



Competency Based Interviews (CBIs)

Society for Social Medicine, ECR Workshop
Trinity College Dublin, 01.09.2015



Competency

- Personal characteristics which enable a person to fulfill a specific job/role and reach their full potential in it
- Combination of skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours which enable you to work effectively
- Different from a skill
 - Emphasis is on what you have done and/or achieved in the past as opposed to the skills which you may possess and may not use effectively

+ Background to CBIs

- Decline in unstructured, open-ended style
- Interviewer had to follow up to establish concrete and specific examples which *might* indicate a skill had been demonstrated
 - *Would you like to tell the panel something about yourself?*
 - *What are your views on X, Y or Z?*
- Unstandardised interview – agenda could be set by the candidate
- Uncertainty over likely performance ‘on the job’



CBI approach

- **Aim:** to find out what you, as a particular candidate actually did (and could therefore do again) in a specific situation which required a particular competence.
- **Underlying assumption:** past actions are a good predictor of current and future functioning and behaviour
- Standardised, more equitable approach for all candidates
- Assesses the candidate in specific and behavioural ways
- Places control with the interviewers
- Approach based on research and job and role analysis
 - *E.g. in what way do the highly effective performers in this job differ from the average performers*

+ How do I know if this will be a CBI?

- Both the job advertisement and application should indicate whether an competency based approach is being followed and what specific competencies are being sought
- Examples:
 - Planning and coordinating
 - Interpersonal skills
 - Self-management
 - Report writing
 - Data management

+ Your task (the candidate)

- Demonstrate whether or not, and to what degree, you possess the relevant skill or attribute by describing **actual behaviours**
- Concentrate on situations where you have direct personal engagement rather than those you have witnessed
- Provide clear examples from your own personal and/or professional experiences



General interview format

- Opening remarks where chair provide the structure of the interview
 - May state specific areas or competencies they will focus on
 - Look at your career to date
 - Focus on the relevant competencies (prompt your response)
 - Opportunity to add anything else relevant at the end

+ Types of Questions

- **Linking your experience to the competencies sought**
 - You described (your example) ... Can you give me another situation or example which demonstrates?
 - In what way is the competence you have described important to the role of ...?

- **Clear outcomes and results**
 - How did you settle on this particular criteria?
 - Was there another way in which that could have been achieved?

- **High standards**
 - How would you compare the achievement of that team to other teams you have worked with?

- **What did you learn from this experience?**
 - How would you approach this differently next time?

+ What happens after the interview?

- Your answers are scored using a pre-determined system
- Focus on demonstrated evidence in each competency and how well you have been doing or done a job
- Final score determines your place on the list relative to other candidates
- You get the job, great!
- If you don't get the job, **get the feedback**



Preparing for interview

- Reflect on the content and areas you are likely to be asked about
- Read widely and talk to informed people
- Reflect on past achievements to determine the skills and competencies you have displayed
- Past mistakes – conduct an honest appraisal and develop a clearly thought out position on what you learned and how you have modified your approach as a result

+ Preparing for interview

- How you have prepared will be analysed
- **Directly:** *How did you prepare for this interview?*
- **Indirectly:** *What is your understanding of the role? What is your understanding of the project?*
- The board can legitimately expect that the candidate knows:
 - The precise nature of the job and the tasks involved
 - The relationship of this job to others in the organization/institute
 - The skills and competencies required
 - The relevant context (research directive, policy context)
 - Deliverables



On the day

■ Positive behaviours

- Attentive listening (posture, appropriate eye contact, nodding)
 - This will help you avoid missing the point or avoid having to ask for clarification mid answer
- Pause before responding and during your response if needed
- Seek clarification in an appropriate way: *I'm sorry, I'm not sure that I understand the question ...* Vs. *What do you mean by ...?*
- Your answers should be clear, direct, relevant and economic



On the day

■ Behaviour to avoid

- Interrupting, getting carried away during questions and over gesticulating
- Responding to the question you *think* you have heard
- Over-responding or lecturing (remember to take a break and wait for your turn)
- Steering away from a question to your own area of interest
- Bluffing E.g. “*To the best of my knowledge ...*”, “*I would imagine that ...*”
 - If you do not know the answer to a factual question:
 - Acknowledge your lack of familiarity
 - Explain in a assertive way why this is the case
 - Indicate, when possible, what you know precisely where you would find the relevant information



General tips

- Get there early (30 minutes before)
- Find a comfortable and quiet place to sit
- Avoid small talk and mixing with other candidates or people organising the interview day
- Plan something nice for afterwards!