

Competency Based Interviews Guide

Introduction

Competency Based Interviews (CBI)

Competency Based Interviews (CBIs) are interviews designed to gather specific behavioural evidence from an individual's past experience in relation to a number of predetermined competencies. Companies are increasingly using this model as it is a more valid and structured interview technique. Moreover it reduces the bias and stereotyping risks by interviewers.

The competencies focused upon within the interview are those that have been identified as key to effective performance within a given role. The questions are designed to elicit specific evidence of a candidate's past performance in relation to the competencies being assessed. Some examples of competencies commonly assessed are:

- Leadership
- Team work
- Interpersonal sensitivity
- Commercial awareness
- Planning and organizing

Example of a question

Q1. Please describe an occasion where you had a number of conflicting demands on your time. How did you deal with this?

Circumstances – The circumstance or context

Can you tell me a little more about the background to the situation?
What exactly were the circumstances surrounding the event?

Behaviors – The behaviors or actions the Candidate displayed

What exactly did you personally do and say?
How did you personally choose to tackle the situation?

Impact – The impact or the outcome achieved

What happened as a result of your personal actions?
What was the impact of your personal contribution, how do you know?

A structure for answering the questions (STAR)

Once asked a question, it is important to think of an example that would demonstrate the competencies shown above. Follow the structure below to answer the questions

S/T (Situation or Task)

- Tell the interviewer in detail the background to the situation
- Why were you faced with the problem
- Who else was involved
- What was the your role/task

A (Action)

- Tell the interviewers in detail what action you took
- Be specific about your action
- What steps did you take (timelines)
- Who did you involve
- What challenges did you face

R (Result)

- What was the outcome of your intervention
- How did you know you were successful
- How did you measure your success

Example of an answer

"I had a meeting with a client to review the success of a project we had just completed. He was telling me about a conference that he was arranging. He was having difficulty identifying a speaker for a particular session on introducing new IT systems. I have experience in this area **(Situation)**. I said that I would be willing to be a speaker if my experience was likely to be of interest. I described what I had done and he took me up on my offer **(Actions)**. I asked him about the nature of the conference and what he thought would be most interesting as an approach **(Actions)**. I worked on the script over the intervening weeks **(Actions)**. After I had delivered the paper he came up to me and congratulated me on hitting the spot **(Result)**. Two months later he contacted me to invite my organisation to work with him on introducing and IT system into one of their divisions. The work was worth Kshs 2 million. **(Result)**."

Preparing for CBIs

It is difficult to prepare for CBIs because of the huge number and variety of questions that may be asked. However, most job descriptions and requirements can give you a clearer idea of what competencies the interviewer might look for. Some of the most frequently asked questions in CBI's are listed below. Practice by responding to them as though you were in an interview to start honing your skills.

Tips for CBI

- If you don't understand the question, ask the interviewer to repeat it
- If you cannot think of an example to provide, ask the interviewer to ask you another question
- Go slowly and provide detail
- Be prepared for a number of follow up questions from the interviewer
- The interviewers will be taking lots of notes, so don't be worried about maintaining eye contact all the time
- Do not generalize about your role
- Do not explain what 'we' did – the interviewer is only interested in recruiting you
- Relax – CBI can be intimidating, but if you follow STAR you should find it more structured and comfortable