

Contrasting Role Plays to Video Simulations

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I. Introduction

This paper will discuss video-based simulations as an alternative to role play simulations. The advantages and disadvantages of using videotaped test stimuli are discussed. This is followed by sections with suggestions about how to begin using video-based simulations and how to choose a video production vendor. Finally, taping test responses is briefly addressed.

II. Video Stimulus Advantages

Perhaps the biggest advantage of the use of videotape stimuli in role play job simulations is that it ensures consistency in testing. As important as it is to hold extraneous variables constant in conducting experiments, it is likewise important to hold these variables constant in testing. A major goal of the job simulation test is to determine how each candidate would perform, relative to each other, in a simulated job situation, given the exact same circumstances. Although there are ways to control for variance in performances among role players, no two live role play situations will be exactly the same. Having candidates respond to videotape guarantees that the situations that the candidates respond to are exactly the same each time.

A second advantage of the use of videotaped role plays is that they allow the testing agency to place the candidate in realistic job situations that cannot be easily simulated live. Examples of these situations that have appeared in recent job simulation videos used by the City of New Orleans include: 1) a simulated suicide attempt; 2) a neighborhood watch group meeting; 3) viewing interpersonal disputes; 4) a traffic stop scene; 5) a police roll call; 6) burning buildings and cars (portrayed using computer graphics). Each of these situations would be impossible to simulate with a single role player acting out the scene. Also, a written description of the situation would not provide the realism and consistent visual and audio cues inherent in videotaped job simulations.

A third advantage is that emotional performances only need to be made once. This allows for a test gauging a police officer's reaction to an emotional domestic disturbance. Also, a firefighter's ability to deal with members of the public who are distressed by viewing their home or car on fire can be tested.

III. Video Stimulus Disadvantages

The consistency in testing provided by videotaped test stimuli has a price. Namely, videos are, necessarily, less realistic than live interactions. Few have to respond to a videotape as a part of their job. Rather, there would be people available to question, and their responses may elicit additional responses. Candidates viewing videotape test simulations should be encouraged to respond by stating the questions that they would ask, and the person to whom they would address those questions. The answers to the questions that they ask may appear in following scenes of the videotape, or they may not. This is the price of the consistency of videotaped tests.

Additionally, raters occasionally express regret in not being able to see how the candidate would respond in a live interaction situation. Yet, it is the fact that live interaction is eliminated that ensures the consistency in testing that is the videotaped job simulation's greatest advantage. It may also be true that how candidates react to a videotape simulation is different from how they would react in a live testing simulation. No direct research on this subject has been found.

An additional potential disadvantage is the expense of creating a videotape test. There are economies of scale to be considered. With only five to ten candidates, the creation of an original videotaped simulation would seem impractical. However, if one's preferred alternative is to bring extra raters to the test site and train them to be role players, the expense of this approach may be weighed against that of creating a videotape. Typically, the testing agency pays for raters' transportation, meals, boarding and often a small per diem. These additional expenses may be weighed against having the role play performed on videotape.

A final disadvantage for testing agencies who have not done this type of testing previously is that starting any new medium of testing will bring apprehension and criticism. Preparation is the best antidote to this problem. In addition, communication with those taking this type of test is essential for its acceptance. The advice offered in the following section is designed to aid those facing the transition to video-based testing.

IV. Getting Started

The first suggestion concerns the type of exam that should be used to initiate video-based testing. While economics may suggest starting with large volume tests, starting with a somewhat smaller test will allow the testing agency some valuable experience. Large volume, high-profile tests have their own set of problems. Beginning a new testing modality with a large-volume test need not be an additional difficulty.

Secondly, experience teaches that careful planning for needed elements will help with the transition to video-based testing. Many of the things needed to do a video role play are the same things needed for a live role play. These things include developing a script and finding actors. Other elements to consider take advantage of those qualities that make video-based testing unique. These include finding props and the appropriate setting.

The video test script should be based on a thorough job analysis and should attempt to elicit responses measuring needed knowledges, skills or abilities. Some find it a challenge to keep the video realistic and avoid the more exciting scenarios that can be portrayed on video. Creating a realistic situation will aid in candidate acceptance.

Regarding actors, the staple acting talent for video testing in New Orleans has been friends, co-workers and relatives. Other sources include university drama clubs, local amateur actors and talent agencies. One should avoid casting those who the candidate may meet or know in other settings, including those in the human resources or civil service department. Candidates may have

difficulty separating the context in which they know the actor from the person acting on the video test stimulus.

Props can often be obtained from a liaison from the department requesting the test. Police cars, fire trucks, and uniforms are commonly requested to provide realism for the video. The setting, likewise, may require assistance from a subject matter expert (SME). While office scenes may be easy to film, scenes requiring traffic stops need police department intervention.

Finally, to gain acceptance on a new way of testing will require open lines of communication with those being tested. In general, it is good to let candidates know what to expect. Realize that candidates will be apprehensive about the new test modality. Tell them the video will be the same for everyone and will not react to their test response. They need to understand that it is a waste of time for them to stare at the screen and say **AI** would never let it get to this point. They need to deal with the situation at hand.

Also, candidate acceptance is aided by the realism of the video. The video should attempt to reflect situations that could really happen, while eliciting a measure of the knowledges, skills or abilities necessary for the job. It is easy to get carried away and want to attempt an overly dramatic scene. Subject matter expert guidance can be helpful in ensuring a realistic portrayal.

V. Video Production Vendors

An important consideration in developing a video-based test is finding a video production vendor to assist your efforts. Comparing the quality of a self-produced, self-edited video test and a professionally done product is all that is needed to justify the necessity of this step. New Orleans Civil Service has used video production vendors from nonprofit agencies, university film schools and for-profit video production companies found through the yellow pages. The decision of which video production vendor to use is made considerably easier when one asks for a sample of the vendor's work.

Once a vendor is secured, the expectations of all involved should be made clear. The vendor will want a fairly specific script ahead of filming to understand lighting and other concerns. They may also want to view the video's setting ahead of time. Of course, the testing agency's concern for test security must be explained as well. Security agreements should be procured from all involved, including the video workers, actors and, most importantly, subject matter experts who may be assisting. The importance of test security must be made clear to all. However, having a trusted SME on hand while filming, to answer questions or to provide realistic details, can be invaluable.

VI. Videotaped Responses

The focus of this paper is the use of videotaped stimuli in testing. It may be noted that videotaping candidates' responses is a step that many testing agencies have taken in tandem with

creating videotaped stimuli. The above sections of this paper apply whether or not one tapes the candidate's responses.

While it would be beyond the scope of this paper to list them in detail, there are numerous advantages (mostly logistical) to taping candidate responses and using these tapes as one's primary media for scoring a test. These advantages are most evident when one considers that, when rating using tapes, the candidates and the raters don't have to be at the same place at the same time. What follows is just a short listing of these advantages.

1. Performances can be rewound and raters can have additional chances to observe a candidate's performance.
2. Raters can take longer with the first few candidates as they get more familiar with the rating scales.
3. Raters aren't pressed for time - they can set their own hours within reason.
4. Raters can dress as they like.
5. Timing is much easier. Smoke breaks and lunch breaks are easier to handle.
6. Potential disasters, such as a rater's family emergencies, are easier to handle.

In summary, videotape testing, both videotaping the stimulus and taping the responses, as well, has proven a viable alternative to role plays.