

Competency-based Interviews

Competency-based interviews are an integral part of the HART selection process. So what is a competency-based interview? And how, as an applicant, might you best approach one?

Introduction

Competency-based interviews (CBI) are based on the idea that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour. Accordingly, the interviewer's goal is to obtain specific examples of when and how you demonstrated particular behaviours.

Interview questions are carefully designed to probe specific skills, competencies and characteristics which are relevant to job success for the position in question. All candidates are asked the same questions and notes are taken in order to evaluate candidates.

The word competency is widely used and refers to the behaviours that are necessary for effective individual and organisational performance. A competency is also something you can measure and lists of competencies form a common language for describing how people perform in different situations. Every job can be described in terms of key competencies. This means that competencies can be used for all forms of assessment, including appraisals, training needs analysis and, of course, selection.

This short document has been produced to help you prepare for the HART competency based interview. The core competencies for HART are shown over the page. It is therefore well worth preparing for this type of interview by, for example, being familiar with the competencies, thinking about possible questions and practicing how you would answer them.

Competencies Critical For an effective HART manager

Because the HART programme is new, there is a great deal of work being carried out to try and understand the core competencies identified as critical for the various HART roles, including the HART Manager. 10 competencies have been identified as important for the HART manager role. These include:

- 1. Team working** (*Team orientation, learning and development*): *Willingness to participate as a full member of a team; effective contributor even when team is working on something of no direct personal interest.*
- 2. Communicating** (*Effectively and Persuasively*): *Ability to express ideas or facts in a clear and persuasive manner. Can reason with others and bring them round to own expressed point of view. Shares information and understands the importance of listening to and understanding the needs of others.*
- 3. Adaptability** (*Flexibility & Openness to Change*): *Ability to modify own behaviour, i.e. adopt a different style or approach, to reach a goal. Proactively supports change and effectively adapts own approach to suit changing circumstances or requirements if necessary.*
- 4. Planning & Organising:** *Ability to establish efficiently an appropriate course of action for self and/or others to accomplish a goal. Appreciation of need for controls and maintenance of control over processes, people and tasks, and actions taken to ensure this.*
- 5. Decision Making** (*Decisiveness, Problem Analysis, Problem Solving, Judgement*): *Ability to evaluate data and courses of action and to reach logical decisions. Makes timely decisions that responds to short-term*

pressures yet does not compromise long-term goals. Effective in identifying causes of and offering solutions to problems.

6. **Networking (Relationship Building):** *Willingness and ability to mix easily with other people, builds relationships and establishes useful contacts.*
7. **Strategic Perspective (Organisational Sensitivity and Vision):** *Takes account of a wide range of longer-term issues, opportunities and contingencies. Identifies the means of implementing plans in line with the vision and direction.*
8. **Delivering For Quality and Results:** *Has the ability to get things done within time and cost limitations. Actively influencing events rather than passively accepting, sees opportunities and acts on them. Originates action. Ability to create and maintain a high level of appropriately directed activity. Shows determination and the capacity to work hard. Setting of high goals or standards of performance for self, others and the organisation. Dissatisfied with average performance.*
9. **Supporting and Developing Others:** *Develops the skills and competencies of others through training, coaching and other development activities related to current and future roles. Contributes to a working environment in which colleagues accept collective responsibility for output and work cooperatively with each other to ensure high levels of performance.*
10. **Integrity:** *Ability to operate fairly and honestly with colleagues. Seen as fair and non judgemental. Able to maintain social, organisation and ethical values in all work activities.*

Achieving effective leadership?

An outcome of the effective (*positive*) application of the above qualities is what we have considered to be an element of **Leadership that enables and engages** (i.e. those who can motivate, enable and inspire others to succeed by utilising appropriate management styles/behaviours. They are also visionary and act as a positive role model).

We would predict that positive outcomes of the above competencies would be seen in terms of having HART personnel that:

- Are excited by the HART role
- Committed to first class team performance
- Engaged and motivated by their work
- Share a vision for HART locally and nationally'
- Integrate well within own environment and with partners
- Strive for high standards of performance and professionalism in all that they do
- Have a positive sense of capability to perform in the role
- Are prepared for HART responding

Examples of competency questions

Adaptability

How quickly and how positively will you adapt to changes in work practices, work roles and work environments?

Q. Tell me about a time when you had to change your approach to motivating your staff in order to achieve a project/corporate/business objective. .

Communication

As a HART member you will need to communicate in an engaging and convincing

way both to your Service work colleagues as well as to other multi-agency partners?

Q. Please tell me about a time when you could not persuade someone of your point of view.

Team orientation & development

The success of HART is dependent upon staff working well together in teams. Being socially competent and able to build and maintain relationships in and beyond the workplace is critical.

Q. Please describe a time when you have actively encouraged the sharing of knowledge and ideas across teams within your organisation?

Preparing for competency-based

Interviews

To prepare for competency-based interviews, first review the recruitment information (i.e. job description, person specification, etc.) carefully. The person specification will outline the skills and competencies required for the HART role.

Next, identify the situations and experiences that you will refer to in the interview to demonstrate these skills and traits. Competency-focused, well-structured answers are extremely powerful and will impress the interviewer.

To support your preparation for the interview you should also consider revisit the **self-assessment questionnaire** that was contained within the recruitment pack. Looking through the questionnaire will help you to think in a way that is needed for competency interviews. It will also help you to practice your answers.

When considering your answers think carefully about how you can structure your response to give the interviewer the best possible chance to

learn about you, your knowledge, skills and abilities.

The CBI model will provide a structure to support your answers:

Circumstance - describe the circumstance (e.g. situation, task, problem, etc.) that you have encountered

Behaviour - describe the action you took, obstacles that you had to overcome, etc.

Impact - highlight outcomes achieved or any important learning as a direct consequence of your actions

Example interview question

Please describe a time when you have actively encouraged the sharing of knowledge and ideas across teams within your organisation?

Describe the **C**ircumstance (e.g. situation, task, problem, etc) briefly. Most of your answers should focus on your **B**ehaviour – that is what you actually did and the **I**mpact (or results, consequences or learning) of your actions. It is important to keep remembering that the interviewer(s) are interested to hear about you, your behaviour, and your contributions. This is your opportunity to highlight and demonstrate to the panel your core skills and your qualities.

When answering the various competency questions during the interview it will also prove invaluable to try to think about and reflect upon different examples or experiences. This will help to demonstrate the breadth and depth of your core skills it will also help to make your descriptions more interesting.

Possible good answer

It was during a time when I worked at the corporate centre for a large building society and

we were undergoing a significant time of change and restructuring within the organisation. A great number of our internal services were under pressure to become more efficient and many functions were becoming outsourced to external companies. At that time I was a team manager within an Information Technology (IT) department – I was one many team managers. Our department was under lots of pressure to make efficiency savings. In my department it was announced that a new external company of contractors would be taking over a some of our functions as they were deemed to be ‘more expert than us’ in this particular area of IT – it wasn’t one of my functions. However, this news had obvious negative impacts, and staff across the division were angry, anxious and disappointed about the announcement. The new contractors began working in the division and quickly it became apparent that the new contractors were struggling to fit in with our way of working but also it was found out that they had some quite significant knowledge gaps and were not as expert as was initially made out. The very fact that the new contractors were struggling made the internal staff members happy as they saw this as an opportunity to fight back and highlight to the senior management that they had made a mistake in their decisions. Staff therefore decided not to support the new contractors in the hope that they would eventually mess things up their contracts terminated. Other team managers seemed to ignore the behaviour of their staff – I guess they were also concerned about their jobs and were also angry about how they had been treated. However, understanding the critical functions that our IT plays not only for the business and for our customers I felt it was too much of a risk to allow this situation to develop any further. I

took the decision to hold a crisis meeting first with the existing team managers within the division to establish the current situation, fears, challenges, concerns, opportunities that might arise, etc. The aim of this meeting was to facilitate a collective hearing of views as well as to establish a solution to this problem. Allowing the situation to continue would have spelt disaster for us all. Following this initial meeting I had agreed that I would facilitate a meeting between team managers and senior managers as well as between team managers and the new contractors. Following several meetings I worked as a mediator between the contractors and team managers to facilitate a closer working relationship. For example, I chaired and held regular divisional meetings (every two weeks) to help establish a clear strategy of where we were going as a division and how we could both work together to deliver this. I also facilitated away days for staff members and the contractors so that they could understand each others’ perspectives but also to devise a way of working together that would be beneficial to us all (e.g. skill sharing and development). As part of this process I also managed to negotiate with the senior managers’ job transitions for our internal staff. It became apparent that the external company had a number of various and quite exciting IT contracts/projects and once they appreciated the level of our in-house skill and experience they keen for our staff to help them with their existing projects. Although the initial phases were very turbulent, the dust did settle and there was a greater sense of cohesion, knowledge and skill sharing within the division. I guess this was a big lesson in ‘how’ and ‘how not to’ manage change!

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