

## Rise of collaborative hiring

## JOB INTERVIEW

**JACKSON NGARI  
& LINET OWOKO**

**In many interviews, candidates are now asked to work together on tasks, solve problems as a team, and navigate disagreements while recruiters quietly watch.**

Getting hired these days is not just about sitting across a table answering questions anymore. It feels more like being thrown into a group project with strangers and told, "Figure it out."

In many interviews, candidates are now asked to work together on tasks, solve problems as a team, and navigate disagreements while recruiters quietly watch. Others are asking to mimic the real job for even three days, just to gauge if they can work under pressure and think critically.

For the group work interviews, the aim is not just to see who talks the most, but who listens, collaborates, manages tension and adapts, the kind of real-life skills employers say matter far more than perfect Curriculum Vitae (CVs).

Joseph Mwangi says his recent job interview was more of a test of endurance rather than skills. "I attempted it for three consecutive days," he says.

Each morning, at 8 a.m. he would arrive at the office promptly, ready to convince his future boss that he deserved the job. "It wasn't about my pre-qualifications, it was about doing the practical job, thinking, communicating and persistence. The oral interview took only 30 minutes out of the three days."

He was tested on how he handled pressure and uncertainty. He also had to prove that he could multitask.

With the changing workplaces, employers are now going beyond an impressive CV and degree.

Sharon Kaiga, a human resources expert in Nairobi, notes that over the past five years, there has been a shift in how employers recruit. A first-class degree may open doors, but the ability to adapt to challenges and show curiosity now matters more for long-term career success.

"Qualifications matter, but they are not everything anymore. What we're really looking for are skills, the human abilities that drive teamwork, innovation, and resilience," says Ms Kaiga.

When she interviews candidates, she looks for more than rehearsed answers. She wants to know if a person can examine a problem, whether it involves a dissatisfied customer or a broken process, and determine how to fix it without being micromanaged.

"Employers want people who can speak their mind, handle pressure, multitask, and be proactive," Mwangi adds.

For Thomas Ouma, 27, a recent interview was also less about qualifications on paper and more about how he handled real-world scenarios. The interview included a simulation designed to test his practical ability under pressure.

"They gave me a pen and asked me to sell it to a customer. It was a sales job. They gave two products and asked me to convince a customer to choose one over the other, imagining the other was from a competitor. It was tough, but I managed. They asked how I would



# Interviews

## Why getting hired feels like a group project

handle a customer wanting to return products that were near expiry. Will I remain calm? Will I adapt?"

Ivy Akinyi's interview also came in a different format: online instead of physical and with strict instructions. "It was a German translator job, and I was asked not to use AI [Artificial Intelligence]." They were very clear: you cannot rely on AI tools to do the work. If AI could do it, the job wouldn't be given to a human. The interview tested whether I could operate independently while respecting the integrity of the work."

"They were also looking to see if I was desirable and likeable, someone who can be taught, and flexible. Academic qualifications matter, yes, but attitude and ability to learn quickly matter more, especially for entry to mid-level roles."

Festus Osinde, a senior human resource specialist at Kenyatta National Hospital, who previously worked in the automotive industry, says that he has noticed attitude consistently beats academic credentials when it comes to actual work performance.

"Workplace dynamics have completely changed, and technology is everywhere now, which means we focus on hiring people with the right mindset," he says. "Customer service is about who you are as a person, not just what you know from textbooks," adding, "employers in technical fields are tired of candidates who can recite theory but freeze when faced with real-world problems."

Some interviews are also becoming longer and others shorter.

Pauline Kerub's interview with the Public Service Commission stretched over months. "The interview required travel, as it was in-person, and demanded a detailed set of documents, from academic certificates to multiple clearances, including Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI), health compliance, Credit Reference Bureau (CRB), and ethics and anti-corruption certifications."

According to HR experts, these three skills stand out as non-negotiable in today's workplace.

### 1. Critical thinking

Can you solve problems?

Reshma Majji, the head of people at BasiGo, says, "When we have two candidates, one with strong technical skills but low adaptability and another with high curiosity and eagerness to learn, we choose the latter every time." "We can teach you the technical stuff over time, but we can't teach you to be curious about solving problems."

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A first-class degree may open doors, but the ability to adapt to challenges and show curiosity now matters more for long-term career success. PHOTO/ BUSINESS DAY

Why does this matter? It causes workplaces that did not exist five years ago to exist in the same form now. The old playground established procedures when you are dealing with new challenges.

## 2. Digital fluency

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### 3. Adaptability

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## Freeze

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