Competency Based Interviewing Technique

What is a Competency

Competencies are those behaviors that you demonstrate at work that makes you effective. They are a mixture of knowledge, skills, motivation and personal characteristics. In demonstrating your competence you will be showing the skills and the background knowledge necessary for you to perform a particular task effectively, together with the motivation or drive to make things happen.

Why to use them

❖ It is critical that organizations assess how selections are made. With limited promotional opportunities, and planned attrition, getting the right people into the right jobs becomes more critical to our success as an organization.
❖ The cost of an unsuccessful selection is an expense that organizations can't afford
❖ Competencies can be developed; the emphasis of a competency based interview is the learning agility of applicants, and how that learning agility can be used to assess success in a position.
❖ Gives the organization a tool to evaluate known quantities and see them in a different light, and evaluate their ability to make effective contributions to the organization

Our individual skills, attributes and behaviors make us unique, they also influence the way we react and respond to events in our lives and thus how we perform at work. There is a direct relationship between our skills, attributes and behaviors and our performance at work. It makes sense for interviewers to ask candidates about their competencies and see how they "match" the job requirement. Candidates can assess whether the job matches their competencies so that they would be happy in that role.

What is a competency based interview

Competency Based Interviewing is founded on the notion that the best predictor of a candidate's future performance is his or her past performance. Therefore, Competency Based interview questions are built around specific incidents that have happened rather than hypothetical situations. The questions ask candidates to describe things that they have actually done, as opposed to what they would do in a given situation. Therefore, this interview approach is most useful for higher level positions; however, modifications may be made to suit the needs of any position. You may also create an interview that includes different types of questions (i.e., situational, Competency Based, and job knowledge-based).

It is an interview in which each candidate is asked the same broad questions which are designed to obtain information about the match between the candidate's competencies and those required for the job. These questions concentrate on the most important parts of a candidate's past experience. This enables the interviewer to draw from each candidate his or her ability to demonstrate successful performance in the job.

The emphasis of a competency based interview is on the applicants' life learning; interviews of the past have focused on accomplishments and future plans; competency based interviewing assesses the individual as a whole.

Competency based interviewing emphasizes excellent communication throughout the interview; with the focus on learning, applicants with substantial learning generally interview better than those applicants with good interviewing skills, but who possess little self awareness. Competency based interviewing places the emphasis on the applicant's individual ability to relate learning from experience to the position in question.

Interview styles range from highly intuitive processes to those that are strictly fact-based. While no technique is perfect, Competency Based Interviewing can alleviate some of the common problems associated with other interview methods. Common errors include:

- Lack of a clear purpose;
- Inadequate preparation;
- Lack of structure;
- Failure to utilize job analysis;
- Personal bias; and,
- Premature decisions.

Done well, Competency Based Interviewing increases the likelihood of receiving honest and revealing responses to, job-related questions. The information obtained may be used to gauge candidates' job-related competencies and assist employers in determining which candidate is most qualified for a position.

Answers to Competency Based interview questions should provide verifiable, concrete evidence as to how a candidate has dealt with issues in the past. This information often reveals a candidate's level of experience and his or her potential to handle similar situations in your organization. The information may also be highly useful in conducting final reference checks, as one may verify that the candidate actually did what he or she has claimed.

What will the interview be like?

The CBT interview, will in general, will be conducted as follows:

? Introductions
? Brief discussion of job
? Competency based interviewing
? Validation of technical/functional skills where necessary
? Interviewee's opportunity to ask questions
? Close out/ next steps

For an interview to be most effective, it should:

- Be based on a recently updated description of the position resulting from a job analysis;

- Follow a pre-determined rating guide with which interview panel members are familiar; and,

- Include sufficient, factual documentation regarding the candidates' respon ses.

This will provide a more accurate basis for selection, as well as documentation of a logical, objective, and legally defensible selection procedure.
How to develop a Competency Based interview

Following is a description of the process used to create Competency Based interview questions. We recommend that a group of people highly familiar with the position perform the steps together to promote objective and balanced thinking, and to generate more thorough information.

Identify what you are looking for by completing a job analysis and/or reviewing a recently updated position description.

Competency Based interview questions should be based on a current position description resulting from job analysis. The information about the position should include he work performed, as well as the competencies necessary to successfully complete the most important work.

From the competencies listed as crucial, identify those which are required upon entry to the position. Interview questions should only assess those competencies which will not be learned on the job during a training period.

Write Competency Based questions to gather information.

For each key competency, create a question by describing a job -related scenario in which the competency is demonstrated. This may be done by describing in detail actual events that have occurred on the job (referred to as critical incidents), or by describing in more general terms situations that routinely happen on the job. The method chosen will often depend on the competency, the level of the position, and whether you wish to measure specific behaviours demonstrated, results, or both.

For example, if one of the position's key competencies is "ability to mediate disputes," you may seek to know the associated behaviours a ca ndidate has demonstrated. You may ask a question such as:

> *"This position serves as a facilitator or coordinator of special projects and committees. In this role, you need to resolve differences of opinion among committee members regarding project issues. Please describe a situation in which you faced a similar challenge. Include the type of project and the differences of opinion. Be specific about the actions you took and what you said when resolving those differences."*

This type of question should elicit detailed statements about behaviours the candidate has demonstrated when mediating disputes. You can then compare those behaviours with those you value most.

Alternatively, if a key competency is "ability to manage multiple priorities," you may seek to know generally whether or not a candidate possesses that competency at the proficiency necessary for the position. You may be looking for specific actions and reasoning behind those actions, and the final outcome of the scenario you describe. (Only measure outcomes if the candidate had control over the end result.) You may ask:

> *"Tell us about a time when you were required to complete multiple assignments in the same time period. How did you handle the situation? Please be specific about the number of assignments, the actions you took, the reasons for those actions, and the result."*

This type of question should elicit enough detail to give you a good indication of the candidate's ability to manage multiple priorities. It will also provide you with information about the level of difficulty or complexity the candidate has handled, which may be compared to that of your position.

Identify what constitutes successful demonstration of the competency.

Rating or scoring criteria is essential to a Competency Based interview. Instead of relying solely on subjective and vague terminology such as "poor response," "average response" and "excellent response," the rating guide for interview questions should contain the specific behaviors or criteria of an appropriate response.

For each question, identify the key behaviors or criteria that separate an excellent performance of the competency from a poor one. These statements will be used by interviewers to rate candidates' responses, so the language should be clear, simple, and straightforward. The group may decide (based on the actual job) that behaviors which indicate <u>excellent</u> performance of the competency would include:

- Directed discussion toward identifying common interests and possible solutions;
- Involved all parties in development of alternatives that fulfilled their interests and needs;
- Helped all parties understand the key issues from others' perspectives; and,
- Resolved the differences in a way that each person felt his or her concerns were respected and addressed.

The group should also identify behaviors which indicate adequate and inadequate performance of the competency. This allows interviewers to match candidate responses to a full range of behaviors.

The managing multiple priorities may have very different rating criteria. For this competency, the criteria that demonstrate proficiency may include:

- Worked concurrently on four or more assignments;
- Most or all of the assignments were of a complex nature and required thought and diligence to handle appropria tely;
- All of the assignments were completed on time;
- Candidate employed sound rationale for the actions taken and for the method used to prioritize assignments; and,
- All parties involved (supervisor, customer, co-worker) were satisfied with the results.

In this example, the interviewers are looking for signs that the candidate has successfully managed multiple priorities in a situation very similar to that encountered in the vacant position. It differs from the previous rating criteria in that the specific actions and rationale are not spelled out for the interviewers.

This is one way that the rating information may vary from question to question to meet your particular needs. The key is to have clear, relevant statements describing what you seek to use to measure the competency. The statements will allow interviewers to anchor the responses and assign scores.

Create a user-friendly rating guide.

Ratings or scores should be given to each response provided by candidates. Recommended are 9- and 7- point scales, but 5-point scales can also work. Consider whether or not you wish to include zero as a score; you may wish to reserve zero for instances where no response is provided. After choosing a scale, split the possible scores into ranges and label the ranges to indicate levels of performance. Below are potential ranges and labels:

The Interview Panel

- Choose between two and five panel members who have in-depth knowledge of the position for which candidates are interviewing. Ideally, at least one member would have participated in the interview development process. If this is not possible, members should at least be intimately familiar with the requirements of the position. Having between two and five members reduces the likelihood of common interviewing errors and provides a manageable number of ratings to discuss. Also, having members with diverse backgrounds or perspectives can help ensure more valid and balanced interview scores.
- Use the same panel members for all candidates and assign specific questions to each panel member. Part of the structure and objectivity of the interview process involves consistency across candidates. This includes ensuring all candidates are asked the same questions in the same order by the same interviewers. Using the sa me panel members for all interviews increases the likelihood of consistent ratings. If this is not feasible, we advise that someone review the ratings to determine if substitute raters scored candidates differently (e.g., if one rater is consistently more or less lenient than another).

Conclusion, in a fair and objective way

Like the previous step, this may seem obvious. However, it is easy to gather a lot of detailed information throughout the interview process, and then ignore it in favour of "a gut instinct." Try to base your decisions upon what each candidate said in response to each question. Compare candidates' responses to those elements listed in the rating guide. <u>Avoid the temptation to compare candidates to one other</u>. Here's why:

▪ Research has shown that when several people are interviewed, interviewers tend to remember more details (both good and bad) about the first and last candidates. Focusing on an objective review of one's interview notes helps to mitigate this problem.

▪ Relatively superficial behaviours of candidates (e.g., how much they smiled) often have a big impact on interviewers' decisions. Interviewers tend to form strong impressions about a candidate early in the interview, and everything the candidate later says or does only confirms this initial impression. Candidate responses that may be contrary to the impression are somewhat discounted in the mind of the interviewer. Please remember to consider all of the available information before deciding each candidate's overall worthiness.

▪ If the interview process is challenged by a candidate, a <u>strong defence is to demonstrate the fairness and objectivity of your process</u>. A comparison of candidates' responses to the rating criteria is more objective than comparing candidates to one another.

Tips for conducting a Competency Based interview:

1. Conduct the interviews in a private setting in which candidates can feel relatively comfortable. Do what you can to put candidates at ease, including the offer of water and a comfortable chair.

2. Consider providing a list of the questions for candidates to look at during the interview. The list allows candidates to review questions as they answer, and increases the likelihood that they will provide complete responses. You may tape the list to the table to make sure candidates do not accidentally take it with them when they leave.

3. Short and simple interview questions are better than long and complex ones. Also, candidates typically know less about the job than you do, and they will not likely "read between the lines" when answering questions. Make sure your questions are clear, easy to understand, and ask for all the details you wish candidates to provide.

4. Consider having some of the more complex questions be pre-exposed. By allowing candidates time (15 – 30 minutes) to think about the questions, you are likely to receive more thorough responses.

5. Keep comments and gestures neutral. Saying "thank you" and nodding is more appropriate than saying "that's great!" or frowning. This maintains objectivity and reduces the likelihood of leading (or misleading) candidates to feel or think a certain way.

6. If a candidate gives a generalized answer such as, "I have to prioritize my assignments every day," you may choose to restate the question to elicit a more specific response: "Do you recall a particular situation of this type?" Panel members will find it easier to rate responses if the candidates provide details. Similarly, if a candidate gives an incomplete response, such as leaving out the result, you may ask, "How did that turn

out?" DOP recommends limiting clarifying questions because they can reduce the reliability of the interview process if only certain candidates are asked extra questions. You may wish to have a pre-determined set of follow-up questions to ask candidates as necessary.

7. Each panel member should **take notes** regarding the candidates' responses. These notes should be factual in nature: *Candidate chose to finish typing report before acknowledging customer, but customer was satisfied with the service.* <u>Personal judgments made by the panel members, physical descriptions, and comparisons between candidates should not be part of the notes.</u>

8. Each response should be scored independently of all other responses made by the candidate, and should be based upon the rating criteria for that question.

9. After each interview, panel members should first discuss what they heard the candidate say. They should then go over the ratings given to each response and discuss significant differences in score (perhaps those of more than one point). While consensus is preferred, panel members are entitled to their individual decisions and should not be required to change a rating. They may, however, choose to do so as a result of the discussion.

10. Allow sufficient time between interviews so that the process isn't rushed. Sitting through hours of non-stop interviews can cause panel members to lose focus and grow tired. Better decisions are usually made by interviewers who are not exhausted by the process.

11. Be sure to give candidates the opportunity to ask questions of you. Also tell them approximately when they may expect to be informed of your decision.

Examples of Competency Based interview questions

Competency: Creative & Innovative Thinking: Develop innovative ideas that provide solutions to all types of workplace challenges.

Question: Describe a situation in which you developed a brand new idea for a product or service that your organization offered to its clients. What was unusual or innovative about this idea? What resistance, if any, did you encounter as you attempted to "sell" your idea to your colleagues or customers, and how did you overcome it?

Describe a situation in your career in which you were asked to develop a product or service that no one had ever thought of before. This should be something that really had no previous "blueprint" from which you could build your idea. What was the product or service? Describe how you took things from the "concept phase" to the "reality phase."

Competency: Customer Focus: Build and maintain internal and external customer satisfaction with the products and services offered by the organization.

Question: Describe a situation in which a customer had an unusual business need, and you were tasked with finding a way to meet that need. This might have been either a large-scale revamping of your organization's business process, or a response to a one-time need. In either case, please be specific in describing the need and what you did to meet the customer's expectations.

Competency: Ethics & Integrity: Earn the trust, respect, and confidence of coworkers and customers through consistent honesty, forthrightness and professionalism in all interactions.

Question: Describe a time in your career in which someone asked you to perform a task you thought was unethical. Without naming names, what position did this person hold (for example, supervisor, colleague, customer), and how did you respond to this person? We are interested in how you handled the situation in general terms.

Competency: Fiscal Accountability: Responsibly and accurately handle the public's money when processing financial transactions and/or committing fiscal resources. Consistently follow applicable fiscal guidelines, regulations, principles and standards.

Question: Using examples from positions you have held in the past, describe your experience managing budgets. How did you make decisions when allocating resources? What unique problems or resistance did you encounter? Please include any rules or stipulations you had to follow in order to receive funding.

Competency: Mediation: Help others resolve complex or sensitive disagreements and conflicts. Effectively lead a rational process of illuminating issues, enhancing understanding of divergent interests, and identifying common grounds for a workable solution.

Question: This position serves as a facilitator or coordinator of special projects and committees. In this role, you need to resolve differences of opinion among committee members regarding project issues. Please describe a situation in which you faced a similar challenge. Include the type of project and the differences of opinion. Be specific about the actions you took and what you said when resolving those differences.

Competency: Negotiate Agreements: Effectively work with others to understand interests and actively strive to achieve agreements or resolve differences in a timely manner.

Question: This position must negotiate, execute, and manage several contracts. Please describe a contract you have negotiated in which the parties had a difficult time coming to agreement. Be specific about the nature of the disagreement(s), how you helped the parties work through the problems, and the end result. We are particularly interested in your negotiation style and techniques, so we would like to know specifically what actions you took and what you said in the negotiation process.

Competency: Project/Program Management: Effectively direct and integrate all aspects of a project or program, ensuring that work progresses toward achieving goals and objectives.

Question: Describe a situation in which you needed to assess the work-related skills of your employees to determine the distribution of assignments to complete a project. What method did you use to assess their skills, and what were the most obvious successes (and failures, if any) of your method?

Competency: Research: Effectively identify, collect, organize, and document data and information in ways that make the information most useful for subsequent assessment, analysis, and investigation.

> **Analysis:** Use data and information in a clear and rational thought process to assess and understand issues, evaluate options, form accurate conclusions, and make decisions.

Question: The person in this position must be able to identify, obtain, and evaluate information critical to the organization's business needs. Describe an experience in which you sensed that your organization needed additional information before it could develop an effective business plan. What type of information did you need, what methods did you use to collect this information, and how did you analyze or evaluate this information?

Competency: Resourcefulness in Problem Solving: Use intelligence, common sense, hard work and tenacity to solve particularly difficult or complicated challenges.

Question: Describe a situation in your career in which you recognized a problem and then devised a solution to it. Be specific about the nature of the problem, the solution you devised, the most difficult obstacle to overcome in the process, and what you did to ensure the successful implementation of the solution.

Competency: Results Orientation & Initiative: Focus on results and desired outcomes and how best to achieve them. Identify what needs to be done and proactively take appropriate action. Get the job done.

Question: Describe a situation in your career in which a goal or objective was delayed or thwarted. What was the specific goal? What were the obstacles in your path, and what specifically did you do to overcome them?

Competency: Teaching & Training: Effectively communicate information for the purpose of having others learn, understand, and apply specific principles, techniques, or information.

Question: Describe a time in which you used a special or unusual method of teaching someone a job-related skill. We are most interested in finding out how your teaching style was effective for a particular situation when more conventional teaching styles might not have worked as well.

Competency: Team Leadership: Actively take steps to build cohesive and results-oriented team.

Question: Please describe a situation in your career in which you built a team using members from separate workgroups. Be specific about the groups with which you worked, your common goal, the specific role you played in bringing everything together, and the outcome of the situation.

Competency: Workload Management: Effectively organize multiple assignments, sometimes of a complex nature or involving competing priorities, to pro duce work products that are accurate, thorough, and on time.

Question: It is common for our customers, both internal and external, to make simultaneous work requests of you. Please describe a complex or difficult situation of this type that you have faced. Be specific about the nature and

number of the requests, and how you prioritized them. Also describe whether or not the customers' expectations were met.

Asking 'good' questions is the secret to decide whether someone is right

Adaptability

- Tell me about a time when you changed your priorities to meet others' expectations.
- Describe a time when you altered your own behavior to fit the situation.
- Tell me about a time when you had to change your point of view or your plans to take into account new information or changing priorities.

Communication

- Describe a situation you were involved in that required a multi-dimensional communication strategy.
- Give an example of a difficult or sensitive situation that required extensive communication.
- Tell me about a time when you really had to pay attention to what someone else was saying, actively seeking to understand their message.

Customer Service Orientation

- Give an example of how you provided service to a client/stakeholder beyond their expectations. How did you identify the need? How did you respond?
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a client/stakeholder service issue.
- Describe a situation in which you acted as an advocate within your organization for your stake holder's needs where there was some organizational resistance to be overcome.

Planning and Execution

- Describe an event in which you had conflicting priorities. How did you handle it?

Organizational Awareness

- Describe the culture of your organization and give an example of how you work within this culture to achieve a goal.
- Describe the things you consider and the steps you take in assessing the viability of a new idea or initiative.
- Tell me about a time when you used your knowledge of the organization to get what you needed.

Problem Solving and Judgment

- Tell me about a time when you had to identify the underlying causes to a problem.
- Describe a time when you had to analyze a problem and generate a solution.
- Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a problem or make a decision that required careful thought. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you were disappointed with the lack of results that occurred after working on an issue.

Results Orientation

- Tell me about a time when you set and achieved a goal.

- Tell me about a time when you improved the way things were typically done on the job.
- Describe something you have done to improve the performance of your work unit.
- Describe something you have done to maximize or improve the use of resources beyond your own work unit to achieve improved results.

Teamwork

- Tell me about a time when you worked successfully as a member of a team.
- Describe a situation where you were successful in getting people to work together effectively.
- Describe a situation in which you were a member (not a leader) of a team, and a conflict arose within the team. What did you do?
- What was your toughest challenge in working with others?

Role Specific Competencies

Developing Others

- Tell me about a time when you coached someone to help them improve their skills or job performance. What did you do?
- Describe a time when you provided feedback to someone about their performance.
- Give me an example of a time when you recognized that a member of your team had a performance difficulty/deficiency. What did you do?

Impact and Influence

- Describe a recent situation in which you convinced an individual or a group to do something.
- Describe a time when you went through a series of steps to influence an individual or a group on an important issue.
- Describe a situation in which you needed to influence different stakeholders with differing perspectives.

Innovation

- Describe something you have done that was new and different for your organization, that improved performance and/or productivity.
- Tell me about a time when you identified a new, unusual or different approach for addressing a problem or task.
- Tell me about a recent problem in which old solutions wouldn't work. How did you solve the problem?

Leadership

- Tell me about a time when you had to lead a group to achieve an objective.
- Describe a situation where you had to ensure that your "actions spoke louder than your words" to a team.
- Describe a situation where you inspired others to meet a common goal.

Relationship Building

- Describe a situation in which you developed an effective win/win relationship with a stakeholder or client. How did you go about building the relationship?
- Tell me about a time when you relied on a contact in your network to help you with a work-related task or problem.

- Give me an example of a time when you deliberately attempted to build rapport with a co-worker or customer.

Resource Management

- Describe a situation in which you took a creative approach to resorting to achieve a goal.
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a particular resource management issue regarding people, materials or assets.
- Describe the options you would consider to resource a project or goal if you did not have the available resources within your own span of control.
- Describe a situation in which you established a partnership with another organization or stakeholder to achieve a mutual goal. What steps did you take to ensure the partnership was effective?

Self-Management

- Describe the level of stress in your job and what you do to manage it.
- Describe a time when you were in a high pressure situation.
- Describe a time when things didn't turn out as you had planned and you had to analyze the situation to address the issue.
- Describe how do you maintained your composure under an extremely stressful or emotional situation
- Describe a work effort that was particularly challenging for you because of politics, conflict or other sensitive issues

Strategic Thinking

- Describe a challenge or opportunity you identified based on your industry knowledge, and how you developed a strategy to respond to it.
- Describe a time you created a strategy to achieve a longer term business objective.
- Describe a time when you used your business knowledge to understand a specific business situation.
- Tell me about a time when you had to make a decision on the basis of incomplete data

SAMPLE INTERVIEW

1. Analytical Thinking and Judgment

- Tell me about a time when you had had to make a decision on the basis of incomplete data

2. Organizational Savvy and Influence

- Describe a work effort that was particularly challenging for you because of politics, conflict or other sensitive issues

3. Drive for results

- Tell me about a time when you were disappointed with the lack of results that occurred after working on an issue.

4. Selecting and developing people

- Tell me about a time when someone identify and implement certain developmental tactics

5. Build Relationships

- Describe a situation when you had to overcome the resistance of others to a plan or idea.

6. Teambuilding

- What was your toughest challenge in wo rking with others?

7. (Intra) Personal Effectiveness

- Describe how do you maintained your composure under an extremely stressful or emotional situation

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