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| **Competency Based Interviewing**  **Candidates’ Guide** |

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| **Introduction** |
| Competency Based Interviewing is a means of interviewing based on the premise that past performance is an excellent indicator of future performance. The interview is structured in such a way that you will be probed for information in support of the role’s key competencies. As such the questions are very much in the format of “*Can give mean example of a time when…*”  *you* |

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| **The STAR Approach** |
| In order that the interview is controlled and you remain focused in giving answers the **STAR approach** to gathering information will be used. This means that when you are answering the questions, the interviewer will be looking for the **Situation** you were in or the **Task** you were doing, the **Action** you took in response to that situation or task and the **Result** of your action. |

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| **Answering the questions** |
| The interview is built around competencies that we believe are key to an individual successfully undertaking the role. Within each competency we are seeking information from you that supports the key behaviours within each competency.  Within each competency various questions have been prepared that are designed to determine to what extent the candidate has performed successfully in previous situations similar to those they will encounter in the position for which they are being interviewed.  With a behavioural question, the interviewer is looking for actions taken and results. They are not just looking for an activity list. So make sure you mention specific names, dates, places, the outcome and especially what **your** role was in achieving that outcome.  When preparing, it would be useful to identify an unsuccessful example for each of the competencies as you may be asked to give an example of a time when things didn’t work out as planned. One way to end an answer to a negative probe is to say something like “the mistake caused me to delay the project, but it helped me to develop a project tracking system which would minimise the chance of that happening again”. Thus a positive outcome is seen to have been achieved from what was initially a negative situation. |

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| **General Tips** |
| * DON’T give general examples * DO give specific examples * The interviewer will examine your examples in more detail, asking a series of probing questions. In view of this it is important to use good, solid examples, within which you are able to recall as much detail as possible. It is perfectly acceptable to use examples from your personal life, as well as from your professional activities * It is vital that you are prepared and have considered the core competencies and suitable examples before your actual interview |

**COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Competency-based interview questions vary widely between sectors and depending on the level of responsibility to which you are applying. The type of competencies against which you will be assessed also depends on the actual post and the company who is interviewing you. For example, some companies view leadership as a competency on its own whilst others prefer to split leadership between a wide range of components (creativity, flexibility, strategic thinking, vision, etc.)

You will find below a spectrum of competency-based interview questions, ordered by competency. The list is by no means complete but will give you an idea of what you can expect to be asked.

**Interview Competency - Adaptability**  
*Adjusts to changing environments whilst maintaining effectiveness*

* Which change of job did you find the most difficult to make?
* Tell us about the biggest change that you have had to deal with. How did you cope with it?

**Interview Competency - Compliance***Conforms to company policies and procedures*

* How do you ensure compliance with policies in your area of responsibility?
* Tell us about a time when you went against company policy? Why did you do it and how did you handle it?

**Interview Competency - Communication***Communicates effectively, listens sensitively, adapts communication to audience and fosters effective communication with others*.

**Verbal**

* Tell us about a situation where your communication skills made a difference to a situation?
* Describe a time when you had to win someone over, who was reluctant or unresponsive.
* Describe a situation where you had to explain something complex to a colleague or a client. Which problems did you encounter and how did you deal with them?
* What is the worst communication situation that you have experienced?
* How do you prepare for an important meeting?
* Tell us about a situation when you failed to communicate appropriately.
* Demonstrate how you vary your communication approach according to the audience that you are addressing.
* Describe a situation when you had to communicate a message to someone, knowing that you were right and that they were wrong and reluctant to accept your point of view.

**Listening**

* Give us an example where your listening skills proved crucial to an outcome.
* Tell us about a time when you were asked to summarise complex points.
* Tell us about a time when you had trouble remaining focussed on your audience. How did you handle this?
* What place does empathy play in your work? Give an example where you needed to show empathy?
* Describe a situation where you had to deal with an angry customer.

**Written**

* What type of writing have you done? Give examples? What makes you think that you are good at it?
* How do you feel writing a report differs from preparing an oral presentation?
* What positive and negative feedback have you received about your writing skills? Give an example where one of your reports was criticised.
* How do you plan the writing of a report?

**Interview Competency - Conflict management***Encourages creative tension and differences of opinions. Anticipates and takes steps to prevent counter-productive confrontations. Manages and resolves conflicts and disagreements in a constructive manner.*

* Tell us about a time when you felt that conflict or differences were a positive driving force in your organisation. How did handle the conflict to optimise its benefit?
* Tell us about a time when you had to deal with a conflict within your team.
* Tell us about a situation where conflict led to a negative outcome. How did you handle the situation and what did you learn from it?
* Give us an example where you were unable to deal with a difficult member of your team.

**Interview Competency - Creativity and Innovation***Develops new insights into situations; questions conventional approaches; encourages new ideas and innovations; designs and implements new or cutting edge programs/processes*.

* Tell us about a project or situation where you felt that the conventional approach would not be suitable. How did you derive and manage a new approach? Which challenges did you face and how did you address them?
* Tell us about a situation where you trusted your team to derive a new approach to an old problem. How did you manage the process?
* Tell us about a time when you had to convince a senior colleague that change was necessary. What made you think that your new approach would be better suited?

**Interview Competency - Decisiveness***Makes well-informed, effective, and timely decisions, even when data are limited or solutions produce unpleasant consequences; perceives the impact and implications of decisions.*

* What big decision did you make recently? How did you go about it?
* How did you reach the decision that you wanted to change job?
* Give an example of a time when you had to delay a decision to reflect on the situation. What did you need to do this?
* What is the decision that you have put off the longest? Why?
* When is the last time that you have refused to make a decision?
* Give us an example of a situation where you had to make a decision without the input of key players, but knowing that these key players would judge you on that decision (e.g. superior unavailable at the time).
* Tell us about a time when you had to make a decision without knowledge of the full facts.
* Tell us about a situation where you made a decision that involuntarily impacted negatively on others. How did you make that decision and how did you handle its consequences?
* Tell us about a decision that you made, which you knew would be unpopular with a group of people. How did you handle the decision-making process and how did you manage expectations?
* Tell us about a situation where you made a decision too quickly and got it wrong. Why made you take that decision?

**Interview Competency - Delegation***Able to make full and best use of subordinate, providing appropriate support*

* What type of responsibilities do you delegate? Give examples of projects where you made best use of delegation.
* Give an example of a project or task that you felt compelled to complete on your own. What stopped you from delegating?
* Give an example of a situation where you reluctantly delegated to a colleague. How did you feel about it?
* Give an example where you delegated a task to the wrong person? How did you make that decision at the time, what happened and what did you learn from it?
* How do you cope with having to go away from the office for long periods of time (e.g. holidays) Explain how you would delegate responsibilities based on you current situation.

**Interview Competency - External awareness***Understands and keeps up-to-date on local, national, and international policies and trends that affect the organization and shape stakeholders' views; is aware of the organisation's impact on the external environment.*

* Describe through examples drawn from your experience how you measure and take account of the impact of your decisions on external parties.
* Give an example where you underestimated the impact of your decisions on stakeholders external to your organisation.

**Interview Competency - Flexibility***Modifies his or her approach to achieve a goal. Is open to change and new information; rapidly adapts to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles.*

* Describe a situation where you had to change your approach half-way through a project or task following new input into the project.
* Describe a situation where you started off thinking that your approach was the best, but needed to alter your course during the implementation.
* Describe a situation where one of your projects suffered a setback due to an unexpected change in circumstances.
* Describe a situation where you were asked to do something that you had never attempted previously.
* Give us an example of a situation where your initial approach failed and you had to change tack.
* Describe your strongest and your weakest colleagues. How do you cope with such diversity of personalities?
* If we gave you a new project to manage, how would you decide how to approach it?

**Interview Competency - Independence**  
*Acts based on his/her convictions and not systematically the accepted wisdom*

* When did you depart from the "party line" to accomplish your goal?
* Which decisions do you feel able to make on your own and which do you require senior support to make?
* Describe a situation where you had a disagreement or an argument with a superior. How did you handle it?
* When do you feel that it is justified for you to go against accepted principles or policy?
* Which constraints are imposed on you in your current job and how do you deal with these?
* When did you make a decision that wasn't yours to make?
* Describe a project or situation where you took a project to completion despite important opposition.
* When have you gone beyond the limits of your authority in making a decision?

**Interview Competency - Influencing***Ability to convince others to own expressed point of view, gain agreement and acceptance of plans, activities or products.*

* Describe a situation where you were able to influence others on an important issue. What approaches or strategies did you use?
* Describe a situation where you needed to influence different stakeholders who had different agendas. What approaches or strategies did you use?
* Tell us about an idea that you manage to sell to your superior, which represented a challenge.
* What is your worst selling experience?
* Describe the project or idea that you were most satisfied to sell to your management.
* Describe a time where you failed to sell an idea that you knew was the right one.

**Interview Competency - Integrity***Ability to maintain job related, social, organisational and ethical norms.*

* When have you had to lie to achieve your aims. Why did you do so? How do you feel you could have achieved the same aim in a different way?
* Tell me about a time when you showed integrity and professionalism.
* Tell us about a time when someone asked you something that you objected to. How did you handle the situation?
* Have you ever been asked to do something illegal, immoral or against your principles? What did you do?
* What would you do if your boss asked you to do something illegal?
* Tell is about a situation where you had to remind a colleague of the meaning of "integrity".

**Interview Competency - Leadership***Acts as a role model. Anticipates and plans for change. Communicates a vision to a team.*

* Tell us about a situation where you had to get a team to improve its performance. What were the problems and how did you address them?
* Describe a change where you had to drive a team through change. How did you achieve this?
* Describe a situation where you needed to inspire a team. What challenges did you meet and how did you achieve your objectives?
* Tell us about a situation where you faced reluctance from your team to accept the direction that you were setting.
* Describe a project or situation where you had to use different leadership styles to reach your goal.
* Tell me about a time when you were less successful as a leader than you would have wanted to be.

**Interview Competency - Leveraging diversity***Fosters an inclusive workplace where diversity and individual differences are valued and leveraged to achieve the vision and mission of the organisation*.

* Give an example of a situation or project where a positive outcome depended on the work of people from a wide range of backgrounds and ideas
* Tell us about a time when you included someone in your team or a project because you felt they would bring something different to the team.

**Interview Competency - Organisational awareness***Demonstrates an understanding of underlying organisational issues*

* Describe a project where you needed to involve input from other departments. How did you identify that need and how did you ensure buy-in from the appropriate leaders and managers?
* Describe a time when you failed to engage at the right level in your organisation. Why did you do that and how did you handle the situation?

**Interview Competency - Resilience and tenacity***Deals effectively with pressure; remains optimistic and persistent, even under adversity. Recovers quickly from setbacks. Stays with a problem/line of thinking until a solution is reached or no longer reasonably attainable.*

* Tell us about a situation where things deteriorated quickly. How did you react to recover from that situation?
* Tell us about a project where you achieved success despite the odds being stacked against you. How did you ensure that you pulled through?
* Tell us about your biggest failure. How did you recover and what have you learnt from that incident?
* Give us an example of a situation where you knew that a project or task would place you under great pressure. How did you plan your approach and remain motivated?
* How do you deal with stress?
* Give us an example of a situation where you worked under pressure.
* Under what conditions do you work best and worst?
* Which recent project or situation has caused you the most stress? How did you deal with it?
* What did you last lose your temper?
* When is the last time that you were upset with yourself?
* What makes you frustrated or impatient at work?
* What is the biggest challenge that you have faced in your career. How did you overcome it?
* Tell us about a time when you wanted to pushed one of your ideas successfully despite strong opposition.
* Which course or topics have you found most difficult? How did you address the challenge?

**Interview Competency - Risk taking**  
Takes calculated risks, weighing up pros and cons appropriately

* Tell us about risks that you have taken in your professional or personal life? How did you go about making your decision?
* What is the biggest risk that you have taken? How did you handle the process?
* Please describe one of your current or recently completed projects, setting out the risks involved. How did you make decisions? How do you know that you made the correct decisions?
* What risks do you see in moving to this new post?

**Interview Competency - Sensitivity to others**Aware of other people and environment and own impact on these. Takes into account other people's feelings and /needs.

* What problems have one of your staff or colleagues brought to you recently? How did you assist them?
* Tell us about an unpopular decision that you made recently? What thought process did you follow before making it? How did your colleagues/clients react and how did you deal with their reaction?
* How do you deal with "time wasters"? Give a recent example.
* When is that last time that you had an argument with a colleague?
* When did you last upset someone?
* What steps do you take to understand your colleagues' personalities? Give an example where you found it hard to adjust to one particular colleague.

**Interview Competency - Teamwork**Contributes fully to the team effort and plays an integral part in the smooth running of teams without necessarily taking the lead

* Describe a situation in which you were a member of team. What did you do to positively contribute to it?
* Tell us about a situation where you played an important role in a project as a member of the team (not as a leader)
* How do you ensure that every member of the team is allowed to participate?
* Give us an example where you worked in a dysfunctional team. Why was it dysfunctional and how did you attempt to change things?
* Give an example of a time when you had to deal with a conflict within your team? What did you do to help resolve the situation?
* How do you build relationships with other members of your team?
* How do you bring difficult colleagues on board? Give us an example where you had to do this.

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| **Handling Interviews** |
| Interviews are necessary evil when it comes to job hunting. No matter how well-qualified you are for a job, your personality and personal presentation will still count when your prospective employer sizes you up. But no worries - you can develop the skills required to make the interview an occasion you need not fear, and one which you can approach with confidence. |
| **Get organised - be prepared** |
| * Know who it is you're meeting, where and how to get there * Take contact details, spare CV, pen and notepad * Go in armed with information to impress the interviewer with your research * Before you go, read company information, visit competitors' websites and read trade magazines for the latest industry developments * Know yourself! Study the job specification again and match it to your CV so that you can provide evidence that you meet the job requirement * Wear a smart but comfortable outfit - a good first impression is a must |
| **Your First Impression** |
| * When you walk through the front door, remember you're already making an impression on your prospective employers * Anyone from the receptionist to the managing director may directly or indirectly influence the final selection of candidates, or even the job winner * Inside the interview room, you'll be introduced to the other interviewers if there are any - look at them when greeting them, smile and carefully remember their names so you can address them throughout the interview * If the sun's in your eyes, or the chair is wobbly, say something rather than squirm and fail to concentrate on the interview; competent people find solutions and never settle for second best! |
| **Questions to you** |
| * Relax - imagine you're having a conversation with a friend * Listen - sometimes, people get so caught up in their feelings they forget to actually listen to the questions; slowing the pace will help you hear the questions and answer them correctly * Before you respond to more difficult questions, think about your answer and how you want to express them - this will help you speak more confidently * Why not practise talking slowly and evenly before you go - record your answers and listen to your pace and tone * Body language demonstrates how comfortable you are with your subject matter - if you're enthusiastic about what you're saying, smile and let your hands do the talking (but don't overdue it) * Look at who you are talking to - but don't exclude other interviewers present * If you said something you didn't mean, and are worried it could damage your chances, simply rectify it by restating what you really wanted to express - don't hold back; it could be your only chance to get that point across * Be factual and honest about strengths and weaknesses - show that you recognise your weaknesses as characteristics you're striving to improve |
| **Questions to the interviewer** |
| * This is a chance to show your enthusiasm and interest! It's crucial to have several questions prepared in advance - these could include: * What are the other people in the department like? * How would their roles impact on mine? * What training or induction is given? * What would be my core responsibilities? * What sort of one-off projects might I be given? * What interaction would I have with other departments of the company, or with clients or suppliers? * What scope is there for taking on extra work or being involved in any other aspects of the company? * What plans do you have for expansion - how would these impact on my role? * Where are the opportunities to progress within the company? |

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| **Conclusion** |
| * There may be an explanation of how the process will continue - if not, then ask; also try to find out when you should hear back - but don't push - some recruiters will not want to commit themselves to timescales until they have had time to consider all the candidates * Make sure the appropriate people know where you can be reached * Finally, thank your interviewer for his or her time, shake hands * Remember to say a personal goodbye to each person you talked with * Don't forget to acknowledge the receptionist as you leave, particularly if you have been looked after while waiting, such has having been given tea or coffee or if your coat and bag or briefcase have been taken care of |