Competency based interviews

Preparing for competency based questions

1. **Describe**
   - **Question:** What is your greatest accomplishment in your previous role?
   - **Answer:** [Explain your accomplishment, including your role in achieving the result.]

2. **Tell me about**
   - **Question:** [Follow-up question about the accomplishment.]
   - **Answer:** [Detail what you did to achieve the result.]

3. **Tell me about**
   - **Question:** [Further question about the accomplishment.]
   - **Answer:** [Provide additional details or examples related to the accomplishment.]

4. **Tell me about a time**
   - **Question:** [Contextual question about challenges or decisions.]
   - **Answer:** [Describe the situation, your actions, and the outcome.]

5. **Tell me how you**
   - **Question:** [Question about organisational awareness.]
   - **Answer:** [Explain how you contribute to the organisation and provide an example.]

6. **Tell me about**
   - **Question:** [Question about problem-solving style.]
   - **Answer:** [Describe your approach to problem-solving and provide examples.]

7. **Tell me about**
   - **Question:** [Question about teamwork or collaboration.]
   - **Answer:** [Discuss your role in a team and provide examples of collaboration.]

8. **Tell me about**
   - **Question:** [Question about adaptability or change management.]
   - **Answer:** [Explain how you adapt to changes and provide examples.]

9. **Tell me about**
   - **Question:** [Question about conflict resolution or personal integrity.]
   - **Answer:** [Describe situations where you faced conflict and how you resolved them.]

10. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about decision making or risk taking.]
    - **Answer:** [Discuss your decision-making process and take risks.]

11. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about initiative or independence.]
    - **Answer:** [Describe situations where you took initiative or acted independently.]

12. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about innovation or creativity.]
    - **Answer:** [Provide examples of innovative solutions or creative thinking.]

13. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about learning or development.]
    - **Answer:** [Discuss your learning process and provide examples of personal growth.]

14. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about leadership or influence.]
    - **Answer:** [Describe your leadership style and provide examples of influencing others.]

15. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about communication or persuasion.]
    - **Answer:** [Discuss your communication skills and provide examples of persuasiveness.]

16. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about teamwork or collaboration.]
    - **Answer:** [Discuss your role in a team and provide examples of collaboration.]

17. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about conflict resolution or personal integrity.]
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    - **Answer:** [Discuss your decision-making process and take risks.]

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    - **Question:** [Question about initiative or independence.]
    - **Answer:** [Describe situations where you took initiative or acted independently.]

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    - **Question:** [Question about innovation or creativity.]
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    - **Answer:** [Discuss your learning process and provide examples of personal growth.]

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    - **Question:** [Question about leadership or influence.]
    - **Answer:** [Describe your leadership style and provide examples of influencing others.]

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    - **Question:** [Question about communication or persuasion.]
    - **Answer:** [Discuss your communication skills and provide examples of persuasiveness.]

24. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about teamwork or collaboration.]
    - **Answer:** [Discuss your role in a team and provide examples of collaboration.]

25. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about conflict resolution or personal integrity.]
    - **Answer:** [Describe situations where you faced conflict and how you resolved them.]

26. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about decision making or risk taking.]
    - **Answer:** [Discuss your decision-making process and take risks.]

27. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about initiative or independence.]
    - **Answer:** [Describe situations where you took initiative or acted independently.]

28. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about innovation or creativity.]
    - **Answer:** [Provide examples of innovative solutions or creative thinking.]

29. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about learning or development.]
    - **Answer:** [Discuss your learning process and provide examples of personal growth.]

30. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about leadership or influence.]
    - **Answer:** [Describe your leadership style and provide examples of influencing others.]

31. **Tell me about**
    - **Question:** [Question about communication or persuasion.]
    - **Answer:** [Discuss your communication skills and provide examples of persuasiveness.]
Sometimes known as situational or behavioural interviews, this style of interview is commonly used by UK businesses, never more so than in the pharma sector when recruiting pharmaceutical physicians. Delivering structured and specific replies to competency based questions is crucial for success.

If a company needs a consistent base of capability for achieving improved performance and readiness for leadership roles, they also need to select for those same capabilities.

While skills and knowledge can be taught, there are varying opinions in the field about whether certain attributes can be developed or whether employees must be selected who already demonstrate the use of those attributes. For example, many organisations today define “flexibility” as a core requirement.

Can you teach people who are rigid in their behavior to become “flexible?” Some would argue you can because people aren’t born flexible. It’s a learned characteristic of behavior. However, the more pertinent question is, should the business have to teach it or should they select candidates who already demonstrate “flexibility” in the way needed by the organisation?

As organizations evolve and create new strategic plans to meet ever-changing business challenges, they are also defining their ideal talent profile. Talent profiles are future-focused, answering questions such as, “What will we need people to be able to do to achieve our business goals in the next 3-5 years or longer?” “What kind of leadership will we need to achieve the growth and profitability we are targeting?” Talent profiles are based on competencies, so interviews and the selection process must be aligned.

Organisations are moving or changing so fast, particularly in the pharma sector, that there is less time than ever to hire “green” talent and develop those employees to meet company expectations and fit the company culture over several years.

Hiring the wrong person today is costly in terms of recruiting and hiring costs and in lost productivity. Competencies predict performance better than experience, technical skills, aptitude or personality.

Traditional (non-behavioral) interviews do not predict performance. Lucia and Lepsinger (1999) state, “By clarifying what specific behaviors and practices make for employee effectiveness, competency models increase the likelihood … of placing the right people into the right jobs.”

Organisational talent management today requires the alignment of multiple human resource functions including selection, development, performance management and succession management. The most effective way to align these functions for the benefit of the organisation and employees at all levels is through use of competency models.

Competency based interviews are based on the premise that past behaviour is a likely predictor of future behaviour.
Applicants who ignore or gloss over competencies do so at their own peril. Be positive and see this as an opportunity to communicate competencies that may not be apparent from your CV.

Competency based interviews are based on the premise that past behaviour is a likely predictor of future behaviour. The interviewer will seek examples of past behaviour that provide him/her with concrete evidence that you have the necessary competencies to succeed in the job.

The word ‘competency’ is widely used in business to refer to the behaviours necessary to achieve organisational goals. A competency is something quantifiable and measurable.

Interview questions are carefully designed to probe specific skills, competencies and characteristics which are relevant to job success for the position in question. Typically, questions will be structured in the format,

- Describe a situation when you ...
- Give an example of a time when you ...

After providing examples, the interviewer may delve deeper, prompting you for more detail.

Although each interview may vary in terms of questions asked and competencies reviewed, certain themes are frequently explored,

**Individual competencies** - your personal attributes: flexibility, decisiveness, tenacity, independence, risk taking, personal integrity

**Managerial competencies** - managing other people: leadership, empowerment, strategic planning, corporate sensitivity, project management, financial awareness

**Analytical competencies** - decision making: innovation, analytical skills, problem solving, knowing when to act, practical learning, information assimilation, attention to detail

**Interpersonal competencies** - dealing with other people: communication, impact, persuasiveness, diplomacy, intuition, self-awareness, negotiation, teamwork, openness

**Motivational competencies** - things that energise you: resilience, challenge, motivation, achievement, initiative, focus on quality, drive for results

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**Sample competency questions**

**Problem solving and judgment**

How do you identify problems and find solutions. Do you consider external and internal factors before making decisions. Do you understand when a problem can be solved without further involvement and when others need to help find a solution?

1. Tell me about a time when you had to identify the underlying causes to a problem.
2. Describe a time when you had to analyse a problem and generate a solution.
3. Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a problem or make a decision that required careful thought. What did you do?
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.

1. Tell me about a time when you acted over and above the expectations of your role.
2. How would you describe yourself?
3. How do you think a close friend who knows you well would describe you?

Ability, competence and achievement

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

1. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
2. Describe a time when you led or motivated others.
3. What do you feel qualifies you for this position?
4. Tell me about a time when you dealt with a problem in your organisation. What did you do? What would you now do differently?

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?

1. Tell me about a significant crisis you have faced.
2. Tell me about a difficult customer or a customer complaint that you have dealt with.
3. How did you resolve conflict in the team you were part of? How could you have resolved it differently?

Personal and career objectives

Employers will invest heavily in your training and development and want to ensure that your objectives don’t conflict with theirs.

1. What are your short and long-term goals?
2. When and why did you establish these goals and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
3. What are the most important things you are seeking in a career?

Adaptability

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?

1. Tell me about a time when you changed your priorities to meet others’ expectations.
2. Describe a time when you altered your own behaviour to fit the situation.
3. 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.

Administrative skills

These are generally checking that you work effectively, understand generic workplace routines and have experience of common office software and administration systems.

1. Tell me how you organise your work and schedule your time.
2. Tell me about computer software applications you are familiar with and your experience in using them.
3. Tell me about your experience of managing a budget. What went well? What didn’t go well and why?
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?

1. Tell me about a difficult decision that you have made.
2. What significant problems have you faced in the last year?
3. How do you work under pressure?
4. Tell me about a time when you had to make a quick decision. What were the circumstances and what did you do?

Communication

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 manner?

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

Organisational awareness

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

Client focus

1. 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
2. Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a client/stakeholder issue.
3. Describe a situation in which you acted as an advocate within your organisation for stakeholders’ needs and where organisational resistance needed to be overcome.

Teamwork

Employers need people who are socially competent. The desire to build and maintain relationships in and beyond the workplace is critical. Many workplaces function on the basis of project teams.

1. Tell me about a time when you worked successfully as a member of a team.
2. Describe a situation where you were successful in getting people to work together effectively.
3. Describe a situation in which you were a member (not a leader) of a team and conflict arose within the team. What did you do? What would you do differently?

Results orientation

1. Tell me about a time when you set and achieved a goal.
2. Tell me about a time when you improved the way things were typically done on the job.
3. Describe something you have done to im-
Influencing, persuading and negotiating

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 negotiate and involve rather than confront and coerce? Do you act ethically?

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

Leadership and people management

Do you lead by example? Do you create an environment that empowers success in others? Can you build relationships inside and outside of the organisation? Are you capable of creating a realistic vision, setting challenging but achievable goals and establishing a learning environment?

1. Describe a situation that best shows your ability to get things done through other people.
2. Tell me about the last time you were unsuccessful in getting someone to follow your lead. What did you do?
3. Have you ever needed to motivate a

Preparing for competency based questions

It's essential to prepare thoroughly.

Applicants who ignore or gloss over competencies do so at their own peril. Be positive and see this as an opportunity to communicate competencies that may not be apparent from your CV.

- Obtain the job description and see which competencies are key for the job.
- Ask your recruitment consultant about the competencies the client is looking for.
- Look at the company’s web site. Have they posted organisational core competencies or values that represent behaviors they expect.
- Seek a contact in the industry and ask to share competencies necessary for his/her position or describe their work and deduce competencies necessary to achieve outcomes.
- Speak with someone who understands trends in their field and have them help you project the competencies.
- Write out your accomplishments. Include your failures with what you learned in the process. Include as many details as you can remember to help bring the stories to life.

Formulate responses to these typical competency questions by writing down specific and different examples of past behaviour that describe the SITUATION that you faced, the ACTION that you took and the OUTCOME that resulted from your action.

Situation
Action
Outcome

This format will help formulate your response in a way that you can deliver at interview with the information the interviewer is seeking about your past behaviour, your learning and how you might act in the future.

Remember that the focus should be on you even if the situation involved a group, interviewers will want to know what was your specific role in achieving the desired result.
Competencies - Organisational benefits

Competency based HR systems help ensure that the people who are recruited have the potential to succeed. It’s been estimated that the wrong hire costs 1.5 times that person’s annual salary. And that doesn’t measure the frustration of an individual trying to succeed in the wrong job.

Competency based systems can also be used to provide appropriate development to help employees realise their potential and to provide appraisal, feedback and coaching to improve productivity. In addition, competencies provide employees with an objective, defined target for development and realistic career goals.

Competencies become operational only if defined by behaviors, so interviewers, candidates, managers and employees can apply the model in the work setting. A behavioral description is a statement of the observable actions that indicate the presence of an underlying competency.

Competencies - Individual benefits

Competencies can be the basis of individual selection and career development. Showing appropriate competencies can help candidates to get a job and position employees for future opportunities.

Demonstrating a desire to improve related competencies generates development on the job and makes performance management meaningful.

Competencies are increasingly being used to select and develop leaders and for succession management. Competency based internal selection makes career mobility across functions easier and helps individuals overcome any discriminatory practices in the organisation. It means career opportunities are based less on educational achievement or on previous positions and more on the knowledge, skills and attributes that have been demonstrated and are needed in new roles.

A validated competency model is an objective way to integrate and ensure fairness of talent management initiatives within the organisation.

In short, knowing and demonstrating competencies provide substantial benefits to individuals who want to be seen as qualified and valued accordingly.