

Behavioural/Competency-based Interviews

Behavioural interviews are based on the idea that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. The interviewer will want specific examples of when and how you demonstrated particular behaviours. Prior to interview each position is assessed for the skills/competencies and characteristics that relate to job success. Interview questions are then developed to probe into these areas. All candidates are asked the same questions and notes are taken in order to evaluate candidates.

The word competency is widely used in business and personnel psychology and refers to the behaviours that are necessary to achieve the objectives of an organisation. A competency is also something you can measure and lists of competencies form a common language for describing how people perform in different situations. Every job can be described in terms of key competencies. This means that they can be used for all forms of assessment, including appraisals, training needs analysis and of course, selection.

- Individual competencies - your personal attributes: Flexibility, decisiveness, tenacity, independence, risk taking, personal integrity
- Managerial competencies - taking charge of other people: Leadership, empowerment, strategic planning, corporate sensitivity, project management, management control
- Analytical competencies - the elements of decision making: Innovation, analytical skills, numerical problem solving, problem solving, practical learning, detail consciousness
- Interpersonal competencies - dealing with other people: Communication, impact, persuasiveness, personal awareness, teamwork, openness
- Motivational competencies - the things that drive you: Resilience, energy, motivation, achievement orientation, initiative, quality focus

To prepare for this type of interview, first review the job description carefully and identify the skills and traits likely to be assessed. Next, identify the situations and experiences that you will refer to in the interview to demonstrate these skills and traits. Competency focused, well-structured answers are extremely powerful and will win you the interview. The STAR model will provide a structure to your answers:

Situation - describe a situation or problem that you have encountered

Task - describe the task that the situation required or your ideas for resolving the problem

Action - describe the action you took, obstacles that you had to overcome

Results - highlight outcomes achieved.

Questions about ...

Influencing or Persuading Others

You may have strong verbal skills but can you influence another person to change their thinking or take some action - perhaps a colleague follows your advice or a client decides to buy a service or product. At management level have you the skills to persuade and involve rather than coerce and punish? Are you ethical in your dealings with people?

- Tell me about a time when you were able to change someone's viewpoint significantly.
- Tell me about a time when you were asked to do something that you disagreed with.
- Tell me about a person or event that has been influential in your personal development.

Interpersonal and Team Skills

Employers need people who are socially competent. The desire to build and maintain relationships in and beyond the workplace is critical.

- What skills and personal qualities have you contributed to the teams you have been part of?
- Tell me about the last time you had a disagreement with someone.
- Tell me about the most difficult person you have worked with.
- What kinds of people frustrate you?
- What qualities do you admire most in others?

Questions about ...

Communication Skills

The key to successful communications is being able to listen to all types of communication in an open way. Are you an active listener, do you really listen and do you hear what is actually said. Are you able to read the non-verbal messages that others communicate? Do you communicate in an engaging and convincing way?

- Tell me about a time when you were successful in getting crucial information from another person.
- Tell me about a time when someone misunderstood what you were attempting to communicate to them.
- Tell me about a current event you have been following in the press.
- What do you think are the three most important things about communication?
- Tell me about a time when you worked with people from a culture unlike your own. What did you do to overcome any perceived barriers to communication?

Personal Adaptability, Energy and Resilience

How quickly and how positively will you adapt to changes in work practices, work roles and work environments and the general flux of the modern workplace? How do you manage or avoid stress?

- Tell me about a time when your work or an idea was criticised.
- Tell me about a time when you felt under pressure.
- What do you do for enjoyment in your leisure time?
- What makes you laugh?
- Describe something creative that you've done.
- What has been your most satisfying/disappointing experience?

Self-management, Self-motivation and Self-knowledge

Do you always strive to achieve a standard of excellence, use initiative at the appropriate time, and show persistence in pursuing goals? Accurate self-assessment skills will allow you to be objective and critical in evaluating your strengths and weaknesses.

- Tell me about a time when you acted over and above the expectations of your role.
- How do you think a close friend who knows you well would describe you?
- How would you describe yourself?
- What's your greatest weakness?
- What does "success" mean to you?
- What does "failure" mean to you?
- How has your university experience prepared you for a career in this field?
- Tell me about a major problem you have encountered and how you dealt with it?

Problem Solving and Decision Making

What's your problem-solving style? Do you manage your activities to minimise or avoid them? How do you behave in a crisis?

- Tell me about a difficult decision that you have made.
- How do you work under pressure?
- Tell me about a time when you had to make a quick decision. What were the circumstances and what did you do?
- How would you motivate an employee who was performing poorly?
- Tell me about a time when you had conflicting priorities and what you did to resolve them.
- What kind of problems do you handle best?

Conflict Management and Ethics

How do you behave in a crisis? What does it take to shake your poise or self-confidence? What approach do you take to problem solving?

- Tell me about a difficult customer or a customer complaint that you have dealt with.
- How do you resolve conflict in the groups or teams that you have membership of?
- Have you ever anticipated a difficult situation before it arose? Describe the situation, the action you took and the outcome.
- Tell me about a time when you bent the rules. When is it okay to do so?

Personal and Career Objectives

Employers are likely to invest money in your training and development and will want to ensure that your objectives don't conflict with theirs.

- What are your short and long-term goals?
- When and why did you establish these goals and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
- What do you really want to do in life?
- Describe your ideal job.
- What person do you admire most and why?

Questions about ...

Knowledge of the Organisation and Role

What are your motives in applying to this organisation: Were they well thought out? Do you know enough about this work area and this organisation to be clear about how your skills fit into it?

- What do you know about our organization?
- Why are you interested in working for our organisation?
- What two or three things are most important to you in a job?
- Which three of the competencies required for this position would you prioritise?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?

Ability, Competence and Achievement

A chance to discover what inspires you and motivates you to achieve and whether you are a loner or a team person.

- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- Describe a time when you led or motivated others.
- Tell us about a time when you had more to do than you could complete in the time allocated: tell us what you did about it and what the outcome was.

Stress Questions

Designed to test your resilience in the work environment. Are you able to maintain appropriate behaviour in the face of what may seem inappropriate behaviour in others? Are you able to keep inappropriate emotions in check and take responsibility for your own performance?

- How do you react to criticism?
- Describe a time you failed.
- What causes you to lose your temper?
- Why should I hire you?
- Tell me about your diary commitments from Monday to Friday of this week?
- How would you describe your work style?
- How would you describe your personality type?

Some 'Interesting' Interview Questions

Often asked by employers to add a bit of interest or inspiration to the interview process to see how you cope with the unexpected or a change in direction. Tend not to have a right or wrong answer.

- It is the 15th Century. How do you convince the Pope that the Earth is round?
- If I gave you an elephant, where would you hide it?
- Why are soda cans tapered on the top and bottom?
- You are in a boat on a fresh water lake. In your hand is a rock. You throw the rock into the lake. How is the lake's water level affected?
- In what ways are you similar or different from your best friend?
- If you had a weekend to spend doing anything you wanted, how would you make the most of the time?

Reference: How to Master Psychometric Tests by M Parkinson