# Perception of Threat in the Context of a Job Interview: A Descriptive Study

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*Abstract*- **This qualitative study investigated the nature and characteristic/s of threat in the context of a job interview. A structured open-ended questionnaire was administered to a purposive sample. Thematic analyses were applied to textual data. Findings show that helplessness over illegitimate behaviour/s of interaction partner/s is a threat in the context of job interview.**

**Review of Literature:**
Initial conditions influence the nature of information exchanged between entities. Persons, processes, values and more make-up the initial conditions, and these initial conditions collectively constitute a system (Lapointe & Rivard, 2005). Exposure to a system makes an entity i.e. individual or system like an organization project consequence/s for self. A consequence is a threat if it is negative i.e. perceived to be obstructive of one's free behaviours (Lapointe & Rivard, 2005). Information that entities disseminate (not) is aimed at averting threat.

Perception of threat is due to perceived loss of free behaviours. Individuals believe that they can respond to a unit of information with one or more behaviours; that they are able to undertake certain behaviours; and, that they possess the freedom to decide when and how they may behave. these beliefs make-up their freedom (Brehm, 1966). An initial condition that obstructs or increases the difficulty of exercising free behaviours i.e. potential loss of freedom comes to be seen as a threat (Lapointe & Rivard, 2005). Perception of loss of freedom leads to perception of threat, and this perception prompts resistance.
Threats from a system may relate to procedures or to outcomes, both of which originate in a lack of fairness (Konovsky , Folger, & Cropanzano , 1987; Oreg, 2006).

Perceived Helplessness of Procedure (PHP): His interaction with a system can require the individual to implement a specific procedure. But implementing the procedure reduces/eliminates the individual's control over what behaviour/s he would prefer to undertake for performing the task. This is  unfairness of procedures and triggers a type of threat called perceived helplessness over process (PHP) (Ngafeeson & Manga, 2021).

Perceived Dissatisfaction over Outcomes (PDO): From perceived loss of control over process and over autonomy flows a less favourable/positive or a negative assessment of outcomes of a task, on the part of the actor (Warren & Guptill, 1988). This is PDO (Ngafeeson & Manga, 2021).

Persuasion can be perceived as a threat. Even if a persuasion is in one's best interest, it tends to trigger resistance if the individual perceives this persuasion to threaten  his free behaviours (Rosenberg & Siegel, 2017).  A persuasive message that is perceived as threat tends to possess one/more of the following characteristics--
i. Illegitimate i.e. unexpected
ii. Inappropriate i.e. unsupported by reason/s
iii. Controlling i.e. loss of individual autonomy in determining free behaviour/s to undertake in a given situation
iv. Short i.e. brief
v.  Loss-focused content
vi. Introduced in either the early half or the latter half of a communication.

Explaining threat and resistance requires awareness of the key assertions of the PRT (Brehm, 1966).
1. Human beings generally believe in "behavioral freedoms." That is, the freedom to perform certain behaviors: when they want it and how they want it.
2. When these freedoms are threatened, an uncomfortable motivational state known as reactance is created.
3. The decision to assert one's behavioral freedoms and to act in a way consistent with these freedoms leads to resistance.
(Lapointe & Rivard, 2005)have developed a framework for looking at resistance. There are 5 concepts in  the framework that interact to produce threat and resistance that the PRT assumptions speak of..
1. Object
A resistance behaviour is targeted at the organization/system (Wagner & Newel, 2007), effects of the system (Markus, 1983); and the implementers of the system (Lapointe & Rivard, 2005).
2. Subject

Resistance behaviours are undertaken by individual/s or entire organizations. These are the subjects of resistance behaviours (Joshi, 1991; Lapointe & Rivard, 2005; Marakas & Hornik, 1996; Martinko, Henry, & Zmud, 1996).

3. Initial Conditions

Interaction occurs within an environment, which possesses specific characteristic/s. These characteristic/s interact with the object/s i.e. target of resistance. This interaction of initial conditions and object/s can influence behaviour of actors (Hirschheim & Newman, 1991; Martinko, Henry, & Zmud, 1996).

4. Perceived Threat

Individuals' response to a system is based on the negative consequence/s that they expect to flow from implementing a certain system (Marakas & Hornik, 1996; Joshi, 1991) . These negative consequences are the perceived threats.

5. Manifestation of Resistance

The behaviour/s that individuals undertake in response to perceived threat/s is an expression of their discontent with the system. This discontent is expressed through sets of covert behaviours (Keen, 1981; Moreno, 1999) and/or overt behaviours (Kim & Kankanhalli, 2009; Lapointe & Rivard, 2005; Ferneley & Sobreperez, 2006) is manifestation of resistance.

(Knowles & Linn, 2004; 2021)investigate the interaction of professionals with healthcare information systems. Individuals' reactance is to anticipated threats from use of technology, which itself is passive. A job interview is an interaction between a job candidate and a prospective job giver i.e. employer. Both entities in this interaction are active participants. The present study aims to identify and describe category/s of threat encountered by and within the community of Chartered Accountants.

**Research Design:**

Definition

Threat in this study refers to value/s underlying information sought/shared, the perceived effect/s of value/s of a system that underlie information sought/shared, and/or the implementer of a potential/perceived threat information, in the context of a job interview.

**Research Questions**:

RQ-1. What is the relation of categories of threat to PHP and to PDO?

RQ-2. What characteristic/s does a threat possess?

**ResearchMethod**:

This study uses the purposive sampling technique for gathering qualitative data i.e. reflective narratives of experiences in a job interview. The sample is drawn from a niche population of students and qualified Chartered Accountants in India. After preliminary interaction, a structured open-ended questionnaire seeking reflective narratives of job interview experience was sent-out by E-mail to individuals -- who had been actors in a job interview as either candidate or interviewer/employer. A total of 14 valid responses including 08 candidates and 06 employers from different cities/towns in India are included in the analysis for this study. All respondents (candidates [C#] and employers [E#]) are assigned a unique alpha-numeric code for preserving confidentiality. Written reflections are subject to thematic analysis for teasing-out themes relating to perceived threats. Where applicable, these themes are placed under broader theme/s, and subsequently under categories. Later section/s of the paper detail the themes/categories, their analyses, and interpretations.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation:**

RQ-1. What is the relation of categories of threat to PHP and to PDO?

Categories of threat relate to PHP in case of 8 (c5, c7, c8, e3, e5, e10, e11, e15) out of the 14 respondents. Employers more often react to threats relating to PHP. 5 (E-3, E-5, E-10, E-11, E-15) out of the 8 instances of threats relating to PHP are identified as such by employers.

Categories of threat relate to PDO in case of 5 (C-9, C-12, C-13, E-6, E-10) out of the 14 respondents. Both candidates and employers/interviewers tend to react to categories of threat relating to PDO, but candidates tend more often to respond to threats relating to PDO. 3 (C-9, C-12, C-13) as against the 2 (E-6, E-10) instances of threats relating to PDO are identified as such by candidates.

Dignity as a category of threat tends to relate to PHP. 5 (C-3, C-4, C-7, C-8, C-12) out of the 14 respondents identify Dignity as a category of threat. All 5 respondents are candidates for a job interview. 2 (C-7, C-8) relate the threat to PHP, while 1 (C-12) respondent relates the threat to PDO, and 2 (C-3, C-4) do not relate the threat to either PHP or PDO.

Attitude as a category of threat is related to PHP. All 4 instances of Attitude as a category of threat relate to PHP, and all these 4 instances are identified as such by employers.

Etiquette as a category of threat may relate to either PHP or PDO. 4 (C-5, C-9, E-6, E-11) respondents identify Etiquette as a category of threat. in 2 (C-5, E-11) instances, the threat category relates to PHP.

In only 1 (C-13) instance is Exploitation a category of threat, and it relates to PDO.

Etiquette as a category of threat may relate to either PHP or PDO. 4 (C-5, C-9, E-6, E-11) respondents identify Etiquette as a category of threat. in 2 (C-9, E-6) instances, this threat category relates to PDO.

The relation of Dignity as a category of threat to PDO is weak.  5 (C-3, C-4, C-7, C-8, C-12) out of the 14 respondents identify Dignity as a category of threat. All 5 respondents are candidates for a job interview. 1 (C-12) respondent relates the threat to PDO.

RQ-2. What characteristic/s does a threat possess?

**Attitude**

Illegitimacy (Unexpectedness) more than any/all other characteristic of persuasive messages describes Attitude as threat. 2 (E-10, E-15) respondents characterize Attitude as Illegitimate. 1 (E-10) additionally characterizes the threat as coming-up early in the interaction, while 1 (E-15) additionally characterizes it as being short and coming-up later in the interaction. But, the threat's being Illegitimate is a consistent feature in both these instances.

**Dignity**

Brevity (being short) is a defining characteristic of Dignity as category of threat. 3 (C-3, C-4, C-12) out of the 5 respondents characterize threat to Dignity as being Short. 1 (C-12) additionally characterizes the threat as Loss-focused. 1 (C-3) additionally characterizes Dignity as coming-up later in the interaction. 2 (C-3, C-8) additionally characterize Dignity as being Illegitimate.  2 (C-4, C-7) additionally characterize it as Inappropriate.

**Etiquette**

All 4 (C-5, C-9, E-6, E-11) respondents who identify etiquette lapses as threat, characterize this threat as illegitimate. 2 (C-9, E-6) additionally characterize the threat as coming-up later in the interaction.

Dignity as a category of threat at once is short, illegitimate, and inappropriate.
Etiquette as a category of threat is illegitimate.
Attitude as a category of threat is illegitimate.
A behaviour of interaction partner/s that is illegitimate (unexpected) and over which one (job interviewer and/or interviewee) has no control (PHP) is a threat).

| Threat | Characteristic | Respondent |
|---|---|---|
| Attitude | Illegitimate | Employer |
| Dignity | Short | Candidate |
| Dignity | Illegitimate | Candidate |
| Dignity | Inappropriate | Candidate |
| Etiquette | Illegitimate | Both |

Analysis and interpretation warrant the proposition:
Helplessness over illegitimate behaviours of interaction partner/s is a threat in the context of job interview.

**Discussion and Future Research**

Candidates confront a complexity of threat. The complexity of threat for candidates results from the simultaneity of uncertainty of the category of threat  and of uncertainty of whether the threat relates to process or outcome.
Employers confront threat that is predictable although concentrated. The certainty of category of threat accompanied by a near certainty of it been related to PHP compensates for the focused nature of the threat category.

Future research needs to look at the effect/s of certainty (uncertainty) and variety concentrated (of threat on the nature of resistance.
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Appendices-01

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Threat: Categories and Themes

| Respondent | Threat category | Superordinate Theme | Threat theme |
|---|---|---|---|
| e3 | Attitude | | 0 Belie |
| e5 | Attitude | Demean | Arrogance |
| e10 | Attitude | Demean | Arrogance |
| e15 | Attitude | | 0 Immorality |
| c3 | Dignity | | 0 Stereotyping |
| c4 | Dignity | | 0 Intrusiveness |
| c7 | Dignity | | 0 Stereotyping |
| c8 | Dignity | | 0 Intrusiveness |
| c12 | Dignity | | 0 Demean |
| c5 | Etiquette | | 0 Demean |
| c9 | Etiquette | | 0 Demean |
| e6 | Etiquette | Demean | Discourtesy |
| e11 | Etiquette | Demean | Deride |
| c13 | Exploitation | | 0 Compromise |