CompQuick

FOCUSING INTERVIEWS ON MIT CORE COMPETENCIES

HR@MIT

WORKING TOWARDS OUR FUTURE

Interviewer's Guide

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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	Better
Tell me what kind of preparation you did for the meeting.	Tell me about events leading up to the meeting.
Didn't you check with anyone else before making a decision?	Could you say more about how you ended up making that decision?
What did you say to them when they criticized your proposal?	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.

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Interview Form

Interviewee Name: _____

Date of Interview: _____

For Position: _____

Interviewer(s): _____

Interview Summary

(complete after interview)

Overall Comments

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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: _____		

Interview Questions

Interview Notes

CORE COMPETENCY: **ABILITY TO INFLUENCE**

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.

Starting Questions:

1) Tell me about a time when you wanted to convince someone to do something.

2) Tell me about a time when tried to persuade a person or group to see your point of view.

3) Tell me about a when you had the opportunity to inspire or motivate others.

Listen For:
- Candidate using appeals to reason, data, others' self interest and concrete examples to persuade.

Signals that this competency is lacking or underdeveloped:
- Acting according to personal agenda (unrelated to goals of organization)
- Unable to defend a good idea if challenged
- Failing to adapt presentation to audience

Evidence:

CORE COMPETENCY: **COMMUNICATION FOR RESULTS (for non-supervisory positions)**

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.

Starting Questions:

1) Tell me about a time when you had an idea that you thought would help your organization.

2) Tell me about a time when you developed or helped develop a plan for your organization. Describe what you did to get commitment to the plan and see that it was carried out.

Listen for:
- Candidate freely shares appropriate information, and seems to value doing so.
- Candidate presents information clearly and assertively.
- Candidate is tactfully directive when the situation requires it.

Signal that this competency is lacking or underdeveloped:
- Working only on an individual level and unable to make effective connections with others.

Evidence:

CORE COMPETENCY: **COMMUNICATION FOR RESULTS (for supervisory positions)**

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.

Starting Questions:

1) Tell me about a time when you had to translate an organizational vision or goal into a practical action plan.

2) Tell me about a time when you developed performance goals for an employee.

3) Tell me about a time when you developed or helped develop a plan for your organization. Describe what you did to get commitment to the plan and see that it was carried out.

Listen for:
- Candidate solicits appropriate input from others.
- Candidate presents information clearly and assertively.
- Candidate helps employees make connections between their work and organizational goals.

Signals that this competency is lacking or underdeveloped:
- Candidate is unwilling or unable to get people to commit to a common plan or purpose.
- Candidate cannot marshal required resources.

Evidence:

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CORE COMPETENCY: **INFORMATION SEEKING**

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.

Starting Questions:
1) Tell me about a problem that came to your attention in the workplace. What did you do?

2) What type of information has helped you monitor the progress of your direct reports (or team members/co-workers)? Tell me about a system you have used to gather this information.

Listen for:
- Candidate asks direct questions.
- Candidate takes appropriate effort to get reliable sources of information to uncover facts.

Signals that this competency is lacking or underdeveloped:
- Candidate takes action without sufficient information

Evidence:

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CORE COMPETENCY: **INTERPERSONAL UNDERSTANDING**

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.

Starting Question:

1) Tell me about a time when you found yourself having to "read between the lines."

2) Tell me about a time when you dealt with someone who was upset, but not saying so.

Listen for:
- Candidate uses non-verbal cues, i.e., body language, pitch and tone of voice, etc. to help understand other person. (Ask, "How did you know that?")
- Candidate attempts to uncover emotional rationale for other person's action.

Signals that this competency is lacking or underdeveloped:
- Candidate misunderstands or surprised by other's feelings or actions
- Candidate shows no explicit awareness of others thoughts or feelings

Evidence:

CORE COMPETENCY: **ORGANIZATIONAL AWARENESS**

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.

Starting Question:
1) Tell me about a time when you used your knowledge of your organization's culture to help you get something done.

2) Tell me about a time you needed to solve a business problem. How did you use the organizational structure to help solve the problem?

3) Tell me about a time when you were instrumental in achieving an organizational change.

Listen for:
- Candidate knows who must be consulted with, advised on or asked for an action/decision to occur.
- Candidate has learned the formal and informal structure of decision making in organization.

Signals that this competency is lacking or underdeveloped:
- Too much reliance on formal structures and systems to get things done.
- Failing to learn or ignoring organizational politics.

Evidence: