



Conducting a Competency Based Interview



Why use a Competency Based Interview?

Competency based interviewing (also referred to as behavioural interviewing), is a style of assessment that is designed to focus on the personal qualities, or soft skills, of an individual rather than their technical skills. The structure of a competency based interview is designed to show whether an individual has the right range of behavioural capabilities to predict that they will be successful when performing a given role.

Soft skills are inherently more difficult to measure compared to technical proficiency or academic attainment, but with the application of contextual/situational questions it is possible to obtain evidence upon an individuals' behavioural capability, based on their historical experience or hypothetical approach. This can be particularly valuable when hiring at early career level, where the individual does not have much practical work experience to call upon. At all levels it is also extremely valuable when assessing for compatibility the team/organisation, or when considering the operating agenda.

A well run competency-based interview should also help you get under the skin of an individual, and consequently it's also a great opportunity to build rapport. Understanding how they approached certain situations, why they took certain decisions, what impact they've had – it all helps build the clearer picture of the person to better inform judgements you'll make about hiring them.



Create the right environment:

Competency-based interviews don't have to be stale, even though they are intended as a systematic means to collect evidence to predict someone's likely success in a particular role. Both parties are making judgements about the other, so it is important to create an environment whereby an appropriate two-way dialogue takes place, for rapport or insight building purposes. So, to set the interview up for success we'd recommend:

- Making the candidate feel welcome and at ease
- Offering refreshments!
- Introducing all the participants and their roles in the organisation
- Explaining the format of the interview and the behaviours you'll focus on
- Stressing the importance of specific in their answers to provide evidence
- Keep the interview on track to avoid running over time

Consistency:

We would encourage you to use the same interview template for each candidate to ensure the process is consistent and assessment of each candidate is conducted fairly. It is acceptable to follow slightly different lines of questioning to adapt to the flow of the interview providing each candidate has the same fair chance to adequately demonstrate their capability (e.g. alternating several questions within a specific competency to more adequately address a candidate's experiences). Where possible interviewing in pairs can be helpful, so one person can scribe notes whilst the other leads on a question, perhaps alternating to involve all parties. Finally, it is important to measure the evidence you've heard with an objective and consistently applied scoring system.





Assessing Competencies:

The purpose of the competency based interview is to allow the interviewer to assess whether a candidate has the right capability/behavioural competence to perform the role to the required standard. This is done through the use of real-life examples where the candidate has had to evidence this behaviour in a situational context (or hypothetical if no real-life example exists). To assess this effectively, interviewers should record information objectively against the headings below (STAR is a common alternative – Situation, Task, Action, Result). The interviewers should probe where necessary to ensure the candidate has sufficient opportunity to provide relevant evidence to demonstrate their level of competence, and this information is scrutinised as robustly as possible. Interviewers should write up their notes as soon as possible after the interview and confer where appropriate.

- Context – What was the scenario they faced and what tasks where they required to perform as a result? Ensure was the selected scenario is appropriate to demonstrate the behaviour required.
- Action – what evidence of the behavioural competence is shown through the candidates' actions in response to the situation they faced?
- Result – What was the outcome of their action? Can the candidate display the understanding of why it was positive or negative that duly reflects the desired level of behavioural competence?

Scoring:

Scoring should be objective, based on the evidence given in the interview. It should also be applied consistently, so the capabilities of each candidate are considered with equal fairness. Below is an example of a scoring system you could use.

Scores of 0 to 4 (below) should be awarded to each question asked.

- 4. Provides very strong evidence to comprehensively meet or exceed the required capability level of the competency
- 3. Provides sound evidence to meet the required capability level of the competency
- 2. Provides some evidence to partially meet the required capability level of the competency
- 1. Does not provide any evidence meeting the required capability level of the competency
- 0. Responses indicate a negative behaviour which automatically disqualifies their appropriate candidacy *

**The option to score a 0 is advised on a discretionary basis to automatically reject a candidate if they have displayed a behaviour that is deemed unacceptable as a key requirement for the role, or a potential employee of the company. This would need to be legally justifiable and clearly documented (an example might be inappropriate behaviour or recurring evidence of failure in a key area).*





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