

How to Prepare for a Competency Based Interview



What is an Interview?

- **An Interview is a conversation with a purpose directed by the interviewer.**
- **A Structured Interview is designed to enable the interviewer to gather information from candidates and assess whether they have the competence (or the potential) to perform at the required level in the post to be filled. If you have been ‘acting up’ this is the time to tell them.....**
- **3 key questions the Board need to satisfy themselves on:-**
 1. **Can the person do the work? Do they have the necessary competencies?**
 - (K,S,A’s – knowledge, skills and attributes or approaches appropriate to the role)
 2. **Will they do the work? (goes to attitude....)**
 3. **What of the organisational ‘fit’? Can we see this person ‘fitting the role’?**
(just a small degree of ‘fit’ and only after the Board are satisfied the candidate has 1&2)

How does a Structured Interview differ from an Unstructured interview?

Structured

- The factors to be evaluated are explicit, based on the job specification, and are the same for each candidate
- Questions re candidate's past experience are job-related
- The same questioning areas - questions related to the same standards of performance are covered with all candidates applying for the same position.
- There is a pre-developed scoring system for evaluating candidates drawn from the job specification
- Systematic probing of examples
- Greater reliability, validity and fairness
- Appointments based on merit

Benefits of Structured Interview

- Getting the best candidate based on merit
- Consistency and fairness to candidates
- Transparency
- Compliance with legislation
- Supports documentation, notetaking, feedback, etc.
- Much more enjoyable experience for the candidate as they are talking of situations/projects they have been directly involved with – they are demonstrating their readiness/suitability to move to the next level

Preparing for the Interview

Understanding the Requirements of the Role



Preparation in Advance of Interview

- Filling in the Application form is the first step and requires several attempts and somebody else reading it over if possible
- Information about the role you are going for
- Job description/ Person Specification/Competencies
- Study job specification & competencies.
- Examine your responsibilities & activities in your current role & previous relevant roles.
- Match where possible. Highlight areas of relevance.
- Consider what is it that differentiates you from the other applicants? What is your USP? (unique selling point)

Understanding of the post/role on offer

- What are the key differences between the grade you are currently in and the grade for which you are applying for promotion to?

Do you know what the role actually involves ?

- Overall purpose of the role?
- Clear reference to strategic vision for the role
- Key activities of the role?
- Main duties/responsibilities of the role?
- What is the culture of the organisation?
- What is rewarded?
- What are the competencies (K,S,A) for the role?
- How is success measured/evaluated in this role?
- What are the biggest challenges & How might YOU address them?
- What specifically do YOU think YOU bring to the post?

What is a Competency?

- Generally a competency is described as the K, S, A's necessary for acceptable job performance;
 - **Knowledge** refers to previous education, intelligence, understanding
 - **Skills** refers to the technical or practical skills required to perform the job and their experience to date and
 - **Behavioural attributes** refer to personal qualities that are key to successful job performance
- What is a competency approach?

It is an analysis of the skills, knowledge, behaviours and personal qualities required for a competent performance. The focus is on behaviours the individual would need to demonstrate to perform 'competently in the role' - greater transparency, fairness and objectivity in the process. It identifies the ideal employee profile

WHY COMPETENCY BASED INTERVIEWING?

“The best predictor of future performance is past performance/behaviour.”

Competency based questions uncover real working life situations through evidence and examples and should get:

- **What was candidate’s role in the situation?**
- **Who was involved? How did the candidate act?**
- **What was the result or outcome?**

“Competency Based Behavioral interviewing, in fact, is said to be 55% predictive of future on-the-job behavior, while traditional interviewing is only 10% predictive.” -- Katharine Hansen, www.quintcareers.com

Competencies are a Blend of Knowledge, Skills and Attributes (K,S,A's)

Have you considered the following?

What do you need to know for this role?
Legislation,
Fees, Timelines,
Policies etc.,

Knowledge

What do you need to be able to do? Consider also technical or practical skills Processing an application, Preparing a report, researching etc.,

Skills

**Attribute /
Behaviour /
Approach**

What type of person do you need to be?
e.g. efficient, polite, hard working, problem solver, motivational, teamworker, leader etc.,

Optimum Performance

Note:- Study the job description for this detail

What is a Performance Indicator?

A *Performance Indicator describes the* appropriate level of on-the-job performance required from a suitable candidate for the vacancy to be filled. Performance Indicators are the *key link* between

Job Specification – Key Competencies



Questions the Interviewer will ask.



How the evidence will be evaluated.

In a competency/evidenced based interview the questions will be designed to gather the evidence of the level at which the person operates. Each competency is composed of a cluster of relevant behaviours (performance/behavioural indicators) – see framework document

Competency – Delivery of Results

- For example, if it is decided that a job to be filled requires a candidate who is a good planner and organiser and can work on several projects at once, the Performance Standard must describe what a good planner and organiser actually does, e.g. someone who prioritises and sets deadlines, manages their deadlines, takes other work into account when projecting timeframes, etc.
 - e.g. Delivers work on time and to a high standard
 - e.g. Appreciates the need to delegate work appropriately (if they have staff reporting to them)...

12 Key Administrative Competencies identified for job success

Employers typically use some of the following as their key administrative competencies:

- 1. Decision Making**
- 2. Teamwork/collaboration**
- 3. Quality work standards**
- 4. Motivation**
- 5. Reliability**
- 6. Problem Solving**
- 7. Adaptability/Flexibility**

- 8. Planning and Organising workload**
- 9. Communication**
- 10. Integrity**
- 11. Initiative**
- 12. Resilience ability to work under pressure**

What completing the application form

Use Action Verbs to Describe Your Experience and level of Responsibility

created instructed analyzed produced
negotiated designed calculated maintained
administered controlled reviewed
consolidated delivered liaised with increased
studied invented supplied detected
developed solved prepared installed
selected arranged formulated solved started

Before preparing to complete the Application Form

- What are the key technical requirements (including education and experience), skills and competencies required for the role?
- What are your key tasks at the moment?
- What are your main achievements?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your non-work activities?
- Read each of the competencies and the behaviours outlined for that competency and consider carefully the best examples you have to demonstrate each of the competencies required for the new position – provide one comprehensive example with a beginning, middle and end using the STAR model of answering

How the Interview Board Members Plan and Structure Questioning

The Body of the Interview

- The Funnel Technique

Opening Question

Probe - Further probing

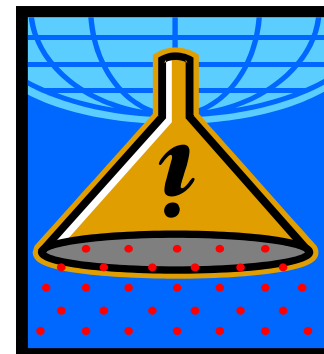
Clarification

Prove

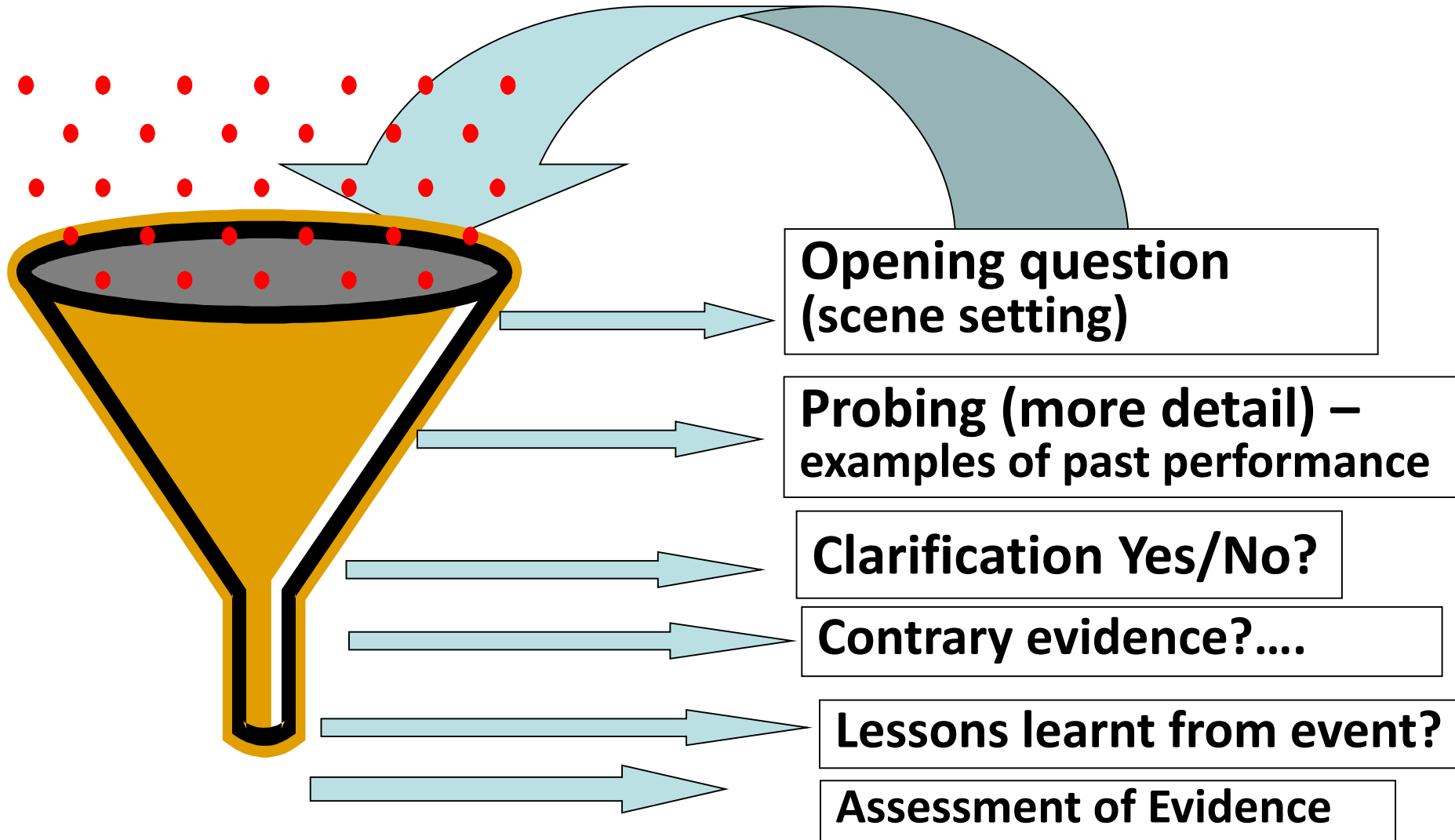
Learning taken from the experience

Contrary Evidence – Looking back with hindsight

- The Inverted Funnel Technique



The Funnelling Technique – Moving from the General to the Specific



Interview Board Style of Questioning

- **Display Interest and Encouragement to candidate**

- **Signpost the process**

This means Board announce the subject or skill area they are about to cover before they question the candidate on this skill e.g. “I’m now going to look at the next area team work.....”

- **Have a Logical Flow**

- Questions are drawn from the areas identified
- The application form is used as back up information
- Competencies drive the questioning process

- **Adopt Appropriate Questioning Styles**

(example based, evidence based, fact based)



Probing Questions

What exactly has the candidate personally achieved, contributed, and had responsibility for.

- *Take one particular example - what exactly was your role?*
- *How many people were involved – how did you deal with these?*
- *What challenges did you meet? How did you deal with these?*
- *Take me through the steps you followed?*
- *“How exactly were you involved ?”*
- *“What specifically was your role?”*
- *“How much responsibility did you as an individual actually have?”*
- *“Where did your involvement begin and end?”*
- *“To what extent were you solely responsible?”*
- *What exactly did you do?*
- *Can you relate this to the demands of the post(s) on offer?*

Probing is used to follow up on vague answers
They Board want facts and evidence

The Board want facts/evidence....

“How exactly were you involved ?”

“What specifically was your role?”

“How much responsibility did you as an individual actually have?”

“Where did your involvement begin and end?”

“To what extent were you solely responsible?”

“What percentage of the overall project were you directly responsible for”

“You mentioned your planning and organising skills, in what situations have you put them into effect while managing multiple projects?”

Examples of specific answers ...

- “Three weeks ago I had to step in at short notice when.....”
- I was the person who was responsible for organising the roster whenwas absent on leave...”
- A technician complained that.....and I sorted it out by
- “I suggested that the system should be changed and I drafted a plan for the consideration of.....this was accepted and is now in place”
- “ I have done that job on numerous occasions.....just two weeks ago...”
- “when I looked after 3 tutorial groups at the same time I managed by ..”
- “we work as a team and my responsibility in that team is to.”
- “when a difficult contractor complainedI took the following steps:...”
- “when I realised that the supplier did not speak English I.....”
- “ It was my idea to”
- “ I believe the skills I bring to the post are unique in that I am”

The STAR Method of Answering



The STAR method is :-

S – Situation, background set the scene

T – Task or Target, specifics of what's required, when, where, who

A – Action, what you did, skills used, behaviours, characteristics

R – Result – Outcome, what happened?

- *“What is your experience of working in teams?”*
- *“What is your experience of initiating change?”*
- *“Have you evidence of where you were flexible & adaptable?”*
- *“What is your experience in solving problems?”*

Interview Techniques

Competency Interviewing – The Star System

Situation

What was their exact role

Background

Selected or volunteered

Organisation, size and shape of the team

Financial data/budget.

Desired result or outcome

Action

Who was involved

Their particular role

Who did they influence,

External help used

Decisions and approach

Problems and compromise

NB: look for 'I' not 'we'



Task

Chronology of events

Planning for the task

**Prioritization – what & how did they
decide**

Technical skills needed

How did they learn

Tools used to complete

Result

Outcome & Learning from Example

**Any improvements or changes
they would make**

Enjoyed most/least

Recognition (or not)

How would others describe their actions?

STAR model of answering Competency – Drive and Commitment



In relation to the competency Drive and Commitment to the Values of UCC
Can you give an example of a work related problem you resolved?

The STAR method is :-

S – *Situation, background set the scene*

T – *Task or Target, specifics of what's required, when, where, who*

A – *Action, what you did, skills used, behaviours, approaches*

R – *Result – Outcome, what happened?*

Situation : The IT company we had outsourced the project to said they would not be able to deliver the booklet in the timeframe agreed

Task:- To complete the project in line with my Performance objective

Action:- I brought this to the attention of my manager
I got permission to focus only on this task and confirmed I would be available to answer their questions – any time – I even gave them my mobile number for outside my normal office hours
I also reminded them of the terms of the contract and their commitment to UCC and the penalties they might suffer if late

Result:- Working together the project was delivered on time and in budget

The Hierarchy of Answering

Best answer:- 1st person (I) work related experience from their current role e.g.

I had that situation only last week...

Next best ans.: 1st person (I) experience from outside of work or from other work experience (maybe voluntary work or previous work, or part-time work)

Next best ans.: 1st person observed by a manager or a colleague dealing with such a situation

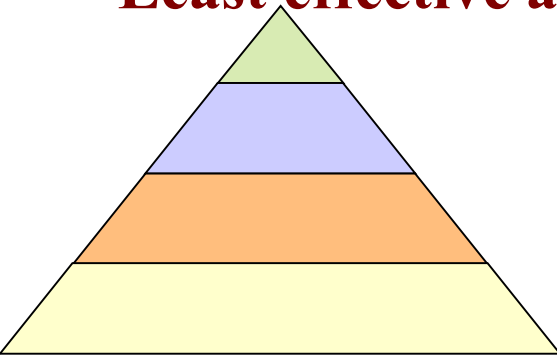
e.g. Investigating allegation of bullying on the team

e.g. Secretary to a Committee, attending meetings

e.g. Working with somebody organising a big event

Least effective answer :

Hypothetical i.e. How would you I would (demonstrates candidate knowledge at best but no evidence of practical skill) if you have practical relevant experience of this situation the Board won't know this!



Use MOSCOW to prioritise detail and then use STAR

**Looking beyond the words
(what are the Interview Board really
assessing with this question?)**



Looking beyond the words....

Competency:- Delivering of Results

The Question

- Describe a time, perhaps linked to a major change in the section, when things were difficult and you were working under significant pressure

The **Real** Question

- How do you cope in difficult situations?
- Can you respond to challenges and set goals?
- Do you panic?

Looking beyond the words

Competency:- Delivery of Results

The Question

- Give an example of a situation where you solved a problem in a creative way

The **Real** Question

- Can you think laterally?
- How do you cope with solving problems?
- How do you cope with making decisions?
- Are you flexible enough to cope with change & challenge?

Looking beyond the words....

Competency:- Interpersonal and Communication Skills ...

The Question

- Describe a recent experience of working with colleagues from another section of the University? What was the project? Were there any difficult moments during the project Tell us more.....

The **Real** Question

- How do you get on with other people?
- What role do you take in a group?
- Are you able to focus on goals and targets?



On the day

How to make the most of yourself
How to differentiate yourself
from the other candidates

Putting the best foot forward

- ☺ Answer the questions as fully as possible
- ☺ Speak clearly and slowly- be specific in your answers
- ☺ Clarify questions if you need to
- ☺ Pause to gather your thoughts 1..2..3..
- ☺ Be energetic, enthusiastic and convincing
- ☺ Check the non-verbal signals regularly
- ☺ Offer additional information at the end
- ☺ **Speak in 1st person ... I am responsible for..**
- ☺ **Give yourself credit where you took the initiative or acted above your grade**

What works really well?

- ☺ Good appearance – first impressions are lasting!
- ☺ Highlighting the positives in the new position rather than the negatives in your current role
- ☺ Taking the time to research the new role – speaking to somebody who is there at the moment and doing the work
- ☺ Well developed examples to support your answers
- ☺ Keeping to the point – listening to the question
- ☺ Answering the question you are asked not the one you thought you were being asked or you want to answer!
- ☺ Showing them you will be a safe pair of hands

What does not work?

Common errors when answering

- ☹ Not listening to the question you have been asked
- ☹ Answering ‘I would do this’ ... when you have actually done it!
- ☹ **Even if they ask you a ‘How would you?’ question if you have the experience be sure to answer in the 1st person**
- ☹ Rambling – not knowing how to finish the answer
- ☹ Underselling yourself - Not believing in your own ability
- ☹ Under prepared – not taking the time to do research
- ☹ Being irrationally nervous
- ☹ Giving one line answers – shutting down the topic
- ☹ Arguing with a member of the Board – they may be testing you
- ☹ Not reading the non-verbal signals
- ☹ Not having backup examples ready in case they are looked for
- ☹ **Failure to be specific and failure to give practical examples**