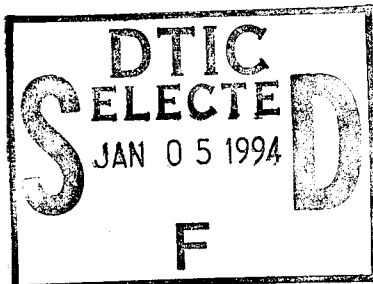


PROFESSIONAL MILITARY COMPTROLLER SCHOOL



IDEA PAPER

TITLE

How to Improve the FMCP Interview Process

AUTHOR

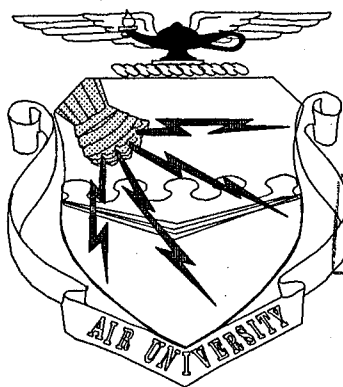
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Class

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PMCS IDEA PAPER

TITLE: How To Improve The FMCP Interview Process

PMCS CLASS: 95-A

AUTHOR: John M. Shepard RANK: GS-11 SERVICE: Air Force

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Financial Management Career Program (FMCP) interview is to evaluate all registrants within the comptroller career program. However, as an interviewee, I have experienced many problems with the whole process. I find the evaluation process can be biased against an individual and the score does not always reflect the expert knowledge an individual may have.

In addition, the current FMCP policy of keeping the criteria for the interview score from the interviewee is non-justifiable. There are more benefits from releasing this information to the interviewees than from keeping it on file.

In this paper, I will discuss the interview process and how it affects comptroller career registrants; in addition, I will focus on the issues that have plagued the interviewees, such as myself. Finally, I will propose a simple solution that a majority of FMCP registered "customers" have been yearning for--let the folks know how they were being graded when they receive their interview score.

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INTRODUCTION

It is a warm spring day in April, and like most budget analysts at an Air Force base, I am recovering from the annual grueling task of developing and defending our Operations & Maintenance (O&M) Financial Plan for the next fiscal year. As if the budget submission weren't stressful enough, I received a message from the Financial Management Career Program (FMCP) stating that the "Interview" will be conducted in our region in the coming weeks. Furthermore, a project officer in our geographical area will be contacting me to set up the interview time. Although the FMCP Interview is not mandatory for career program registrants, most people, including myself, can not afford the luxury of losing 37.5 percent of the Total Person Score (TPS) by declining (1:16). Refusing to be interviewed can be a major disadvantage to a career, especially in the fiercely competitive period that the Department of Defense is in right now. Naturally, I schedule an appointment with the project officer even though I am skeptical about the whole ordeal. Why is it so necessary? Is it such a fair way to evaluate an individual's technical knowledge based upon a twenty-five minute interview? I've decided to do some research...

The interview is an opportunity for each registrant to strengthen and expand their education and work experiences and to exhibit personal qualities and characteristics that are essential for future Financial Management/Comptroller community leaders (1:17).

This idea has been endorsed and advertised by the Financial Management Career Program since the inception of the interview. In reality, I, along with other registrants, think the whole interview process falls short of meeting those objectives. And unless the FMCP Policy Council listens to the registrants' complaints and makes some changes to the way individuals' scores are being graded, the interview should be discontinued until a better method of evaluation can be implemented. In order to explore some of these areas, I will explain the FMCP interview process, discuss some of the most common problems, and then propose a solution to the current method of evaluating the interviewees.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the Financial Management Career Program interview is to evaluate all registrants in the comptroller fields and provide a valuable score to compute the Total Person Score (TPS). The career program uses the TPS to evaluate and rank comptroller career program registrants for promotion, reassignment, and training opportunities. Interviews are conducted annually, usually in the spring months, with GS-11s and GS-12s interviewed one year and GS and GM-13s and 14s the next (5:5). The interview panel, or judges, consist of four senior members of the financial management community plus a nonvoting FMCP representative. The individual is allowed twenty-five minutes to complete

the interview (7:4). During the interview, the judges take notes and listen to the individual's responses. After the individual has completed the interview and left the room, the judges discuss and compare notes on the interviewee's performance before determining the final score. The results from the interview will not be known to the individual until approximately four months later. At this time, the individual will receive a raw interview score in conjunction with his Total Person Score (TPS). Accompanying this score is a letter from the FMCP Policy Council on how great of a job they are doing to keep the integrity of the career program and the importance of the FMCP interview in reflection to the individual's score. The problem with this wondrous process is that it forgets the most important element of all--the interviewee, who is the "customer" too.

According to AFP 40-20, the interview provides individuals an opportunity to overcome the variations in the civilian performance and promotion appraisal system. In addition, it provides the individual an opportunity to demonstrate his experience and capabilities (2:5). However, the results are contrary to the objectives because of the problems existing with the process. One example is that there is no specific guidance to the individual in preparation for the interview. The Interview Guide published by FMCP is very vague on the areas of concentration. For example, information sources consist of a list of DOD and AF

Regulations from each subject matter area: audit, budget, cost, accounting and finance, etc. [In other words, the message might be to the interviewee to memorize the regulations before the interview and then to probably brain-dump them afterward (by the way, the current list consists of twenty four regulatory publications).] Therefore a question must be asked...how could anyone be expected to know such a wide range of comptroller career fields as well as to be an expert of his own? Considering that not everyone's an expert in all things, the panel members seem to place interview scoring more heavily on performance and showmanship rather than on the individual's expertise in his career field. If this is the case, then the whole purpose of the interview has been defeated. For example, if my ability to demonstrate my experience and expertise is diminished by lack of strength in the area of presenting or selling myself to a panel, then my interview score will reflect that weakness. Never mind that I may have been the budget analyst of the year, or that my appraisal has been superior to my colleagues. The point is that the interview scores do not always lean in favor of those with less oral capabilities, which goes against the charter of the original interview objectives--to ensure all persons being interviewed receive fair treatment (3:5). The problem is then compounded by the fact that the grading method--how the panel arrived with the final interview score--is never published to the interviewee.

In any formal setting within DOD, whether it is job performance, on-the-job training, classroom environment, long-term school such as PMCS, or even a briefing presentation, there's always a critique or formal feedback being accomplished at the end of the period of performance. This is valuable data to let the individual know how he is doing, where he stands in the performance measurement and how he could improve in weak areas. However, in the Financial Management Career Program, the interview's methodology of scoring by the panel members is never revealed to the interviewee. How the members come up with the score is not as important as the score itself. At least that's the message I and many other registrants are receiving from FMCP. My heart-burning question is--WHY!!!!?? This, in my opinion, is the biggest flaw of the whole FMCP interview process.

I have attended many FMCP briefings over the years and have yet to get a solid answer to this question from any Palace Team members. I feel there are more benefits in revealing to the interviewee his strengths and weaknesses after the interview than there are by not telling him. For example, suppose I have a habit of repeating a certain word over and over again during the interview without realizing it. This habit turns out to be negative in terms of scoring. How would I have known to correct the mistake next time without the constructive critique from

my audience in the previous interview? Other examples could be the way I dress; the direction I took in answering the questions; hand gestures; eye contacts; etc. The list could go on and on if you were to ask other registrants. The point is the interviewee will never know his weaknesses to improve upon unless he receives immediate feedback from the panel members. The time has come for the Financial Management Career Program to listen to the registrants or customers of the program on these common problems and act upon them. If not, there could be potential implications later; implications such as why we have a program that does not serve its customer but rather is simply in place for the sake of existence? To say nothing of using up valuable resources of TDY and personnel.

CONCLUSIONS

In an era of drawdown experienced throughout the Department of Defense, the competition within the career programs, including FMCP, is not just for promotion but rather retention as well. The FMCP interview can be an effective method of evaluating career registrants if the Policy Council is willing to make changes to improve on the process. The problems discussed in this paper are not new to the Palace Team, they are common to many interviewees, and they have been brought up to the Career Program many times before by customers. With new rounds of base closures and reduction-in-force (RIF) actions, there will come

a point, if the current process is not corrected, when a registrant will invoke his Total Quality Management (TQM) rights (4:2) or the Right to Privacy Act of 1974 (6:28) to determine how his interview score was established by the panel members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Since the Interview Guide is too vague in the areas of concentration, I recommend: AFCPMC/DPCA put out specific guidance to each comptroller career field on the subject matter area that the interviewee needs to focus upon for that interview cycle. For example, in the budget area--the analyst may need to focus more on the financial plan process; or in the accounting and finance area--the accountant may need to study more on the paying and collecting area; etc.
2. The current FMCP policy prohibits interview's results being made available to the interviewee. I recommend: AFCPMC/DPCA and SAF/FMP re-look at this policy and do away with it completely. The benefits to the registrants far outweigh the secrecy that the current policy holds.

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