



CompQuick

FOCUSING INTERVIEWS ON MIT CORE COMPETENCIES

Developed by

The MIT Human Resource Practices Implementation Resource Team
January 2000

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This guide can be viewed online, or downloaded from
<http://web.mit.edu/personnel/irt/compquick/>

From the Vice President of Human Resources

January 25, 2000

To All Hiring Managers:

I am very pleased to introduce CompQuick, a web-based interviewing guide designed to help hiring managers assess candidates more fully, resulting in better matches between people and jobs. CompQuick is the first in a series of on-line human resources tools that will be released to the MIT community.

As we've learned in our review of MIT's human resources practices, mastery of technical skills and knowledge required for a job are important, but are only two pieces in a complete picture of success at work. Other important abilities and characteristics--what we call behavioral competencies--are equally important for effective performance in our jobs, and for the success of the organization. CompQuick provides an introduction to the process of interviewing for such behavioral competencies for administrative staff positions at MIT. An upcoming version of CompQuick, to be released in the Summer of 2000, will include the process of interviewing for behavioral competencies for support staff positions as well.

But matching good people to the right jobs is only the beginning. As we strive to create a work environment in which people can thrive and develop, it is important for MIT to equip all employees with the tools they need to meet the challenges of daily work life, and to support them in continuously improving their skills and effectiveness. Following CompQuick, we plan to provide you with a wide range of state-of-the-art tools for use in determining appropriate salaries, helping employees identify career paths, and providing recognition for a job well done. These practices will all contribute to MIT's being viewed as an employer of choice.

I encourage you to use this guide as an introduction to competency-based interviewing. I also urge you to learn more about competency-based practices, and to participate fully in putting these new tools and ideas to work. I am confident that the time you put into using competencies and related practices will result in a more satisfying and effective work experience for you as well as those who are beginning new careers at MIT.

Laura Avakian

Vice President of Human Resources

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What Is CompQuick?

Interviewing job candidates is difficult—sometimes more art than science. How can you predict if the person in front of you would be effective in the face of the demands and challenges of your open position?

It is usually possible to assess a candidate's technical skills and knowledge (or technical competencies) by reviewing the resume and asking about training and experience. But there are other important factors—which we call behavioral competencies—that are also critical for success, but difficult to assess from a resume or a standard interview.

CompQuick is an easy-to-use tool for enhancing hiring effectiveness at MIT by providing a way to assess behavioral competencies that have been demonstrated to be key for success in administrative work at MIT. It is built around a set of behavioral competencies referred to as the MIT Administrative Staff Core Competency Model. Research by the Human Resources Practices Development Team (HRPD) has shown that these competencies are important predictors of effective performance for a broad range of MIT administrative staff positions.

A set of core competencies for support staff will be completed by Summer 2000, and integrated into this CompQuick guide.

CompQuick consists of a set of questions and guidelines that help interviewers get at these core behavioral competencies. It provides a brief introduction to competencies and how to interview for them, and includes an Interview Packet, which you can print and use as a guide and recording form during interviews.

CompQuick is not intended to replace current approaches to conducting interviews. Rather, it is meant to add an important tool to the interviewer's toolbox—one that can increase the power and precision of the interview process.

If you need a refresher on the overall process of selecting and hiring people at MIT, this guide also provides an outline of The MIT Selection Process, which features generally useful guidelines on planning and conducting interviews as well as links to relevant MIT policy.

For more in-depth information about competencies, competency-based practices and training resources, see Learning More.

This guide has been developed by the Human Resource Practices Implementation Resource Team, with assistance from the Performance Consulting and Training team. We welcome your questions, comments and suggestions. Please send e-mail to compquick@mit.edu.

What Are Competencies?

In matching people with work, we intuitively try to do the best we can to assess those underlying factors or competencies that will affect people's success in the job. Often what we want to know is as much about **HOW** candidates go about getting things done as about **WHAT** they know how to do. For instance, we might want to know...

- **HOW** does this person take initiative and ensure results in work assignments?
- **HOW** does this person communicate and work with other people?
- **HOW** does this person deal with conflict or obstacles?

Most people accept that these types of questions are quite important. A great deal of research over the past 25 years has supported that idea, and attempted to understand what kinds of **HOW** factors are most important for success in different kinds of work (see [Reading List](#)).

Behavioral competencies target those HOW factors.

Behavioral competencies are abilities and characteristics that help people make the most of their technical competencies on the job.

Note: throughout this guide we often refer to behavioral competencies simply as "competencies".

CompQuick focuses on behavioral competencies rather than technical competencies. This is not because technical competencies are not crucial—they are. It is because technical competencies are more overt, and assessing technical competencies is something that hiring managers have always done, whereas behavioral competencies are often neglected or glossed over in interviews. (See [The MIT Selection Process](#) for tips on assessing technical competence in an interview.)

Technical competencies might include degrees or other credentials, knowledge of a certain type of software, experience with a certain type of machinery, knowledge of regulations or procedures, presentation skills, or project management techniques.

To learn more about what competencies are and the theory behind them, see [More About Competencies](#).

To see an example of how competencies might be used in matching people with jobs, see [Competencies in Action: A Tale of Two Doctors](#)

The MIT Administrative Staff Core Competency Model

A competency model is a description of the key competencies required for excellent performance in a given job or category of jobs. A competency model consists of a set of competencies that have been selected through some research process that demonstrates their importance for success on the job.

Competency models at MIT have been developed using either rigorous research interviews or expert panels (a panel of people who know the job requirements well).

In developing a competency model for the broad category of Administrative Staff, HRPD used a research protocol that included in-depth, structured interviews of 71 administrative staff members from a wide range of positions across MIT departments, laboratories and centers. (For more information on the research, see [Competencies in Human Resource Practices at MIT: The Human Resources Practices Development Team \(HRPD\) Recommendations](#)).

The research showed five behavioral competencies that were considered universally important for success in all administrative staff positions across MIT. These competencies should be part of the interview process for any administrative staff position being filled.

The core competencies are listed on the following page.

This competency model for Administrative Staff is referred to as a core model because it is intended as a starting point. Additional competencies can be added to the model to address the competency requirements of individual positions.

A similar core competency model for support staff will be developed by Summer 2000.

The MIT Administrative Staff Core Competencies

Ability to Influence

The ability to move or persuade others to act in a desired way. Influencing behaviors might include direct persuasion (e.g. appeals to reason, data, others' self-interest), adapting presentations to the interest and understanding of the audience, or using indirect influence strategies.

Administrative staff are often required to convince and influence others, often those they don't have formal authority over.

Communication for Results

The ability to mobilize an organization to achieve results by conveying goals and objectives clearly and in a compelling manner. At the basic level, this competency is about sharing information effectively. More sophisticated Communication for Results involves supporting a strategy in the face of resistance or obstacles.

Information Seeking

An underlying curiosity and desire to know more about things, people or issues. It implies going beyond the questions that are routine or required to perform the job. It may include digging or pressing for exact information; resolving discrepancies by asking a series of questions; or broad environmental scanning for potential opportunities or miscellaneous information that may be of future use.

Interpersonal Understanding

The desire and ability to accurately hear and understand the unspoken or partly expressed thoughts, feelings, and concerns of others. This skill at understanding "where people are coming from" is important in building work relationships, influencing or persuading others, and working effectively in groups. May include cross-cultural sensitivity.

Organizational Awareness

The ability to understand and learn organizational relationships and dynamics and use them to achieve objectives. This includes knowing not only the formal organizational structure and "by-the-book" ways of doing things, but also the informal structure--who the "real" decision-makers are and how they can best be approached. This competency can also include an understanding of the organizational culture--what approaches or tactics will tend to work best and what should be avoided.

Hiring for Competencies at MIT

Why Hire for Competencies?

Matching people with jobs based on both behavioral and technical competencies results in a better job-person "fit". This leads to greater satisfaction on the part of both the employer and the employee.

Competency-based interviewing has already been practiced widely at MIT with positive results. It has been used in diverse areas (e.g. Information Systems, Dept. of Facilities, Technology Review, Office of the Ombudsman, Office of the Dean of Students and Undergraduate Education, School of Engineering) for a wide range of positions (from support staff to the Executive Vice President). See Competencies in Human Resource Practices at MIT: The Human Resources Practices Development Team (HRPD) Recommendations in this guide for more information.

The basic principle of interviewing for competencies is this:

Past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior.

In competency-based interviewing, you ask the candidate to tell you about specific, actual past events in which he or she played an active role. You listen for evidence that the person demonstrated behaviors in those situations that are identical to or similar to the competencies you are looking for. For example, if you hear about a candidate trying to persuade a supervisor to change a decision, that would constitute evidence of the Ability to Influence competency.

Getting this type of information can greatly increase the power and precision of the interview process. Specifically, this approach is more reliable and effective than asking people to say what they would do in a hypothetical situation.

What CompQuick Can Do For You

CompQuick can help you...

- ...focus your questions. The structure of competency interviewing helps you be clear about what qualities you are looking for in a candidate.

- ...tap an additional source of data. Listening to and assessing the stories that candidates tell in response to competency questions provides rich information you probably would not get otherwise.
- ...begin thinking in terms of competency requirements for the positions you hire for. Using the technique of competency interviewing can help you deepen your understanding of what will lead to successful performance in the job for which you are hiring, and how to look for it when interviewing.

Should You Use CompQuick?

- ◆ CompQuick is limited to the Administrative Staff Core Competency Model (with a similar model for support staff to be added in the future). If you want to interview for competencies other than the core competencies, read Using a Customized Competency Model, and consider taking Competency Modeling and Competency-Based Interviewing and Selection (see Next Steps: Enhancing Your Competency Interviewing Skills).
- CompQuick is just a simple introduction to competency-based interviewing and selection. If you want develop your interviewing skills beyond CompQuick, the course Competency Modeling and Competency-Based Interviewing and Selection is offered on a regular basis. The course offers more in-depth information and practice in probing for competencies, assessing different levels of competency, and selecting appropriate competencies for a job or group of jobs (competency modeling).

Using CompQuick

Competency-based interviewing can be easily integrated into your normal interviews—conducted by you individually or by a team or committee.

The CompQuick steps below will take you through a simplified version of the competency-based interview process. These steps will help you prepare for, conduct and assess your interviews. (General guidelines and information about hiring and interviewing at MIT can be found in The MIT Selection Process.)

A couple of important points:

Screen your candidates for technical skills and basic qualifications prior to interviews. There is no point in expending the effort to assess someone's behavioral competencies if he or she is not a realistic candidate for the position.

Be sure to be consistent across interviews in the ordering and framing of your questions.

Keep in mind the basic principle of interviewing for competencies:

Past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior.

Step 1: Get Your Materials

The CompQuick Interview Packet, including an Interviewer's Guide and an Interview Form, is available in the Materials section at the back of this guide.

The CompQuick Interview Packet can also be downloaded in Adobe Acrobat (.PDF) format from

<http://web.mit.edu/personnel/irt/compquick/>

Be sure to print or copy the Interview Form for each interviewer and candidate.

Step 2: Plan Your Competency Interviews

- ◆ Figure out how much time you will devote to probing for competencies. Best practice is to probe for **2-3 competencies**, allowing about 15 minutes per competency.
- ◆ Prioritize the competencies. Looking at the five core competencies (listed on the Interview Form), pick the 2-3 competencies that seem most relevant to the position you are interviewing for, and rank them in terms of importance.
- ◆ Review the competency "starting questions". The starting questions provided on the Interview Form are intended to guide the candidate to tell a story that is likely to provide evidence of a particular competency. Choose the question you like best, or feel is most appropriate. If you like, you can ask the interviewee to choose between two or more questions. (But be consistent across candidates with how you do this!) Feel free to adjust the question wording slightly to fit the position or candidate.

A sample "starting question": Tell me about a time when you needed to convince someone to do something.

In the stories that your candidates tell you will very likely hear information about competencies other than the one you are specifically asking about. That is normal, and a valuable source of information that you can record.

Step 3: Prepare for Each Interview

Review the position description and the candidate's resume, planning general, open-ended questions, as well as questions about particular past experience, technical competencies, or other qualifications. (See The MIT Selection Process, pg. 31, for tips on interviewing for technical competencies.)

Review the [CompQuick Interview Packet](#), especially the description of each competency, the [Competency Interviewing Tips](#), and [General Tips on Interview Etiquette](#). Remind yourself of which competencies you will specifically probe for.

It is fine—in fact, it's good practice—to let each candidate know ahead of time that part of their interview will be something called "interviewing for competencies". (You can use the wording suggested in Step 4). It's even okay to tell the candidates the names of the competencies you are looking for (e.g. Ability to Influence, Organizational Awareness) so they can be prepared. But don't give too much detail about what you are looking for, and be consistent about how much information you give to candidates.

Some Useful Open-Ended Interview Questions:

- **What interests you about this position?**
- **Tell me about your last job.**
- **What did you like most/least about your last job?**
- **What's most important to you in a work environment?**
- **What particular skills, abilities or background do you think would make you a good fit for this position?**
- **What are your longer-term career goals? How would this position fit into those?**

Step 4: Conduct the Interviews

- Let the candidate know up front that you will be doing something "a bit different" toward the end of the interview. For example,

For the last part of the interview, we'll be doing a type of interviewing called competency interviewing. We'll be asking you to tell us some stories about work-related experiences in order to understand better how you approach your work.

- Conduct the interview as you normally would, including
 - describing the job and organization for the candidate;
 - asking open-ended questions about interests, abilities, preferences and goals;
 - asking about work history, technical competencies and other qualifications.
- Introduce the competency part of the interview. Here is some wording you could use:

We want to take the rest of the interview to do something called competency interviewing. We will ask you to tell us a

couple of stories about work-related events or situations. We want to get some concrete examples of experiences so we can better understand how you approach your work and some of the skills and abilities you bring to it.

As you tell your stories, we will probably ask several questions to get at some of the details of the situations. We aren't probing for more information because you're giving the wrong answer. We are probing because we want to understand the situation fully—including what you did, said, thought and felt.

Try to stick to telling about **your** role in specific past events. We'll help you out.

I may take some notes to help me remember what you say.

- For each competency you are probing for (in order of priority), ask a starting question from the CompQuick Interview Packet to elicit a story about a past work-related event (e.g. "Tell me about a time when you tried to get someone to change his or her mind.")

Some tips:

- ♦ Ask for an overview of the event so you can get a sense of what to follow up on. Get the background before you get into the details. What was the context of this event? How did you become involved? What was the end point? How did it turn out? The event may be a single meeting, a project spanning several months, or anything in between.
- ♦ Ask for events within the past two years, if possible, in which the candidate played an active part. More recent is better, so the candidate can remember details. Give the candidate time to think of an event or situation that addresses your question.
- ♦ Be patient and supportive. Most people are not used to this style of interviewing and it can be awkward.
- After focusing in on each event or part of an event, follow up with probing questions to get more information about the candidate's behavior in that event. See Competency Interviewing Tips for more details.
- ♦ Take brief notes. If more than one person is conducting the interview, it can be helpful to have one person do the probing and another person do the note-taking.

- ◆ Keep the focus on relevant stories. If the candidate starts into a story that clearly will not provide evidence of the competency you are interested in, remind him or her of the starting question, and restart with the same question (or an alternative starting question, if there is one). For example:

Remember that we are interested in a time that you needed to convince someone to change his or her mind. In the situation you started to tell about, it sounds like you weren't directly involved in the convincing. Is that right? Can you tell me about another time you did that?

- ◆ Budget your time. Move to the next story if you are running out of time, or if you are not getting useful information from the story the candidate has selected.
- At the end of the interview, give the candidate a chance to ask any questions or add anything else relevant about his or her experience or qualifications.

Step 5: Assess What You Heard

Immediately after each interview, review your notes or confer with your colleagues about the following:

What evidence did you hear for each competency that you specifically probed for? What were the actions, thoughts or feelings that you think provided evidence of each competency? How strongly did you hear that competency (i.e. did you hear some ambiguous evidence once, or clear evidence several times)?

Remember that listening for competencies in this sort of interview is as much art as science (though there is a great deal you can do to increase your skill at it—see [Next Steps: Enhancing Your Competency Interviewing Skills](#)). There will very likely be some evidence that you can't clearly match up with a competency, or is ambiguous or unclear. That's okay. If something seems significant anyway, take note of it.

What other competencies from the core competency model did you hear evidence of? Sometimes you might hear more about a competency you weren't specifically looking for than

about the competency that your question was aimed at. That's fine, and can be important information in itself.

What other things of interest did you hear? Within the stories that the candidate told, there will likely be information about skills, abilities or expertise that may be relevant to the position.

NOTE: Some people aren't good at being interviewed for competencies. A particular candidate may have difficulty remembering relevant stories, or may have difficulty giving good, concrete, first-person information from which you can infer competencies. If that happens, you can't necessarily conclude that the candidate does **not** demonstrate those competencies. The best you can do is to say that you are not sure, and to rely on other sources of information.

Step 6: Contact Us

We want to know who is using CompQuick, and for what types of positions! We also want to hear about your experience interviewing for competencies, and any comments or suggestions you may have.

Once you have completed your interviews for a position using CompQuick, please fill out the form at [fill out the form at](http://web.mit.edu/personnel/irt/compquick/cqStep6.htm)

<http://web.mit.edu/personnel/irt/compquick/cqStep6.htm>,

or send an e-mail to compquick@mit.edu indicating

- ◆ your name, position and department;
- ◆ the position title you interviewed for;
- ◆ whether you interviewed solo or as part of a team/committee;
- ◆ how many interviews you conducted;
- ◆ whether you successfully hired someone;
- ◆ any comments or suggestions you have for us.

We appreciate your input!

Competency Interviewing Tips

1. Zero in on what seems significant.

- After getting a brief overview of the event, follow up on specific pieces of it.

Examples:

- Tell me more about how you got involved.
 - You mentioned a meeting with the consultant; tell me more about that.
 - Take me into that discussion. What was your role?
-
- If it is not clear to you what you should follow up on, ask the candidate to tell you what part was significant. For example:
“Is there some part of that project that stands out for you as significant—a milestone or decision point that you were involved in?”

2. Keep the candidate focused on actual past events.

- Keep questions brief, specific, and in the past tense.

Examples:

- What did you do then?
 - What were you thinking when she said that?
 - What did you say?
 - How did you feel when that happened?
 - What led up to that decision?
 - What happened next?
-
- Ask for dialogue. If the person can't remember, say “Give me a sense of the conversation.”
-
- If you are getting generalities, philosophizing or hypothetical actions (e.g. “Well, the way we used to approach it was to...”), bring the candidate back to the specifics (e.g. “What did you do in this case?”).

3. Keep the candidate focused on his/her role in those past events.

- If the candidate is talking about what “we” did, ask, “What was your role in that?”
- If you are still not getting clear information about what the candidate did, stop him or her and say, “I'd like you to stay with what you yourself actually did.”

4. Probe for thoughts and feelings behind actions.

Examples:

- How did you reach that conclusion?
- How did you know to do that?
- What was your reaction to that?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- What were you thinking before going into that meeting?
- What did you find satisfying/frustrating about that?

Questions about feelings or reactions can provide a lot of information about what a candidate values or is motivated by.

5. Keep your responses to a minimum.

- ◆ In order to make the best use of time, say no more than necessary to keep the candidate on track.
- ◆ It's fine to be reassuring if the candidate seems uncomfortable, but try to avoid verbalizing your own reactions (e.g. agreeing or disagreeing, expressing surprise or approval, telling related stories, etc.). You don't want the candidate to know your feelings or reactions to what they are saying. Instead, focus on learning more about the candidate's behavior in the event.
- ◆ Refrain from asking "leading questions" - questions that point a candidate toward a particular answer, or express a bias or judgment. Some examples:

Leading

Tell me what kind of preparation you did for the meeting.

Didn't you check with anyone else before making a decision?

What did you say to them when they criticized your proposal?

Better

Tell me about events leading up to the meeting.

Could you say more about how you ended up making that decision?

What happened next?

6. Keep track of time.

- Keep an eye on your budgeted time. If you are not getting any useful information, you can stop probing about a given event and either ask for a new story to address the question, or move to another starting question.

LEARNING MORE

More About Competencies

All jobs require both behavioral and technical competencies.

Most people involved in hiring know this intuitively, though they may not have used the language of “competencies.” But most formal assessment of qualifications traditionally focuses on technical competencies.

Competencies are not “add-on” responsibilities or skills. Instead, they are a way of clarifying existing job requirements and expectations about performance.

Competencies are about finding the best “fit” between the job and the person.

Competencies are individual abilities or characteristics that are key to effectiveness in work. Competencies are not a way of providing a complete inventory of a person’s skills and abilities (which would be impossible as well as undesirable). Instead, the starting point in using competencies is always what the job requires.

Once the job requirements have been clarified (and competencies provide a framework for doing this), then competency interviewing helps interviewers look for evidence of those requirements in each candidate.

For people already in jobs, competencies provide a way to help identify opportunities for growth within their jobs. Competencies are not “fixed”—they can usually be developed with effort and support (though some are harder to develop than others). Employees and their managers together can identify which competencies would be most helpful to work on to improve the employee’s effectiveness. They can then integrate that into a learning plan that may include on-the-job experience, classroom training, or other developmental activities.

See [Competencies in Human Resource Practices at MIT: The Human Resources Practices Development Team \(HRPD\) Recommendations](#) for more about the uses of competencies for learning and development.

Some common concerns:

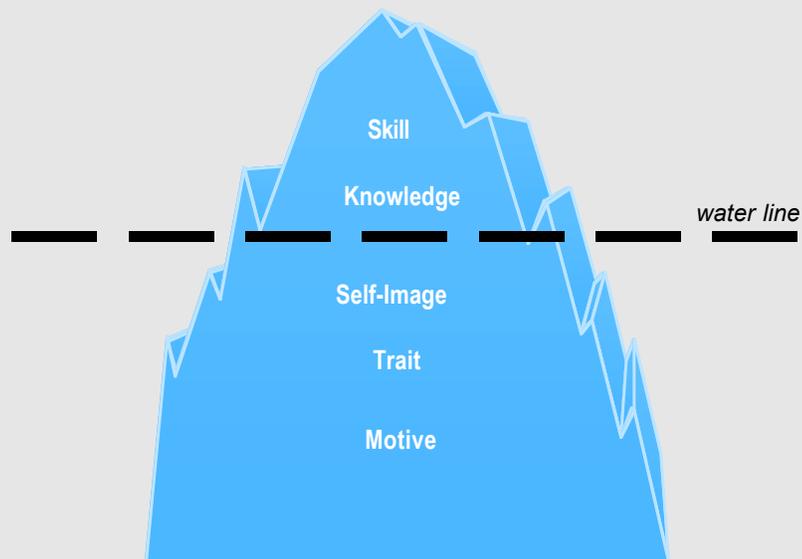
Competencies are not about being “competent” or “incompetent”. Everyone has strengths in certain areas—skills, knowledge and abilities that they have developed over time.

Competencies are not a tool to be used for evaluating people for layoffs. Competencies are only a way of talking about what helps people get results in their jobs. What matters is performance—being effective and meeting job expectations.

The Competency Iceberg

It can be helpful to think of competencies in terms of an iceberg. Technical competencies are at the tip—the portion above the waterline that is clearly visible (and therefore easier to assess).

Behavioral competencies are below the waterline—they are more difficult to assess, and often harder to develop. Behavioral competencies can be understood as manifestations of how a person views him- or herself (self-image), how he or she typically behaves (traits), or what motivates him or her (motives).



Skill: A person's ability to do something well. For example, is great at using Microsoft Word.

Knowledge: Information that a person uses in a particular area. For example, this might differentiate the outstanding waiter or waitress who speaks many languages from his or her average counterpart in a restaurant with an international clientele.

Self-Image: A person's view of him or herself, identity, personality and worth. For example, seeing oneself as a leader, or as a developer of people.

Trait: A typical aspect of a person's behavior. For example, being a good listener.

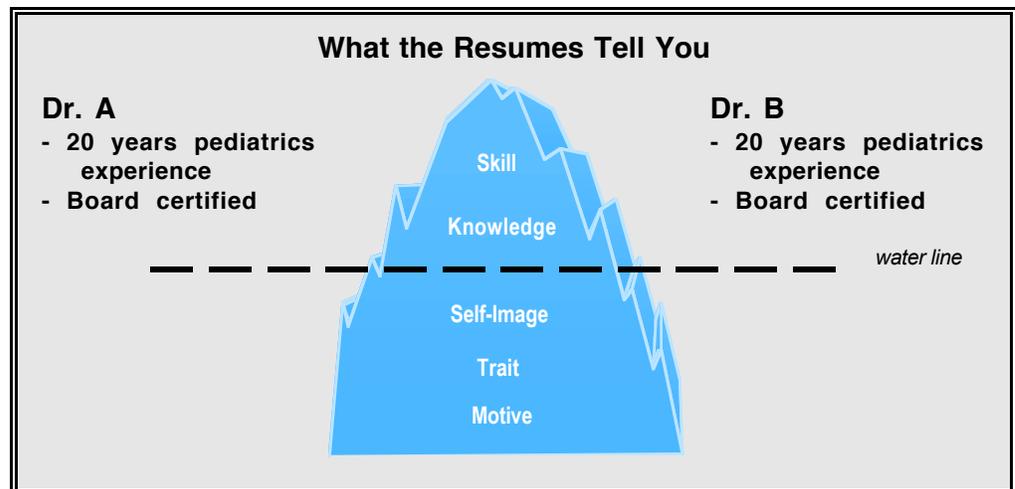
Motive: An underlying concern that drives someone's behavior in a particular area (e.g. a need for achievement, affiliation or influence).

Competencies in Action: A Tale of Two Doctors

From reading [More About Competencies](#) you now have a better understanding of what competencies are about. The following example illustrates how competencies can be put to work in hiring decisions.

Doctor A and Doctor B

Let's suppose you are director of a large hospital. You have two positions to fill, one for a pediatrician and the other for the head of a pediatric research center. You have received the resumes of Dr. A and Dr. B. You observe that these two candidates look similar: each has 20 years experience in pediatrics and is Board Certified.



What else would you like to know in order to determine which of these candidates is best for the research center and which one is best for the pediatrician position? What additional qualities would an outstanding pediatrician have? What would be important qualities for the head of a pediatric research center?

We have used this exercise many times in training sessions. Participants in typically describe the ideal qualities for a pediatrician as something like these:

- bedside manner with patient
- bedside manner with parents
- kindness
- understanding of children
- willingness to refer child to specialist
- availability
- listening ability
- sensitivity

And for the pediatric research center head these qualities are most often championed:

- entrepreneurial instinct
- management ability – ability to lead, to delegate, to see the whole picture – science, people, money
- vision
- deep understanding of research
- cares about quality of organization's systems and procedures
- ability to work with people
- ability to raise money

No doubt you could add to these lists.

Once you know what is required for excellence in each of these positions, how can you ascertain whether Dr. A or Dr. B meet the requirements for either of your openings?

Let's suppose that you interview both candidates. By asking questions about past work-related situations, you are able to discern that the doctors demonstrated the following competencies :

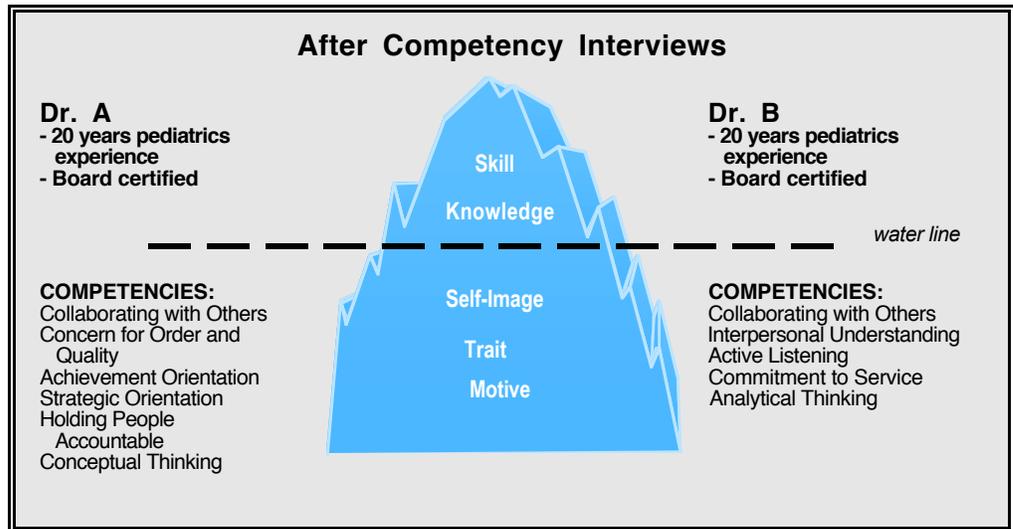
Dr. A:
Collaborating with Others
Concern for Order and Quality
Achievement Orientation
Strategic Orientation
Holding People Accountable
Conceptual Thinking

Dr. B:
Collaborating with Others
Interpersonal Understanding
Active Listening
Commitment to Service
Analytical Thinking

Given this additional information, which of these doctors would you choose for the pediatrician role and which for the head of the pediatric research center?

Our groups easily and consistently chose Dr. A for the research center leadership role and Dr. B for the pediatrician role. In this case, competency-based interviewing gave the interviewer the additional information about characteristics vital to success in the specific job. The process provided a method of choosing among candidates whose resumes might otherwise appear similar.

In this way competency-based practices provide a power and precision to support success for people and their organization.



Note that the competencies listed above cover most—but not all—of the qualities listed above. "Ability to raise money" and "availability," for example, don't directly translate into behavioral competencies, but could be assessed by asking other relevant questions.

*
The competencies listed here come from the MIT Competency Reference Guide, which is a "menu" of competencies that has been developed and refined through competency work and research at MIT. (This guide, of course, would not be used to hire doctors at a hospital outside MIT.) Different organizations that implement competencies develop their own menus of competencies to choose from.

Next Steps: Enhancing Your Competency Interviewing Skills

Why Go Beyond CompQuick?

- Interviewing for competencies takes practice. Like any complex skill, competency interviewing feels awkward at first, but grows much more natural with use. Further training will allow you to hone your skills in a supportive environment where the stakes aren't as high as a real interview.
- More training will allow you to interview for competencies beyond the Administrative Staff Core Competency Model.
- You can refine your approach using competency levels, which allow you to assess how developed or sophisticated a candidate's demonstration of each competency is.
- Learning more about the theory and applications of competencies will improve your confidence in using competency interviewing skills.

Learning Options

- Competency Modeling and Competency-Based Interviewing and Selection. This 2-day course is offered at least once per semester. It provides a brief overview of the applications and history of competencies, teaches participants how to develop a customized competency model, and covers competency interviewing skills with several opportunities for practice.

This course is recommended for anyone who will be doing a lot of hiring using competencies. Register on-line at <http://web.mit.edu/personnel/pct>.

- The Short Course. A cadre of trained competency practitioners is available to come to your area and present a condensed, 2-3 hour workshop on competency interviewing skills. Completion of such a workshop provides enough material to allow you participate in competency-based interviews with the support and guidance of a trained interviewer. It is not sufficient to prepare you to interview for competencies independently.

This option is often the most appropriate for search committees where several people will be interviewing candidates. Contact the Human Resources Practices Implementation Resource Team (irt@mit.edu) for more information.

- Other options (possibly including a one-day course) are under development.

Using a Customized Competency Model

For hiring administrative staff at MIT, the Administrative Staff Core Competency Model is broadly applicable—the five core competencies are important for many, if not all, administrative staff positions. But the core competency model may not be complete in many cases—there may be behavioral competencies that are critical for success that it does not capture.

There are three ways to go beyond the core competency model in hiring. Using any of these means going beyond what CompQuick offers. We **strongly recommend** getting further training in competency-based selection interviewing if you are going to pursue any of these options. See [Next Steps: Enhancing Your Competency Interviewing Skills](#) to learn more about your options for further training.

Option 1: Use the Default Competency Model

This option involves the hiring manager and one or two other people sitting down and making a few choices within a defined set of competencies—the Default Competency Model. The choices are based on the type of position.

The competencies in the Default Competency Model showed up in Human Resources Practices Development Team (HRPD) research as being important in certain positions, but not as universally relevant (as did the core competencies).

Using the Default Competency Model is a quick method, but the resulting set of competencies may not be quite as valid and appropriate as for Option 2; there is a speed/quality trade-off.

Contact irt@mit.edu for more information on how to use the Default Competency Model.

Option 2: Convene an Expert Panel

Expert panels have been widely used at MIT to develop competency models. An expert panel consists of 4-12 people with solid knowledge of what the position requires. The group should be as diverse as possible to represent different perspectives on the position, including managers, peers, direct reports, internal or external customers, and others in similar positions.

An expert panel session typically runs 2-3 hours, depending on the complexity of the position, the size of the group, and people's prior experience with competencies. The group starts with the core competencies, discusses the requirements for success in the position, and reaches consensus on additional competencies.

A cadre of qualified facilitators is available to help run expert panel sessions. Contact the HR Practices Implementation Resource Team (irt@mit.edu) for more information.

Option 3: Consult the MIT Competency Model Database

There are over 50 competency models that have been developed for a wide range of jobs at MIT. A competency model for a position similar to the one you are trying to fill may already exist.

Eventually, a listing of such models will be made available on the web. For the time being, contact the HR Practices Implementation Resource Team (irt@mit.edu) if you would like learn about competency models that you might use off-the-shelf or with some modification.

Competencies in Human Resource Practices at MIT: The Human Resources Practices Development Team (HRPD) Recommendations

Background

Since February 1997, through a process of community involvement and collaborations with central administrative and academic areas of the Institute, the Human Resource Practices Development (HRPD) team conducted research to define, test, and customize an integrated system of basic human resource practices suitable for MIT.

The development team was authorized to continue the work of the design team, which found in 1996 that current human resource practices no longer aligned with MIT's changing environment. The scope of the HRPD project included:

- career and succession planning
- job classification and compensation systems
- job design
- orientation
- generic role descriptions and competencies
- organizational development
- performance management
- recognition and rewards
- hiring and selection
- strategic planning
- training and development
- a study of project team formation

Project Output

The output from the project includes recommended enhancements to existing HR practices, new strategic HR approaches, and customized tools and resources for modernizing the Institute's HR management. The recommendations for change in the Institute's classification and compensation structures, delivered in the fall of 1997, have been under development and are scheduled for implementation in calendar year 2000.

Specific Recommendations

1. Describe jobs using competencies as well as duties and responsibilities.

2. Select and recruit employees based on behavioral as well as technical competencies.
3. Transition from the current performance appraisal process into a performance management process, including multi-source assessment, planning and goal setting, continual coaching to ensure results, and a year-end feedback summary meeting.
4. Align training and development programs with MIT goals and make them accessible to all employees.
5. Effect new capabilities to support organizational development through Performance Consulting.
6. Provide employees with proper orientation to the Institute, their departments, and their jobs.
7. Use classification and compensation programs to reinforce MIT's pay-for-performance philosophy and also position MIT favorably in the employment market.
8. Implement a comprehensive recognition and rewards program.
9. Implement succession planning as the first step in human resources planning at MIT.
10. Implement career development services to support both MIT's goals and employee interests.
11. Measure impacts of HR practices at the Institute level.
12. Support HR practices with an integrated human resources information system (HRIS).
13. Implement an employee communications program.

For a fuller description of the HRPD recommendations, see
<http://web.mit.edu/reeng/www/hrpd/reports/Core/core-report.htm#Recommend>

Reading List

American Compensation Association (ACA) in cooperation with Hay Group, Hewitt Associates LLC, Tower Perrin and William M. Mercer, Inc., Research Project Report: Raising the Bar: Using Competencies to Enhance Employee Performance, May 1996.

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Goleman, Daniel, Emotional Intelligence, New York, Bantam, 1995.

Goleman, Daniel, Working with Emotional Intelligence. New York, Bantam Books, 1998.

Hay/McBer Client Case Studies, How Do Competency-Based Processes Pay Off? Massachusetts, Hay/McBer, 1995.

McClelland, David C., Ph.D., "Testing for Competence Rather Than Intelligence," American Psychologist. vol 28: 1-14

Spencer, Lyle M., Jr. and Signe M. Spencer, Competence at Work: Models for Superior Performance. New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1993.

General Tips on Interview Etiquette

Arrange for a quiet location free of interruptions.

Put the candidate at ease. Create a relaxed, friendly atmosphere and use a conversational rather than interrogative tone.

Listen actively. Communicate interest and attentiveness both verbally and non-verbally. Check your understanding when needed. Use open-ended questions that will allow the person to really tell you something about themselves.

Keep an open mind. Avoid snap judgments and try to maintain objectivity about the interviewee's ability to do the job. If you are perplexed or surprised at the person's behavior or statements, ask questions to be sure you truly understand.

Create a positive impression of your organization and yourself. The interviewee should feel that he or she is being treated with consideration, fairness and professionalism.

Be sensitive to physical and cultural differences.

The MIT Selection Process

The process of interviewing and selecting candidates can be broken into three phases: Pre-Interview and Search, Interviewing, and Decision Making.

The Pre-Interview and Search Process

- 1. Define technical and list core competency requirements for position and prepare search plan:**
 - Define and gain understanding and consensus of the job scope and responsibilities.
 - Define required technical competencies and list core behavioral competencies.
 - Prepare a search plan using guidelines listed at <http://web.mit.edu/personnel/www/recruit/Searchpl.htm>.
- 2. Identify and utilize recruiting sources:**
 - Determine how the job will be advertised (internal posting, ads, job fairs, headhunters).
 - Define the roles in receiving and screening resumes.
- 3. Obtain approval of Search Plan:**
 - Submit to senior officer of department, lab or center, and to Personnel Officer.
- 4. Screen resumes:**
 - Evaluate for required education, experience, and technical competence.
 - Decide who should be invited for interviews.
- 5. Set up interviews:**
 - If you will be interviewing as a team or committee, assign roles for conducting the interview (i.e. who will probe for technical competencies, who will describe the job to the candidate, who will ask about behavioral competencies).

The Interview Process

- 6. Prepare for each interview:**
 - Review information about the job opening and the required competencies.
 - Review the candidate's resume.

- Clarify your role with others on the team; decide which competencies you will probe for.

7. Introduction:

- Establish an informal, friendly tone.
- Make sure you and the candidate are clear on logistics and timing. Say, “As I understand it, we will have an hour together, then you are to meet with...”
- Describe the format of the interview.

8. Review the candidate’s current job:

The purpose of asking the candidate to describe his or her current (or most recent) job is to:

- get him or her talking, “warmed up”;
- begin to get the candidate focused on specifics;
- give you some context for events that will be discussed later in the interview.

Some tips:

- Focus on what the candidate is currently doing, or has done within the past two years.
- Use the resume as a guide to ensure you have a clear picture of who this person is.
- Begin to train the candidate to focus on specifics...
“What did you do as the task force leader, what was your role...?”

9. Confirm the candidate’s technical competencies:

Though you will have an overview of the candidate’s technical competencies from the resume, it can be worthwhile learning about key technical competencies in greater depth. Here are some ways to do that:

- Verify education/training received. For example:

“It says on your resume that you have taken courses in Finance. What courses did you take, when did you take them, what was the nature of the training, and how well did you do?”).

- Ask for a sample or work, or ask them to demonstrate technical skill or knowledge to you.
- Ask for a description of work done. For example:

“Tell me about a time you programmed a project in C++. Tell me about the requirements, how you approached the task, what challenges you encountered, and how it turned out.”

You can also ask references about technical abilities after the interview.

Obviously, when probing for evidence of technical competencies, it is important to have the interviewer be someone who can properly judge the competence of others in the specific technical areas.

10. Ask behavioral competency questions:

See [Using CompQuick](#) for details.

11. Present MIT:

Interviewing is a two-way process. While your primary objective is to ensure that you gain sufficient valid evidence to recommend the correct hiring decision with a given candidate, it is also important to answer that person's questions and present a positive image of yourself and MIT. Therefore, it is important that you think through answers to the questions that might arise, like:

“So tell me, why should I come to work here?”

The best answer to that question is to answer honestly why you think the individual should want to work at MIT. The answers you provide should reflect your reasons for respecting MIT as an employer. Possible answers might be:

- Environment of learning, ability to try new things, be on the cutting edge.
- Freedom to work on a variety of interesting things.
- Academia presents interesting challenges and opportunities not available in the private sector.
- Belief in the MIT mission and values.
- Pride at working for a great institution.
- Collegial atmosphere.

12. Close the interview:

Leave candidate feeling positive about the interview process:

- Ask the candidate if there's anything else he or she would like to know.
- Provide time for the candidate's questions.
- Ask in supportive tone: "In closing, what else would you like us to know about you?"
- Clarify the selection process and identify the next step(s).
- Thank the candidate for his or her time.

The Decision-Making Process

13. Document your interview:

Before you leave the interview process to move on to something else:

- Document enough examples of the evidence to jog your memory. Too much is better than too little.
- Rate the candidate against each individual competency. Since multiple competencies may be found in any story, look through all of the competencies to see if you have gained evidence of other competencies, and if so document this.
- Rate the candidate against each competency based strictly on the evidence (what he/she actually did/said).

14. Convene all interviewers to compare notes and arrive at a select/no select decision for each candidate:

- All interviewers meet and compare evidence.
- Discuss and resolve discrepancies of opinion.
- Discuss any other concerns (e.g., salary demands, relocation, etc.).
- Evaluate the candidate as a hiring risk (based on evidence or lack of competencies).
- Consider how realistic "growing into" the job is - avoid hiring "potential" for which you have no evidence.
- Consider the possibility that none of the candidates are worth the risk.
- Selecting someone with some limitations may point to early developmental efforts or opportunities for early focus in setting performance expectations.
- Beware the halo effect. Do not let strengths in one area make you wish to overlook weaknesses in other areas. At the very least, you should see some evidence of every core competency in each new hire.

15. Submit Post-Search Report.

See the guidelines listed at

<http://web.mit.edu/personnel/www/recruit/Searchre.htm>.

MATERIALS

CompQuick

FOCUSING INTERVIEWS ON MIT CORE COMPETENCIES



Interviewer's Guide

Contents

- ◆ CompQuick Steps
- ◆ Competency Interviewing Tips
- ◆ General Tips on Interview Etiquette

Steps for Planning, Conducting and Assessing CompQuick Interviews

A couple of important points:

Screen your candidates for technical skills and basic qualifications prior to interviews. There is no point in expending the effort to assess someone's behavioral competencies if he or she is not a realistic candidate for the position.

Be sure to be consistent across interviews in the ordering and framing of your questions.

Keep in mind the basic principle of interviewing for competencies:

Past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior.

Step 1: Get Your Materials

You have all you need in your hands.

The [CompQuick Interview Packet](#) can also be downloaded in Adobe Acrobat (.PDF) format from

<http://web.mit.edu/personnel/irt/compquick/>

Be sure to print or copy the Interview Form for each interviewer and candidate.

Step 2: Plan Your Competency Interviews

- Figure out how much time you will devote to probing for competencies. Best practice is to probe for **2-3 competencies**, allowing about 15 minutes per competency.
- Prioritize the competencies. Looking at the five core competencies (listed on the Interview Form), pick the 2-3 competencies that seem most relevant to the position you are interviewing for, and rank them in terms of importance.
- Review the competency "starting questions". The starting questions provided on the Interview Form are intended to guide the candidate to tell a story that is likely to provide evidence of a particular competency. Choose the question you

like best, or feel is most appropriate. If you like, you can ask the interviewee to choose between two or more questions. (But be consistent across candidates with how you do this!) Feel free to adjust the question wording slightly to fit the position or candidate.

In the stories that your candidates tell you will very likely hear information about competencies other than the one you are specifically asking about. That is normal, and a valuable source of information that you can record.

Step 3: Prepare for Each Interview

Review the position description and the candidate's resume, planning general, open-ended questions, as well as questions about particular past experience, technical competencies, or other qualifications. (See *The MIT Selection Process*, pg. 31, for tips on interviewing for technical competencies.)

Review the [CompQuick Interview Packet](#), especially the description of each competency, the [Competency Interviewing Tips](#), and [General Tips on Interview Etiquette](#). Remind yourself of which competencies you will specifically probe for.

It is fine—in fact, it's good practice—to let each candidate know ahead of time that part of their interview will be something called "interviewing for competencies". (You can use the wording suggested in Step 4). It's even okay to tell the candidates the names of the competencies you are looking for (e.g. Ability to Influence, Organizational Awareness) so they can be prepared. But don't give too much detail about what you are looking for, and be consistent about how much information you give to different candidates.

Some Useful Open-Ended Interview Questions:

- **What interests you about this position?**
- **Tell me about your last job.**
- **What did you like most/least about your last job?**
- **What's most important to you in a work environment?**
- **What particular skills, abilities or background do you think would make you a good fit for this position?**
- **What are your longer-term career goals? How would this position fit with those?**

Step 4: Conduct the Interviews

- Let the candidate know up front that you will be doing something "a bit different" toward the end of the interview. For example,

For the last part of the interview, we'll be doing a type of interviewing called competency interviewing. We'll be asking you to tell us some stories about work-related experiences in order to understand better how you approach your work.

- Conduct the interview as you normally would, including
 - describing the job and organization for the candidate;
 - asking open-ended questions about interests, abilities, preferences and goals;
 - asking about work history, technical competencies and other qualifications.
- Introduce the competency part of the interview. Here is some wording you could use:

We want to take the rest of the interview to do something called competency interviewing. We will ask you to tell us a couple of stories about work-related events or situations. We want to get some concrete examples of experiences so we can better understand how you approach your work and some of the skills and abilities you bring to it.

As you tell your stories, we will probably ask several questions to get at some of the details of the situations. We aren't probing for more information because you're giving the wrong answer. We are probing because we want to understand the situation fully—including what you did, said, thought and felt.

Try to stick to telling about **your** role in specific past events. We'll help you out.

I may take some notes to help me remember what you say.

- For each competency you are probing for (in order of priority), ask a starting question from the CompQuick Interview Packet to elicit a story about a past work-related event (e.g. "Tell me about a time when you tried to get someone to change his or her mind.")

Some tips:

- Ask for an overview of the event so you can get a sense of what to follow up on. Get the background before you get into the details. What was the context of this event? How did you become involved? What was the end point? How did it turn out? The event may be a single meeting, a project spanning several months, or anything in between.
- Ask for events within the past two years, if possible, in which the candidate played an active part. More recent is better, so the candidate can remember details. Give the candidate time to think of an event or situation that addresses your question.
- Be patient and supportive. Most people are not used to this style of interviewing and it can be awkward.
- After focusing in on each event or part of an event, follow up with probing questions to get more information about the candidate's behavior in that event. See [Competency Interviewing Tips](#) for more details.
- Take brief notes. If more than one person is conducting the interview, it can be helpful to have one person do the probing and another person do the note-taking.
- Keep the focus on relevant stories. If the candidate starts into a story that clearly will not provide evidence of the competency you are interested in, remind him or her of the starting question, and restart with the same question (or an alternative starting question, if there is one). For example:

Remember that we are interested in a time that you needed to convince someone to change his or her mind. In the situation you started to tell about, it sounds like you weren't directly involved in the convincing. Is that right? Can you tell me about another time you did that?

- Budget your time. Move to the next story if you are running out of time, or if you are not getting useful information from the story the candidate has selected.

ENDING

- At the end of the interview, give the candidate a chance to ask any questions or add anything else relevant about his or her experience or qualifications.

Step 5: Assess What You Heard

Immediately after each interview, review your notes or confer with your colleagues about the following:

What evidence did you hear for each competency that you specifically probed for? What were the actions, thoughts or feelings that you think provided evidence of each competency? How strongly did you hear that competency (i.e. did you hear some ambiguous evidence once, or clear evidence several times)?

Remember that listening for competencies in this sort of interview is as much art as science (though there is a great deal you can do to increase your skill at it—see [Next Steps: Enhancing Your Competency Interviewing Skills](#)). There will very likely be some evidence that you can't clearly match up with a competency, or is ambiguous or unclear. That's okay. If something seems significant anyway, take note of it.

What other competencies from the core competency model did you hear evidence of? Sometimes you might hear more about a competency you weren't specifically looking for than about the competency that your question was aimed at. That's fine, and can be important information in itself.

What other things of interest did you hear? Within the stories that the candidate told, there will likely be information about skills, abilities or expertise that may be relevant to the position.

NOTE: Some people aren't good at being interviewed for competencies. A particular candidate may have difficulty remembering relevant stories, or may have difficulty giving good, concrete, first-person information from which you can infer competencies. If that happens, you can't necessarily conclude that the candidate does **not** demonstrate those competencies. The best you can do is to say that you are not sure, and to rely on other sources of information.

Step 6: Contact Us

We want to know who is using CompQuick, and for what types of positions! We also want to hear about your experience interviewing for competencies, and any comments or suggestions you may have.

Once you have completed your interviews for a position using CompQuick, send an e-mail to compquick@mit.edu indicating

- your name, position and department;
- the position title you interviewed for;
- whether you interviewed solo or as part of a team/committee;
- how many interviews you conducted;
- whether you successfully hired someone;
- any comments or suggestions you have for us.

You can also fill out the comments form on the CompQuick website at <http://web.mit.edu/personnel/irt/compquick/>

We appreciate your input!

Competency Interviewing Tips

1. Zero in on what seems significant.

- After getting a brief overview of the event, follow up on specific pieces of it.

Examples:

- ♦ Tell me more about how you got involved.
 - ♦ You mentioned a meeting with the consultant; tell me more about that.
 - ♦ Take me into that discussion. What was your role?
- If it is not clear to you what you should follow up on, ask the candidate to tell you what part was significant. For example:
“Is there some part of that project that stands out for you as significant—a milestone or decision point that you were involved in?”

2. Keep the candidate focused on actual past events.

- Keep questions brief, specific, and in the past tense.

Examples:

- ♦ What did you do then?
 - ♦ What were you thinking when she said that?
 - ♦ What did you say?
 - ♦ How did you feel when that happened?
 - ♦ What led up to that decision?
 - ♦ What happened next?
- Ask for dialogue. If the person can't remember, say “Give me a sense of the conversation.”
 - If you are getting generalities, philosophizing or hypothetical actions (e.g. "Well, the way we used to approach it was to..."), bring the candidate back to the specifics (e.g. "What did you do in this case?").

3. Keep the candidate focused on his/her role in those past events.

- If the candidate is talking about what “we” did, ask, “What was your role in that?”
- If you are still not getting clear information about what the candidate did, stop him or her and say, "I'd like you to stay with what you yourself actually did."

4. Probe for thoughts and feelings behind actions.

Examples:

- How did you reach that conclusion?
- How did you know to do that?
- What was your reaction to that?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- What were you thinking before going into that meeting?
- What did you find satisfying/frustrating about that?

Questions about feelings or reactions can provide a lot of information about what a candidate values or is motivated by.

5. Keep your responses to a minimum.

- In order to make the best use of time, say no more than necessary to keep the candidate on track.
- It's fine to be reassuring if the candidate seems uncomfortable, but try to avoid verbalizing your own reactions (e.g. agreeing or disagreeing, expressing surprise or approval, telling related stories, etc.). You don't want the candidate to know your feelings or reactions to what they are saying. Instead, focus on learning more about the candidate's behavior in the event.
- Refrain from asking "leading questions" - questions that point a candidate toward a particular answer, or express a bias or judgment. Some examples:

Leading

Tell me what kind of preparation you did for the meeting.

Didn't you check with anyone else before making a decision?

What did you say to them when they criticized your proposal?

Better

Tell me about events leading up to the meeting.

Could you say more about how you ended up making that decision?

What happened next?

6. Keep track of time.

- Keep an eye on your budgeted time. If you are not getting any useful information, you can stop probing about a given event and either ask for a new story to address the question, or move to another starting question.

General Tips on Interview Etiquette

Arrange for a quiet location free of interruptions.

Put the candidate at ease. Create a relaxed, friendly atmosphere and use a conversational rather than interrogative tone.

Listen actively. Communicate interest and attentiveness both verbally and non-verbally. Check your understanding when needed. Use open-ended questions that will allow the person to really tell you something about themselves.

Keep an open mind. Avoid snap judgments and try to maintain objectivity about the interviewee's ability to do the job. If you are perplexed or surprised at the person's behavior or statements, ask questions to be sure you truly understand.

Create a positive impression of your organization and yourself. The interviewee should feel that he or she is being treated with consideration, fairness and professionalism.

Be sensitive to physical and cultural differences.

CompQuick

FOCUSING INTERVIEWS ON MIT CORE COMPETENCIES



Interview Form

Interviewee Name: _____

Date of Interview: _____

For Position: _____

Interviewer(s): _____

Interview Summary

(complete after interview)

Overall Comments

Competencies

	Probed for this competency?	Heard evidence of this competency?
Ability to Influence	YES NO	DEFINITELY MAYBE NO
Comments: _____ _____		
Communication for Results	YES NO	DEFINITELY MAYBE NO
Comments: _____ _____		
Information Seeking	YES NO	DEFINITELY MAYBE NO
Comments: _____ _____		
Interpersonal Understanding	YES NO	DEFINITELY MAYBE NO
Comments: _____ _____		
Organizational Awareness	YES NO	DEFINITELY MAYBE NO
Comments: _____ _____		

