

## What is a Competency-based interview question

Author: Newturn Wikirefu . August 2020

Many organisations are using behavioural interviewing techniques to help determine how competent candidates can get into critical position. Competency-based interviews are used to evaluate the candidate's suitability for a role based on their perceived competency level. Competency-based interviews are also referred to as behavioural interviews. A Competency is the skill, knowledge and behavioural attributes necessary for acceptable job performance. Paul Green, in his book *Building Robust Competencies* (Jossey Bass, 1999), defines an individual competency as "a written description of measurable work habits and personal skills used to achieve a work objective." Alternatively, competencies can be described as underlying characteristics, behaviour, knowledge, and skills required to differentiate performance. Organizations benefit from working with competencies because it gives them a better, more sophisticated way to manage, measure, and improve the quality of their employees.

### *How does a Competency-Based Interview Work?*

Competency-based interviews are structured and use behavioural questions to help the interviewer assess candidates based on critical competencies identified for the position. The most commonly used competency-based interviewing style is based upon asking candidates primary questions targeted to the critical competencies for the position. During competency-based interviewing, the interviewer will ask the potential employee to describe a situation they have previously used the competency, what **actions they took and what was the outcome of those actions**. Competency-based interviewing is based on the premise that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. In other words, past success predicts future success.

### *What do prospective employees need to know about competency-based interviews?*

For prospective employees, you need to understand how to use your competencies to convince employers that you are the best candidate.

- Understand competency-based interview systems.
- Identify the key competencies for the position
- Make sure you understand what it takes to be successful in your professional area and in the position you are interested in
- Explain the **situation, action, and result** in enough detail that the interviewer can tell what the interviewee is talking about, but not so much detail that the interviewer loses the main point.
- Identify your best examples to provide evidence that you are strong in each key competency
- Look at case studies for ideas to make your ideas strong.
- Understand how a typical competency-based interview flows.
- Think about how to explain your accomplishments to prove that you have high level of experience in the key competency areas

- Be prepared to answer follow up questions probing your initial answer for additional details or competency-related information
- Prioritize the parts of an answer and always make your most critical points first.

*What are some of the most typical competencies-based questions used by organizations?*

### *1. Communication*

1. *Describe a time when have you had to explain something to someone/an audience you never met before. Tell me about the way you explained it to them. How did you know that they understood you? What makes you think you were successful?*

1. **Strategic Thinking:** The ability to analyze the organization's competitive position by considering the market and industry trends, existing and potential customers, and strengths and weaknesses as compared to competitors. It entails developing and proposing a long-term strategy for the organization based on an analysis of the industry and marketplace and the organization's current and potential capabilities as compared to competitors.

1. Tell me about a time when you have recognised the connection between seemingly unrelated issues. What was the situation? What connections did you recognise? What impact did this have?
2. How do you think the role for which you are applying will impact on the long-term success of the company? How important is this role? What contribution does it make to the achievement of our long-term goals? What more can you do?

**2. Technical Expertise:** The ability to demonstrate the depth of knowledge and skill in a technical area. That entails effectively applying technical knowledge to solve a range of problems and possess in-depth knowledge and skill in a technical area

1. In what way do you think the role for which you are applying contributes to our overall business performance? How could we measure this impact? How could you improve this contribution?

*3. How do you benchmark your efficiency against others?*

1. **Results-Orientation:** Identifies what needs to be done and doing it before being asked or before the situation requires it.

1. Describe an instance when you were particularly effective at achieving results. What steps did you take to achieve these results?

B. It is not always easy to achieve the required work goals or objectives. Describe a stretch goal or objective that you were able to achieve. Why was this a stretch goal? What was the result?

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**3. Customer Orientation: The ability to demonstrate concern for satisfying one's external and/or internal customers**

A. Tell me about an example of what you have done to obtain information to better understand a customer. What did you do? How did this information improve your customer service?

B. Think of an example when you consistently exceeded internal or external customer expectations. How did you do this? What approach did you use?

**4. Planning and Organizing:** The ability to visualize a sequence of actions needed to achieve a goal and to estimate the resources required. A preference for acting in a structured, thorough manner

**5. Developing Organisation Capacity:** The ability to delegate responsibility and to work with others and coach them to develop their capabilities.

**6. Managing Change:** The ability to demonstrate support for innovation and for organizational changes needed to improve the organization's effectiveness; initiating, sponsoring, and implementing organizational change; helping others to successfully manage organizational change.

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**7. Teamwork:** The ability and desire to work cooperatively with others on a team; as a team leader, the ability to demonstrate interest, skill, and success in getting groups to learn to work together

A. Describe a time when you had the opportunity to empower a team or individual to make a difference in their work? What happened? How did you manage people differently? How did you retain control?

**8. Providing Motivational Support**

The ability to enhance others' commitment to their work.

**9. Performance Climate**

The ability to take responsibility for one's own, or one's employees' performance, by setting clear goals and expectations, tracking progress against the goals, ensuring feedback, and addressing performance problems and issues promptly.

1. Tell us about the last time you had to walk into a group of people and have an impact. How did you prepare? How did you manage your behaviours to create the maximum impact?
2. *Describe a time when you had the opportunity to empower a team or individual to make a difference in their work? What happened? How did you manage people differently? How did you retain control?*

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**10. Influencing Others:** The ability to gain others' support for ideas, proposals, projects, and solutions

**A.** Tell us about the last time you won someone over to your point of view. How did your opinion contrast with their original position? What were the key things that you did which persuaded them? What kind of agreement did you reach? On reflection, what would you do differently next time?

**B.** Give us a recent example of when you negotiated a successful outcome? What did you negotiate? How did you win the person round? What objections did they raise? How did you know that they were convinced?

**11. Building Collaborative Relationships:** The ability to develop, maintain, and strengthen partnerships with others inside or outside the organization who can provide information, assistance, and support.

**A.** Tell us about a time when you have helped another area to achieve their business objectives. What was the situation? How did you get involved? What did you do? What was the outcome? Why did you become involved?

**B.** Give me an example of when you have worked with another area to achieve common objectives. What was the situation? How did you approach? What issues arose? How did you overcome?

Against this background, your organisation must take a competency-based approach to interview and such an approach allows you to hire employees with the requisite competencies that help to drive your business performance.

*Source:*

**Green, Paul C. Building Robust Competencies: Linking Human Resources Systems to Organizational Strategies. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999.**

**Kessler, Robin, and Linda A. Strasburg. Competency-Based Resumes: How to Bring Your Resume to the Top of the Pile. Franklin Lakes, N.J.: Career Press, 2004.**

*Newturn Wikirefu is the Talent Acquisition Manager at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd a management and human resources consulting firm.*

*Phone +263 4 481946-48/481950/2900276/2900966 or cell number +0784 597343 or email: newturn@ipcconsultants.com or visit our website at [www.ipcconsultants.com](http://www.ipcconsultants.com)*

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