response from other" [RO]), and how they responded (the "response from self" [RS]), (Book, 2018). Using Book's guidelines, during the interviews I attempted to do two things in this regard. Firstly, I probed for relationship episodes that would provide an understanding of a person's CCRT, asking if the situation or one of the interlocutors had triggered the Participant's CCRT; and secondly, I tried to uncover any connection to an early caregiver. In four cases, the CCRT was captured and used to explain the perception and decision-making.

IX. Findings and Discussion

The findings of the interviews are presented and discussed below according to 10 hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Thoughtful and efficient organization and a friendly attitude of the interviewer improve the first impression.

Interviews involve different points of contact, each of which generates a first impression. The recruitment process starts with a call from the headhunter, followed by an e-mail describing the vacancy, the tasks and the company, and continues with further analysis of homepages, social media profiles and so on. If there is interest, the fourth contact point is the in-depth interview with the headhunter and then, if both parties are interested, the first interview with the company's decision-makers, which itself can lead to further discussions. In between the interviews an assistant will take care of the organization by phone or e-mail, this contact also creates lasting impressions. As one Participant said:

" And then, just before Frankfurt, I received a call from Mr. X's secretary's office asking me to drive one street further at the intersection in front of the entrance to get to the house from behind. The navigation system will misdirect you, because construction work is blocking an intersection. I was thrilled by the attention."

And in relation to e-mails one said: *"In addition to the format, I also like the human touch in e-mails, because it enhances the atmosphere and gives me the feeling that there is a real interest in my person"*. Correspondingly, poorly written and late e-mails led to a rather negative impression.

Due to the Covid-19 lockdown in Germany, instead of personal meetings, several of the Participants job interviews were conducted as VCs. They depended heavily on technical reliability and the punctuality of the start. One Participant said: "*And suddenly there was a problem with the volume. My conversation partners could not hear me. And this despite the fact that I was so well prepared. It was terrible. Thank God I was able to solve the problem after 10 minutes"*.

The technical breakdown caused this Participant to focus so hard on himself that his perceptions of his surroundings faded.

However, these perceptions were less significant than the first impressions of personal conversations. Here, the recency effect was at work – the last impression had a stronger effect than earlier ones. The personal experience of getting to know an interviewer is valued most highly. Associated with this are further conclusions drawn from getting to know the office and the company environment (see Hypothesis 3).

First impressions are linked and, if they last until the end of the contact, influence each other. The most intensive first impressions are gained in face-to face meetings. If they are bad, then any previous positive impressions fade immediately and have hardly any lasting effect. If they are positive, they strengthen the first personal impression of each other. The crucial points are a human touch, and thoughtful and efficient organization.

Hypothesis 2: Social media is used exclusively for information gathering and does not serve to create sustainable first impressions.

The Literature Review shows that interviewers' first impressions are based to a large extent on the applicants' documents and appearance. The latter, on the other hand, can nowadays obtain information about their interview partners via their profiles on social media sites such as LinkedIn and Xing. Accordingly, the 17 Participants were asked about the first impressions they gained from social media sites and their accuracy.

Social media are important for preparation for interviews. But the first impressions they provide are not really taken seriously in applicants' overall evaluations, and are not very stable. One Participant even completely ruled out preparation through social media, saying *"Everyone writes what makes them look good. I do not trust this self-presentation"*.

In their profile assessment, the applicants' investigations into the competence of the decision-makers and their eventual interviewers plays an important role. However, if any attempts to mislead were detected, it could be held against the authors. One Participant remarked: *"I was not impressed by the profile. Mr X (French nationality) seems to have talked himself up. And somehow I have not had good experiences with French managers"*. Despite these prejudices, the Participant went ahead with the interview, and said that these concerns lasted only briefly,

as the interviewer was perceived as competent during the conversation. Being prepared to revise the initial assessment, this Participant remained open at all times. Other Participants in this study confirmed that perceptions of social media profiles do not lead to lasting first impressions: *"You know, it provides a first idea about an interlocutor. But that's it."* And*: "I need to meet somebody in person to make a decision about her or him."*.

However, social media does provide important information about companies, their business plans and balance sheets for example, and gives an initial picture of the company and its decision-makers. For 16 of the 17 Participants, social media was an essential component for their first overall impression of the company. These Participants were critical of the photos in the company profiles. Although they themselves have carefully chosen photos in their CVs and on social media, this creates almost no real impression: *"Photos are already part of marketing. I do not know how old the picture is"*. And: *"If they're not headshots, I can't see anything anyway. Then why should I take the photo so seriously?"*.

The focus of impression formation at this early stage in the recruitment process seems to be on objective information. In this context, physical attractiveness is of negligible importance.

Hypothesis 3: The perception of the potential new physical working environment is significant for stable first impressions.

Fifteen Participants described environmental factors such as the company offices, buildings and locations as impression forming: *"My first impression was shaped by the office building. It looked elegant. You could see that money was invested here. You could see the greenery from the windows. A small stream ran around the building. I had a good feeling about it"*.

Seven Participants stated that they were impressed by modern architecture and a chic office, and would like to work in such an environment. The other 13 were less specific, but also stated that they were aware of the environment, and from it drew general conclusions about the attractiveness of the work.

A positive impression of the working environment created a more benevolent attitude in the Participants before and at the beginning of their interviews, though they all maintained an openness to change their opinions during them. However, exactly what is evaluated and in what

ways, and how this perception is integrated with other evaluations, is quite different from person to person, as the following account shows:

"Shortly before the interview began, I was told that the interview would be delayed by an hour. I was asked to take a seat in a waiting room[4]*. In retrospect, this morbid impression fitted in with the overall picture and the company's financial situation. I should have gone home at this point."*

Looking back on the interview, this Participant went through the process of forming impressions and concluded that their prior good impressions were dispelled and not compensated for. The exchanges with the interviewers proved to be similar to the atmosphere in the waiting room. This picture emerged later in my conversation with this Participant and suggests that he entered the interview unconsciously biased (see references to motivation in the Literature Review). This Participant's job interview proceeded very much within the framework of social norms (see references to social norms in the Literature Review).

Finally, the companies' geographical locations were discussed – attractive cities generally being the most popular. In this study however, the Participants' impressions of the tasks as a whole had more importance, and, if they were, all but one of the Participants were prepared to relocate to other German-speaking countries.

The companies' physical environments affected the mood of all the Participants and influenced their judgments. Even though the impressions they made during personal conversations predominated.

Hypothesis 4: Interviewees' first impressions are strongly influenced by the presumption of competence of and their respect for their interviewers.

All the Participants formed their most important first impressions during direct interactions. Their focus was on the person identified as the decision-maker who would usually become their direct superior. Important questions for their evaluation were *"Can he come to my office at any time?",* or, more simply, *"Can I talk to him?",* and also *"How much room for my own decisions does she leave me?",* and *"Do I fit into the strategy and approach?"*

[4] See Appendix # 3 – completion quote 1

Depending on the personality of the Participant, and in no particular order, the following characteristics were mentioned as important for impression formation: the interviewer's mode of expression, the dynamics between the interviewers, their body language, and the seating arrangements. None of the Participants could remember their interviewers' voices and facial expressions other than very generally, nor could they make substantial statements about their attractiveness (see Literature Review). It may be that age, gender, or particularly attractiveness is conspicuous, but they seem to play a subordinate role in the formation of first impressions. One Participant said:

"When I entered the meeting room, I saw the owner sitting in the middle between her grandson and the board of directors[5]*. The owner looked at me confidently and took over the conversation from the beginning."*

In a very short time, this interviewee had interpreted the social dynamics between the three conversation partners and drawn conclusions. Subconsciously, it became clear quite quickly that he would not fit into this management team. However, he adapted to the social norms of an 'old style' conversation and carefully answered all questions without allowing his perceptions to play a part. This Participant expected to be able to detect and respect his potential superiors' greater knowledge in the field, but this expectation was disappointed. The owner did not appear to be particularly knowledgeable nor emotionally equipped for leadership, the grandson was not an impressive potential superior due to his personality and lack of experience, and the CSO seemed only to be motivated by power.

A female Participant had a similar experience:

"I went into the company (a medium-sized family business in the automotive industry) with mixed feelings, because Mrs. X (headhunter) had recommended it to me in high tones and the homepage had confirmed the recommendation.[6] *The interview began with a joke from one of the three – somehow a male 'thigh slapper' – and everyone laughed. From this, I gathered that there was little interest in change, as had been assumed. Talking about it yes, just implementing it, no. More like, "Shower yes, get wet no!"*

[5] See Appendix #3 – completion quote 2

[6] See Appendix # 3 – completion quote 3

The interview was conducted in such a way that the interviewee always felt the need to justify herself. She didn't really feel that she was at eye level with her interviewers. So she withdrew her application for better alternatives. The personal interview and the attitude and dynamics of the three interview partners were central to the Participant's decision. She saw the interviewers as competent, but did not trust any of them to seriously want to integrate her into the management team. This led to a lack of respect on her side.

These examples (to which many more could be added) show that a respectful attitude, agreeableness and warmth (see Personality section in Literature Review) on the part of the interviewers in conjunction with the interviewee's presumption of their competence have a lasting effect on the first impressions and played a key role for all Participants in their decision-making processes.

Hypothesis 5: The duration of the first impression varies greatly from individual to individual.

According to 14 Participants, the first impression lasts between 30 seconds and six minutes; three Participants could not specify. This essentially confirms the findings referred to in the Literature Review. My research suggests that the inception of the first impression is closely linked to the first perception of a situation. However, it did not reveal exactly when and why the first impression ends. One Participant commented: *The good first impression lasted two years. (By then) the employee had disappointed me"*. According to this, first impressions can end when they are no longer supported and this can either lead to a changed perception on the part of the perceiver, or to a negative first impression:

When I met Mr. X, I immediately thought, no way, it's not possible, you can save yourself the time and go home. Mr. X is 30 years in the business, thinks he's great, expects a certain amount of gratitude. He spoke kindly of his employees, but made it clear in every gesture who is the boss here.

This Participant made these judgments within a couple of minutes. Another made the same decision: *"I met Mrs. Y in a top hotel. It suited her style and communication (which was) not very appreciative"*. Five Participants who had negative first impressions decided not to pitch for the positions.

So, it might be said that a confirmed positive first impression becomes a longer lasting perception, whereas a negative first impression is dispelled relatively quickly.

However, despite any negative first impressions, all the Participants concluded their interviews according to the social norms and tried not to let their decisions be noticed. This could be explained by their wanting to keep the search for the right job or affiliation, and associated measurable rewards such as status and salary, open as long as possible in the hope of a change of mind.

Hypothesis 6: The first impressions of interviewees are most often accurate.

Of the 33 first impressions described by the Participants, 28 coincided with their final assessments at the end of their interviews. At almost 85% this suggests that first impressions can be used as valid correlates to determine the results of the interview. Interestingly, this result is almost identical to the observation made by Springbretts et al. referred to in the Literature Review.

These authors assumed that the formative factors for first impressions were the application documents and the personal appearance of the interviewee. However, very interestingly, this assumption was rejected by almost all of the Participants in this research with regard to the documents (see Hypothesis 2), as were personal appearance, voice and manner of speaking in telephone conversations. On the contrary, if pre-judgments had been made in advance of the interviews, the willingness to alter them during the course of the conversation was very pronounced.

A first suspicion of mine was that executives are very familiar with the theory of impression formation and are therefore less subject to personal and classic distortions such as primacy, halo and recency (Mai, 2017). In my study however, it turned out that while executives had heard about first impressions and their impact, they had only a very superficial understanding. Their knowledge of biases was even less. Just 10 of the 17 Participants had heard of them, though they had never taken them into account in their professional lives.

By contrast, the observation in the Motivation section in the Literature Review that people who are more motivated to understand others have better social skills and competences, and achieve better performance in interpersonal perception, was very pronounced for all executives, as their

concern was always about the important next career step and its consequences. Openness to the interview partners and the development of the interview was of very high importance for all of them, and remained so even when their first impression was bad. The majority of the reasons given for this were that the interview did not require them to take a position contrary to the interviewer. In fact, some interviews that were thought to have gone badly led to follow-up invitations, so by this measure they were successful. For tactical reasons, it therefore makes sense to let the interviewers decide on how things proceed.

In addition to motivation and in their role as leaders, executives' many years of experience in successfully moving within social structures could also be regarded as a source of a specifically learned ability to assess people in the context of an interview.

I believe that an important finding of this research is that although executives are not consciously concerned with perceptions, their first impressions are most often correct. All the Participants were able to tell me about these first moments in an interview, and they remembered specific episodes well.

Hypothesis 7: Executives recognize deceptions

All the Participants demonstrated well-developed abilities of mind reading and emotion recognition. Thus, they gained clear pictures of their interlocutors' intentions. Five Participants reported that they had been deceived by their interviewers; their post-interview investigations showed that their first impressions were therefore false. One Participant said:

"After about six minutes it was clear to me that this telephone conversation would not lead to a good result.[7] *I thought at that moment that I had to stay responsive now, otherwise I would mess up our relationship (with the friend), and also the standing of my friend towards my interviewer."*

This Participant kept the conversation open because of the recommendation since he did not want to disappoint his friend or get him into trouble. The interviewer's "inquiry" was aimed at testing the applicant's technical expertise. But this was a leadership task and the interviewee had some of these experts among his 1,500 employees in a former function. The conversation was supposedly about getting to know each other, but there was no warm-up phase to create a

[7] See Appendix #3 – completion quote 4

friendly atmosphere. It emerged later from the Participant's friend that the interviewer was pursuing two goals on the call. Firstly, he wanted to interview the Participant professionally in order to then be able to reject him with good reason. Secondly, he wanted to demonstrate his judgment and power over his colleague by making the recommendation look bad. This conclusion cannot be proven, but such rivalries and demonstrations of power are not necessarily unusual. Of course, one could assume that there was a serious interest, but it should have been clear from the Participant's CV alone that he was no longer a technical expert, but an Executive.

There was a lack of mutual respect on the basis of which the Participant would have liked to have ended the call, but his friend's involvement stopped him from doing so. Very interestingly, only one Participant in this study ended a call when it was reasonable to do so, not even if the course of the conversation did not suit them. The reasons given for this were not to disappoint someone who had recommend them, or to wait for the result of the interview in order to consider further options. This phenomenon was referred to in relation to Hypothesis 6. None of the five Participants ended their interviews or withdrew from the hiring process, they all waited until this was done by the interviewers. They realized that they had been deceived, but did not want to disappoint those who had recommended them. Sixteen of them stated that they would not have behaved differently even if they had had a permanent job in order not to offend or inconvenience the person who had recommended them.

Hypothesis 8: Misinterpretations of interviews are based on specific wishes.

What happened, on the other hand, if it was not the interviewers who attempted to deceive, but the interviewees who were subject to their own biases? And, if so, what were these biases? The analysis of the CCRT (see Data Gathering and Reporting), of four Participants below perhaps provides some indication.

The Participants all began with attitudes that distorted their first impressions of their interviewers, but which were subsequently changed.

Part.	**Wish (W)**	**Response from others (RO)**	**Response of the self (RS) – affect, behavior, fantasies**
1.	*"That top headhunter took time for me. I have*	*"Remained silent. Observing. Little arrogance."*	RSa: "*…felt under pressure.*"

	to be a top candidate."		RSb: "*…talked 45 minutes in a row about my career and performance*." RSf: "*..wanted to be seen as an excellent investment of his time."*
2.	*"Don't have to move to another city and will have an excellent relation to the decision maker. Wonderful"*	"*Conversation among equals colored by the same cultural habits."*	RSa: "*…felt well."* RSb: "*…as expected."* RSf: "*...this is a good match."*
3.	*"Will be glad to get me on board."*	*"The interview went well."*	RSa: *"I was wondering about the whole setting."* RSb: *"I asked several questions regarding the company's financial situation – not sure, if they even understood the problems where they are in."* RSf: "*I'm the problem solver for their difficulties."*
4.	*"To be seen as the right person for that job."*	*"Conversation among equals."*	RSa: *"...felt excellent."* RSb: "*…wondering about mistakes in M&A projects of the interlocutor."* RSf: *"...can do the job with that guy."*

In the first case, Participant 1 met a top headhunter whom he considered to be highly competent, and was grateful that he had taken the time to see him. Accordingly, he wanted to make a good impression (W). But the slightly arrogant nature (RO) of the headhunter unsettled him, so he took refuge in talking (RSb) in the hope that he would provide the headhunter with justifications for his invested time (RSf). However, nothing of the sort happened. The headhunter interrupted the interviewee after about 45 minutes, addressed his perception, and the conversation relaxed.

Instead of openly engaging in the conversation, the interviewee had entered it with excessive expectations that influenced his first impression and the course of the conversation in such a way that they did not fulfill his hopes.

Participant 2 saw the possibility of getting a good job in his home-town and, having previously always had a longer commute, he wanted (W) it. So, in the interview he concentrated on the supposed local connection with the CEO and overlooked many other clues. He was surprised by his rejection. Again, the first impression did not match the outcome of the conversation.

Participant 3 assumed that the company would be happy to hire someone like him (W). He seems to have appeared self-confident and paid no further attention to the interviewer's responses (RO). In this respect he was surprised by the negative feedback of the headhunter after the interview.

In the fourth case, a very good first impression of the interviewee – with whom he felt many similarities, – led the interviewer to ask about "*skeletons in the closet*", which the former answered. Such personal questioning is unusual in first contacts, which ideally serve to clarify competencies and build trust. He seems to have violated some of the social norms of conversation with asymmetrical self-disclosure and the trust associated with it (Spitznagel, 1982). According to Sarges (2000), the interviewer should ask questions that lead to the interviewee speaking for 80-90% of the interview; this advice was most likely not followed in this case.

The four Participants went through their CCRT analyses very conscientiously, and were motivated to understand why their first impressions had been inaccurate. Although their analyses provided *helpful* interpretations, they were taken seriously, and they do improve self-performance in interviews. It may be said that individual biases towards people and situations distort the decision-making process at a subconscious level. I suggest that these insights should be used to check the potential for distortions even before an interview in order to avoid errors in the decision-making phase.

Hypothesis 9: Executives are willing to revise their first impressions.

Even though all 17 Participants trusted their first impressions, each one was prepared to change them in the light of new information. One Participant said: "*Over the years, I have learned to*

trust my first impression. I'm seldom mistaken. And should I be, I am ready to check it". Another remarked: "*In the end, the overall impression is decisive. And there the first impression is a good start".*

The willingness of the Participants in this study to adjust their first impressions if necessary seems to be one reason for their professional success, (and indeed it is a general necessity for operating successfully in a socially complex environment such as a company). Accordingly, one said: *"I must accept facts in order to be successful and always keep an open mind",* and another that *"...coping with complexity requires the ability to change my mind if necessary".*

Hypothesis 10: The option of an active impression management divides opinion.

Impression management means being aware of and able to control the impressions we make on others. All but one Participant was sure that they knew how others perceived them in their interviews. Such perceptions are related to similarities with the interviewers in terms clothing, education, attitudes and values, body language, and eye contact for example. Direct, indeed sometimes very direct, communication is another important factor in giving impressions in interviews.

The question of whether the Participants in my research would try deliberately to create a false first impression met with varied reactions. About a third of them rejected the idea because they feared the loss of their authenticity and thus the transparency necessary for them to properly assess their interviews and interviewers.

One reaction was: *"I have never thought about this before. Was not necessary. Don't train me to be anything I'm not".* A second said: *"I want the other side to have a clear picture of me. And I want to have a clear picture of them",* and one warned: *"Don't get in any poses. I wouldn't manipulate it. No".*

Another third of the Participants took exactly the opposite position; they wanted to be able to influence events if possible. One said: *"Yeah, sure. It's always the goal of an interview. A good first impression has nothing to do with pretending. It can be deliberately tried or neglected",* and a similarly minded Participant said: *"I always try to make a good impression. I think it's professional".*

The remaining third were somewhere in between. *"As long as external impressions are part of what and who I am, yes. If I had to put on too much make-up, for example, I'd have a problem because I don't usually do that". "Yes, if it is justifiable within the scope of my personality"* said one of them. Another remarked: *"Up to now, I did not know how I could do this naturally, such as a strong handshake or a proper haircut. If you show me a technique, I would be happy to listen to it. First impressions count, as you know".*

The Participants' advice for creating a good first impression seems relatively traditional. It included firm handshakes, confidence, eye contact, sitting "properly" and being "properly dressed and groomed". There was a specific suggestion about interviews by video call: *"Put books under your laptop. It makes you look better. It makes you look more professional than when you're looking down".*

Active impression management beyond behavior to meet social norms is not used in this study, nor in fact is it known about. It might be the case that if there were the necessary techniques they would be used. However, two-thirds of the Participants clearly argue that authenticity and transparency in interviews are important for the decision-making process. Their reasoning is that it may be possible to disguise oneself in an interview, but not once appointed. For these Participants, honesty on both sides is an important prerequisite for successful cooperation beyond the interview.

X. Limitations and Future Research

This study has a number of limitations that point to the need for further research.

I used a phenomenological approach involving 17 Participants, but I think it would be interesting and beneficial to work with a larger sample in order to make the results more objective and reliable. Provided the individuality of the participants in a larger group was maintained, it would probably be possible to gain further and more detailed insights into the impression formation and decision-making of executives in interviews.

The CCRT was applied in a situation-specific manner. The structure of the CCRT was particularly helpful in the case of Participants' experiences of failure. However, early childhood imprints and emotional experiences were only considered in two instances. The different social backgrounds of the Participants did not play a significant part in this research due to the unwillingness of several of them to provide information or discuss the topic. Such information and conversations could have provided important insights into decision-making on an individual basis.

In addition to more data, a stronger research focus on individuals might well provide further interesting insights into decision-making behavior. For instance, more knowledge about the correlation of motivation and the abilities of mind reading and emotion recognition (see Findings and Discussion) could be of interest in several fields of social psychology.

In this study it was not possible to address gender-specific perceptions and decision-making, as only three of the 17 Participants were female. I could not identify any significant difference in the response spectrum between female and male Participants, though the data did give rise to a somewhat vague idea that female executives in interviews belong to the group of more sensitive and conscious perceivers. However, their similarity with the male Participants was so strong that it can be said that the unspoken rules and social norms in relation to interviews apply equally to females.

Following the idea of having larger and more diverse test groups, it could be very interesting to expand this research to encompass gender specific behavior, and also international and cultural influences on impression formation and decision-making.

Excluding personal bias as far as possible when interviewing subjects and evaluating data can probably only be achieved to a limited extent in a qualitative study. It is therefore possible that my own views may have affected my interpretation of the data and caused me to make assessments and draw correlations in the interviews and afterwards that would otherwise not have been the case. For example, despite great effort and scientific interest on my part, a confirmation bias – the tendency to seek or interpret information in a way that confirms one's own thoughts (Nickerson, 1998) – may have influenced matters. For more in-depth investigations, it would therefore be interesting to conduct the interviews and data collection in pairs, the better to ensure the objectivity of the investigation for example.

Finally, other methods of data collection about the multiple causes of human behavior, such as employing a psychologist to validate the CCRT assessment, and the use of a questionnaire or 360-degree feedback by the interviewers, could also have strengthened this thesis.

XI. Conclusion

At this point it is helpful to recall the research questions set out in chapter 'Research Aims and Objectives'. Firstly, 'How do executive interviewees perceive and describe the experience of their first impressions in job interviews?' From their descriptions of their strong first impressions it's clear that the Participants in this study were very perceptive. This is not surprising on closer inspection. After all, they have without exception been successful in large, complex social structures, and it is certain that abilities such as mind reading and emotion recognition are important for such success. Also central to the formation of first impressions are environmental factors, first moments with the interviewers and a high motivation to collect and evaluate impressions (see Literature Review and Methodology). The latter may be particularly pronounced due to the job search situation, and would probably lead to less pronounced results in other situations.

The answer to the second research question: 'To what extent did their first impressions influence their decision making?' was surprising. With an almost 85% correlation between first impressions and the eventual overall impressions of the interview, the answer confirms already valid findings. However, and this was an unexpected finding, other influencing factors apply. While in previous studies the application documents and personal impressions of the interviewees are the most important factors, for the Participants in this study positive judgments about the interviewers' competence and being treated with respect were paramount. Of course, factors such as income and increases in responsibility are considered in the decision-making process, but these two factors strongly influenced the Participants' evaluations of the companies and their decision-makers. So even if the 85% correlation in this study confirms findings in previous studies, the reasons for it differ.

Other questions that were addressed in this research included: "how stable are these initial perceptions?", and, more important, "how reliable are first impressions?" Even when the Participants' first impressions proved to be wrong, they hardly noticed and thus stuck with their first impressions. This automatically increased the subjectivity of their perceptions, but not their objective accuracy. However, it is noteworthy that all the Participants were open to questioning their first impressions if further information from their interviews facilitated it.

What is surprising overall is that the formation of first impressions was not a major issue for any of the Participants, either generally, or specifically in their preparation for interviews. So they did not consciously concentrate on the collection of information for these first perceptions, but formed them by chance. Also interesting was that their first impressions influenced neither their decisions about how to sell themselves and behave in their interviews, nor their overall evaluations of them, and this despite the correlation being so high. In my opinion, it is time to develop an effective way of integrating first impressions into the professional preparation and conduct of executive interviews.

According to Bargh and Chartrand (1999), and Palmeri (1999), the relatively effortless and rapid creation of perceptions can be improved by repeated practice and training. And furthermore, even the understanding of different the relationship types can be enhanced through practice and experience. For instance, people who have undergone training in theatre perform better in the task of interpersonal perception. It is probable that they have been sensitized to the meaning of certain gestures, facial expressions and voice patterns through theatre training (Costanzo, 1992).

Executives in career transition make one of the most important decisions for their professional and private futures when choosing a job. Therefore, they should proceed consciously and carefully when defining and evaluating their decision parameters. The integration of first impressions and other perceptions, together with the "hard facts" of the content, should always be central to the decision-making process.

XII. Appendices

Appendix # 1 – questionnaire.

Thesis Interview with…
General information:
Medium of interaction:
Last job title:
Career:
Total compensation:
Age:
Sex:

Introduction: Thank you very much for your willingness to take part in my research, and for the time you are committing to it. I'm interested in knowing more about your experiences with your first impressions in job interviews, and would like to ask you some questions about it. Is that okay with you?

1. General questions about knowledge and experience with first impressions

What do you know about first impressions?
Do you consciously perceive first impressions and, if so, what do you perceive?
How do you deal with such perceptions during the course of an interview process?
Do you have an idea of when these perceptions begin, and when they end?
Do you always trust your first impression?

2. Descriptions and questions about two actual experiences in interviews

Please tell me about one positive and one negative experience in dealing with your first impression in an interview situation. I would then like to ask you questions about them. Does that suit you?

Follow-up questions to help structure the conversation:

How did the interview come about?
Were you recommended as a candidate? If so did it influence your first impression?
What was the setting?
What was the interview for?
What was your initial position and attitude towards the task, the company, and your interviewers?

Did you have any expectations or hopes before the first meeting?
What was your first impression?
When did it start?
How did you perceive it?
What influenced it?
What impressed you?
How did you deal with this impression in the conversation with your interviewers?
What roles did you and your interviewers take?
When did this first impression end?

3. Clarification questions on specific aspects and situations

Do social media profiles, internet research, for news and the company's homepage for example, affect your impression formation?
How do photos affect your first impressions?
Has your situation of being in-between jobs influenced your attitude or perceptions?
Do you know your biases? If so, how do you deal with them?
What do you think were your interviewers' first impressions of you?
If it had been possible to influence your interviewers' first impressions so that they had a better picture of you, would you have done so?

Appendix # 2 – adapted invitation letter.

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you very much for your willingness to answer my questions in the context of my thesis research. Mrs. / Mr. has already informed me about your participation.

I started my studies in the field of change in 2018 at INSEAD business school in Fontainebleau, France. I am currently writing my thesis, a scientific paper comparable to our diploma thesis, which I would like to complete in June 2020.

My thesis title is: First impressions in job interviews: a phenomenology theory study of how first impressions during professional interviews affect the decision-making of top executives in career transition.

For my research, I have prepared a list of questions about your experiences of first impression formation in general, and a request for two actual experiences of yours, which should not be older than six weeks. Based on the experience of my first two interviews with Participants, your interview will last no longer than two hours. I'm happy to conduct the interview in person or via VC – whichever is the more convenient for you.

There are seventeen Participants involved in the study, all of whom belong to a relatively small group of executives with incomes of over €350,000 p.a. I am interested in how 'first impressions' are formed in job interviews within this group, and how and to what extent these first impressions subsequently influence their decision-making in the application process.

I have not sent you the questionnaire in advance, because I need your reactions to my questions to be spontaneous. Please let me know when and in what form we can conduct the interview.

I look forward to your reply.

With kindest regards.
Jürn-F. Konitzer

Appendix # 3 – verbatim extracts from interviews with Participants.

Completion quote 1: *I felt as if I had been transported into the past century. Everything was big and pompous with the chic of the early 20th century: stucco on the walls, high ceilings, chandeliers, shelves made of heavy oak. What surprised me in all this demonstration of the fifth-generation family business were the cobwebs in the corners. In this room I was served a potato soup for lunch.*

Completion quote 2: *The grandson (the successor) seemed shy. At least I could tell by his sitting posture and the way he looked at his grandmother (the owner). The Chief Sales Executive (CSO; 3rd interviewer) wore a handkerchief in his breast pocket, and embodied the old school of the complacent manager. His posture showed me that he enjoyed the trust of the owner.*

Completion quote 3: *However, there was no woman in the extended management. I wondered whether I would fit into this conservative-looking company and whether the will to change that Mrs. X had claimed existed, was really there. The landscape was picturesque and the building, although very remote, seemed very modern. At the reception I was picked up by the personnel manager, which I found very pleasant. In the meeting room, coffee in cups with rubber mats was served – very elegant. Normally in companies of this size you bring your own cup (laughs). When I entered the boardroom, I was sitting opposite three men in suits without ties. They looked better than in the social media photos.*

Completion quote 4: *I didn't like this icy cold questioning without being responsive to my person. I'm always surprised that these pressure-generating executive types, without any empathy, are still used. If there hadn't been a friend's recommendation, I would have ended the phone call.*

XIII. Bibliography

Albright, L., Kenny, D. A., & Malloy, T. E. (1988). Consensus in personality judgement at zero acquaintance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *55*, 387-395.

Ambady, N., Bernieri, F. J., & Richeson, J. A. (2000). Toward a histology of social behavior: Judgmental accuracy from thin slices of the behavioral stream. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 32*, 201-271.

Ambady, N., Rule, N. O. (2006). First Impressions – Peeking at the Neural Underpinnings. In N. Ambady & J.J. Skowronski (Eds.), *first impressions* (pp. 34-36). New York, USA: The Guilford Press.

Armstrong, D., & Rustin, M. (2014). Social defenses against anxiety: Explorations in a paradigm. London, UK: Routledge.

Arnaud, G. (2012). The contribution of psychoanalysis to organizational studies and management: An overview. *Organization Studies, 33(9)*. 1121-1135.

Aube, J., & Whiffen, V. E. (1996). Depressive styles and social acuity: Further evidence for distinct interpersonal correlates of dependency and self-criticism. *Communication Research, 23*, 407-424.

Ausbreitung des Virus in Deutschland: Die Chronologie der Corona-Pandemie (2020, May 19). *Sonntagsblatt*. Retrieved from: https://www.sonntagsblatt.de/chronologie-corona-pandemie

Bargh, J. A., & Chartrand, T. L. (1999). The unbearable automaticity of being. *American Psychologist, 54*, 462-479.

Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K. (1991). The big five personality dimensions and job performance: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology, 44*, 1-25.

Baumeister, R. F., (1982). A self-presentational view of social phenomena. *Psychological Bulletin, 91*, 3-26.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R., (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*, 497-529.

Bernieri, F. J., & Gillis, J. S. (1995). Personality correlates of accuracy in a social perception task. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 81*, 168-170.

Bernieri, F. J., Gillis, J. S., Davis, J. M., & Grahe, J. E. (1996). Dyad report and the accuracy of its judgement across situations: A lens model analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 71*, 110-129.

Bernieri, F. J., & Gillis, J. S. (2001). Judging rapport: Employing Brunswik's lens model to study interpersonal sensitivity. In J. A. Hall & F. J. Bernieri (Eds.), *Interpersonal sensitivity: Theory and measurement* (pp. 67-88). Mahwah, NJ, USA: Erlbaum.

Block, J., & Funder, D. C. (1986). Social roles and social perception: Individual differences in attribution and error. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 51*, 1200-1207.

Blog.arkadin (2017). You never get a second chance to make a first impression. Retrieved from: https://blog.arkadin.com/en/you-never-get-a-second-chance-to-make-a-first-impression/

Bond, C F., DePaulo, B. M. (2006). Accuracy of deception judgements. *Personality and social Psychology Review, 10*, 214-234.

Book, H. (2018). *The CCRT.* (PowerPoint slides). Retrieved from https://learn.insead.edu/courses

Borkenau, P., & Liebler, A. (1992). Trait inferences: Sources of validity at zero acquaintance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 62*, 645-657.

Borkenau, P., & Liebler, A. (1993). Convergence of stranger ratings of personality and intelligence with self-ratings, partner ratings, and measured intelligence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65*, 546-553.

Borkenau, P., Mauer, N., Riemann, R., Spinath, F. M., & Angleitner, A. (2004). Thin slices of behavior as cues of personality and intelligence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 86, 599-614.*

Brewer, M. B., & Caporael, L., (2006). An evolutionary perspective on social identity: Revisiting groups. In M. Schaller, J.A. Simpson, & D.T. Kenrick (Eds.), *Evolution and social psychology* (pp. 143-161). New York: Psychology Press.

Buckley, M. R., & Eder, R. W. (1988). B.M. Springbett and the notion of the "snap decision" in the interview. *Journal of Management, 141(1),* 59-67.

Buss, D. M. (1987). Selection, evocation, and manipulation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 53*, 1214-1221.

Buss, D. M. (1992). Conflict in married couples: Personality predictors of anger and upset. *Journal of Personality, 59*, 663-688.

Byrne, D., Gouaux, C., Griffitt, W., Lamberth, J., Murakawa, N., Prasad, M.B., et al. (1971). The ubiquitous relationship: Attitude similarity and attraction: A cross-cultural study. *Human Relations, 24,* 201-207.

Carlston, D. E., & Skowronski, J. J. (2005). Linking versus thinking: Evidence for the different associative and attributional bases of spontaneous trait transference and spontaneous trait inference. *Journal Personality and Social Psychology, 89*, 884-898.

Carmon, Z. (2019). Human Behaviour Dynamics from the Organisational and Macro Perspective. (PowerPoint slides). Retrieved from https://learn.insead.edu/courses/381/pages/slides

Costanzo, M., & Archer, D. (1989). Interpreting the expressive behavior of others: The Interpersonal Perception task. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 13*, 225-245.

Costanzo, M. (1992). Training students to decode verbal and nonverbal cues: Effects on confidence and performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 84*, 308-313.

Cottrell, C. A., Neuberg, S. L., & Li, N.P. (2007). What do people desire on others? A socio-functional perspective on the importance of different valued characteristics. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*, 208-231.

Custrini, R. J., & Feldman, R. S. (1989). Children's social competence and nonverbal encoding and decoding of emotions. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 18*, 336-342

Dawes, R. M., Faust, D., & Meehl, P. E. (1989). Clinical versus actuarial judgment. *Science*, *243*, 1668-1674.

DeBruine, L. M. (2002). Facial resemblance enhances trust. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B, 269*, 1307-1312.

DeBruine, L.M. (2005). Trustworthy but not lust-worthy: Context-specific effects of facial resemblance. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B, 272*, 919-922.

Diamond, M., & Allcorn, S. (2003). The cornerstone of psychoanalytic organizational analysis: Psychological reality, transference and countertransference in the workplace. *Human Relations, 56*(4), 491-514.

Dimberg, U. (1997). Psychophysiological reactions to facial expressions. In U. Sgersstrale & P. Molnar (Eds.), *Nonverbal communication: Where nature meets culture* (pp. 47-60. Mahwah, NJ, USA: Erlbaum

Dimberg, U., Thunberg, M., & Elmehed, K. (2000). Unconscious facial reactions to emotional facial expressions. *Psychological Science*, *11*(1), 86-89.

Dougherty, T. W., Ebert, R. J., & Callender, J. C. (1986). Policy capturing in the employment interview. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *71*, 9-15

Dougherty, T. W., Turban, D. B., & Callender, J. C. (1994). Confirming first impressions in the employment interview: A field study of interviewer behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *79*(5), 659-665.

Dougherty, T. W., & Turban, D. B. (1999). Behavioral confirmation of interviewer expectancies. In R.W. Eder & M.M. Harris (Eds.), *The employment interview handbook* (pp.259-278). Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: Sage

Dunbar, R. I. M. (1998). The social brain hypothesis. *Evolutionary Anthropology*, *6*, 178-190.

Eagly, A .H., Ashmore, R. D., Makhijani, M. G., & Longo, L. C. (1991). What is beautiful is good, but…: A meta-analytic review of research on the physical attractiveness stereotype. *Psychological Bulletin, 110*, 109-128.

Ekman, P. (1972). Universals and cultural differences in facial expressions of emotion. In J. K. Cole (Ed.), *Nebraska symposium on motivation, 1971* (pp. 207-283). Lincoln, USA: University of Nebraska Press.

Elfenbein, H. A., & Ambady, N. (2002). On the universality and cultural specificity of emotion recognition: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 128*, 203-235.

Estes, S. G. (1938). Judging personality from expressive behavior. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, *33*, 217-236.

Fink, B., & Penton-Voak, I. (2002). Evolutionary psychology of facial attractiveness. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 11*, 154-158.

Fröhlich, H. (2015). Führung in Zahlen. Retrieved from *brand eins*. Website: https://www.brandeins.de/magazine/brand-eins-wirtschaftsmagazin/2015/fuehrung/fuehrung-in-zahlen

Funder, D. C., & Dobroth, K. M., (1987). Differences between traits: Properties associate with (interjudge)? agreement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *52*, 409-418.

Funder, D. C., & Sneed, C. D. Behavioral manifestations of personality: An ecological approach to judgmental accuracy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 64,* 479-490.

Ghoshal, S. (1995). The Smell of the Place. World Economic Forum in Davos. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgrD7yJwxAM

Gilbert, D. T., & Malone, P. S. (1995). The correspondence bias. *Psychological Bulletin*, *117*, 21-38.

Gilovich, T., Griffin, D., & Kahneman, D. (Eds.). (2002). *Heuristics and biases: The psychology of intuitive judgment*. New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.

Gould, L. (2001). Introduction. In L. Gould, L. Stapley, & M. Stein (Eds), *The systems psychodynamics of organizations.* (pp. 1-15). London, UK: Karnac.

Graudenz, H. (1987). Eignungsuntersuchungen aus der Sicht der Bewerber. *DGP Informationen, 38*, 1-28.

Gray, H. M., & Ambady, N. (2006). *When sadness spurs social acuity: Insights from a dyadic interaction paradigm.* Manuscript under revision.

Greenwald, A. G. (1980). The totalitarian ego: Fabrication and revision of personal history. *American Psychologist, 35*, 603-618.

Greenwald, A. G., & Pratkanis, A. R. (1984). The self. In R. S. Wyer, Jr., & T. K. Srull (Eds.), *Handbook of social cognition* (Vol. 3; pp. 129-178). Hillsdale, New Jersey, USA: Erlbaum.

Hartmann, M. (2002). *Der Mythos von den Leistungseliten*. Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Campus Verlag

Hassin, R. R., Bargh, J. A., & Uleman, J. S. (2002). Spontaneous causal inferences. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *38*, 515-522.

Hassin, R. R., Aarts, H., & Ferguson, M. (2005). Automatic goal inferences. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *41*, 129-140.

Huffington, C., Armstrong, D., Halton, W., Hoyle, L., Pooley, J. (Eds.) (2004). *Working below the surface: The emotional life of contemporary organizations.* London, UK: Karnac Books Ltd.

Ickes, W., Stinson, L., Bissonnette, V., & Garcia, S. (1990). Naturalistic social cognition: Empathic accuracy in mixed-sex dyads. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 59*, 730-742

Isaacowitz, D. M., Lockenhoff, C. E., Lande, R. D., Wright, R., Sechrest, L., Riedel, R., et al. (2007). Age differences in recognition of emotion in lexical stimuli and facial expressions. *Psychology and Aging*, *22*, 147-159.

Izard, C. E. (1971). *The face of emotion*. New York, USA: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Johnstone, T., & Scherer, K. R. (2000). Vocal communication of emotion. In M. Lewis & J. Haviland (Eds.), Handbook of emotion (2nd ed., pp. 220-235). New York, USA: Guilford Press.

Jones, E. E., & Harris, V. A. (1967). The attribution of attitudes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 3*, 1-24.

Kassin, S. M., & Fong, C. T. (1999). "I'm innocent!": Effects of training on judgments of truth and deception in the interrogation room. *Law and Human Behavior*, *23*, 499-516.

Kelley, H. H. (1950). The warm-cold variable in first impressions of persons. *Journal of Personality*, *18*, 431-439.

Kenny, D. A., Horner, C., Kashy, D. A., & Chu, L. (1992). Consensus at zero acquaintance: Replication, behavioral cues, and stability. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *62*, 88-97.

Keßler, B.H. (1988). Daten aus dem Interview. In R.S. Jäger (Eds.), *Psychologische Diagnostik – Ein Lehrbuch* (pp. 363-372). München, Germany: Psychologie Verlags Union.

Kets de Vries, Manfred F. R., & Miller, D. (1984). *The neurotic organization: diagnosing and changing counterproductive styles of management.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Kets de Vries, Manfred F. R. (2006). *The leadership mystique* (second ed.). Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Ltd.

Kets de Vries, Manfred F. R., & Cheak, A. (2014). Psychodynamic approach. *INSEAD Working Papers Collection*, (45), 1-22.

Kets de Vries, M. F. R., Korotov, K., Florent-Treacy, E., & Rook, C. (2015). Coach and couch 2nd edition: The psychology of making better leaders. New York, USA: Springer.

Keysar, B. (1994). The illusory transparency of intention: Linguistic perspective taking in text. *Cognitive Psychology*, *23*, 165-208.

Keysar, B., Ginzel, L. E., & Bazerman, M. H. (1995). States of affairs and states of mind: The effect of knowledge of beliefs. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 64*, 283-293.

Kilburg, R. R. (1995). Integrating psychodynamic and systems theories in organization development practice. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research, 47*(1), 28-55.

Leyens, J.-P., Dardenne, B., & Fiske, S. T. (1998). Why and under what circumstances is a hypothesis-consistent testing strategy preferred in interviews? *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *37*, 259-247.

Long, S., & Harding, W. (2013). Socio-analytic Interviewing. In S. Long (Ed.), *Socioanalytic methods: Discovering the hidden in organizations and social systems* (pp. 91-106) London, UK: Karnac Books Ltd.

Luborsky, L., & Crits-Christoph, P. (1989). A relationship pattern measure: The core conflictual relationship theme. *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes, 52*(3), 250-259.

Luborsky, L., & Crits-Christoph, P. (1990). *Understanding transference: the core conflictual relationship method.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Macan, T. H., & Dipboye, R. L. (1990). The relationship of interviewers' pre-interview impressions to selection and recruitment outcomes. *Personnel Psychology*, *43*, 745-768.

Mai, J. (2017). Der erste Eindruck: Was dabei wirklich zählt. Retrieved from *Karrierebibel,* Website: https://karrierebibel.de/erster-eindruck/

Maner, J. K., Kenrick, D. T., Becker, D. V., Robertson, T. E., Hofer, B., Neuberg, S., et al. (2005). Functional projection: How fundamental social motives can bias interpersonal perception. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 88*, 63-78.

Maner, J. K., deWall, C. N., Baumeister, R. F., & Schaller, M. (2007). Does social exclusion motivate interpersonal reconnection? Resolving the "porcupine problem". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*, 42-55.

Merton, R. K. (1948). The self-fulfilling prophecy. *Antioch review, 8*, 193-210.

Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Murray, S. L., Holmes, J. G., Bellavia, G., Griffin, D. W., & Dolderman, D. (2002). Kindred spirits? The benefits of egocentrism in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*, 563-581.

Neumann, J.E., & Hirschhorn, L. (1999). The challenge of integrating psychodynamic and organizational theory. *Human Relations, 52(6),* 683-695.

Newman, L. S., & Uleman, J. S. (1989). Spontaneous trait inference. In J.S. Uleman & J.A. Bargh (Eds.), *Unintended thought* (pp. 155-188). New York, USA: Guilford Press.

Nickerson, R. S. (1998). Confirmation bias: A ubiquitous phenomenon in many guises. *Review of General Psychology, 2* (2), 175-220.

Nowicki, S., & Duke, M. P. (2001). Nonverbal receptivity: The diagnostic analysis of nonverbal accuracy (DANVA). In J. A. Hall & F. J. Bernieri (Eds.), *Interpersonal sensitivity*. Mahwah, NJ, USA: Erlbaum.

Palmeri, T. J. (1999). Theories of automaticity and the power law of practice. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, *25*, 543-551.

Peeter, G. & Czapinski, J. (1990). Positive-negative asymmetry in evaluations: The distinction between affective and informational negativity effects. European Review of Social Psychology, *1*, 33-60.

Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. A. (2012). Practical guide for interpretative phenomenological analysis in qualitative research in psychology. Psychological Magazine, *18*(2), 361-369.

Posthuma, R. A., Morgeson, F. P., & Campion, M. A. (2002). Beyond employment interview validity: A comprehensive narrative review of recent research and trends over time. *Personnel Psychology*, *55*, 1-81.

Puccinelli, N., Tickle-Dgnen, L., & Rosenthal, R. (2004). Effect of target position and target task on judge sensitivity to felt rapport. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 28*, 211-220.

Reid, K., Flowers, P., Larkin, M. (2005). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: An overview and methodological review. *The Psychologist*, *18*, 20-23.

Rosenthal, R., Jacobson, L. (1968). Pygmalion in the classroom. *Urban Review, 3*, 16-20.

Ross, L. D., Amabile, T. M., & Steinmetz, J. L. (1977). Social roles, social control, and biases in social-perception and attribution processes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 35*, 485-494.

Ross, L. D., Greene, D., & House, P. (1977). The false consensus effect: An egocentric bias in social perception and attribution processes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 13*, 279-301.

Sarges, W. (2000). Interviews. In W. Sages (Ed.), *Management-Diagnostik* (3rd ed., pp. 475-489). Göttingen, Germany: Hogrefe Verlag.

Schaller, M., Park, J. H., & Kenrick, D. T. (2007). Human evolution and social cognition. In R.I.M. Dunbar & L. Barrett (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of evolutionary psychology* (pp. 491-504). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Schaller, M. (2008). Evolutionary Basis of First Impressions. In N. Ambady & J.J. Skowronski (Eds.), *first impressions* (pp. 15-34). New York, USA: The Guilford Press.

Schroeder, J. E. (1995). Self-concept, social anxiety, and interpersonal perception skills. *Personality and Individual Differences, 19*, 955-958.

Siegal, M., & Varley, R. (2002). Neural systems involved in "theory of mind." *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, *3*, 463-471.

Smith, J. (2010). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. *Existential Analysis*, *21*(2), 186-192.

Snyder, M., & Swann, W. B., Jr. (1978). Hypothesis-testing process in social interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *36*, 1202-1212.

Spitznagel, A. (1982). Die diagnostische Situation. In K.-J. Groffmann & L. Michel (Eds.), *Grundlagen psychologischer Diagnostik* (pp. 248-294). Göttingen, Germany: Hofgrefe.

Spitznagel, A. (2000). Narrative Verfahren. In W. Sarges (Ed.), *Management-Diagnostik* (3rd ed., pp. 489-497). Göttingen, Germany: Hogrefe Verlag.

Springbett, B. M. (1958). Factors affecting the final decision in the employment interview. *Canadian Journal of Psychology*, *12*, 13-22.

Swann, W. B., Jr. (1984). Quest for accuracy in person perception: A matter of pragmatics. *Psychological Review, 91*, 457-477.

Swann, W. B., Jr. (1987). Identity negotiation: Where two roads meet. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 53*, 1038-1051.

Swann, W. B., Jr., Rentfrow, P. J., & Guinn, J. S. (2003). Self-verification: The search for coherence. In M. R. Leary & J. J. P. Tangney (Eds.), *Handbook of self and identity* (pp. 367-383). New York, USA: Guilford Press.

Thoresen, C. J., Bradley, J. C., Bliese, P. D., & Thoresen, J. D. (2004). The big five personality traits and individual job performance growth trajectories in maintenance and transitional job stages. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *89*, 835-853.

Thornhill, R., & Gangestad, S.W. (1999). Facial attractiveness. *Trends in Cognitive Science, 3*, 452-460.

Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1974). Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases. *Science*, *185*, 1124-1131.

Uleman, J. S., Newman, L. S., & Moskowitz, G. B. (1996). People as flexible interpreters: Evidence and issues from spontaneous trait inference. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology (*pp. 211–279). Cambridge, USA: Academic Press.

Whalen, P. J., Rauch, S. L., Etcoff, N. L., McInerney, S. C., Lee, M. B., & Jenike, M. A. (1998). Masked presentations of emotional facial expressions modulate amygdala activity without explicit knowledge. *Journal of Neuroscience 18*(1), 411-418.

Wilson, T. D., & Schooler, J. W. (1991). Thinking too much: Introspection can reduce the quality of preferences and decisions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *60*, 181-192.

Zebrowitz, L. A., Hall, J. A., Murphy, N. A., & Rhodes, G. (2002). Looking smart and looking good: Facial cues to intelligence and their origins. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28,* 238-249.

Zebrowitz, L. A., & Rhodes, G. (2004). Sensitivity to "bad genes" and the anomalous face overgeneralization effect: Cue validity, cue utilization, and accuracy in judging intelligence and health. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 28*, 167-185.

Acknowledgements

With the submission of this thesis an instructive and exciting journey comes to an end. I would like to thank the faculty, staff, my fellow students, friends and family, all of whom made this journey possible:

Bogdan, who drew my attention to the CCC-studies at INSEAD and always stood by my side as an advisor.

Yasmin, who was a role model for me through her international education and encouraged me to make this journey.

All the Participants in my research, who opened up to me to talk about their very personal experiences in interviews.

Roger, Eric, Michael and Liz, who showed me ways into the clinical approach and how to learn from it. Your lively way of making even complex contexts understandable and your responsiveness during the entire course were incentive enough for me to constantly deal with new topics.

My classmates, who have made this journey a joint experience, and who have inspired me again and again through their advice and empathetic support.

David, who patiently supported me with the editing of the thesis and provided me with important writing hints.

Tobias, who, throughout my entire studies, unselfishly and compassionately supported me in managing our company. Your backing and enthusiasm for this journey encouraged me to apply and keep at it till the end.

Sarah, who provided me with time off for studying. Your interest and our dialogues constantly triggered my creativity. It is thanks to your commitment that I was able to make this journey.