



PNA Guidelines On Preparing For Interview



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Competencies

Definition:

"An underlying characteristic of a person which enables them to deliver superior performance in a given job, role or situation".

A competency includes the skills, knowledge, experience and other personal attributes which are critical to job success. Another way of defining competencies would be the behavioural actions which, if done well, result in superior performance.

Considerations

You should aim to produce a set of competencies which:

- Are comprehensive - cover all key skills required to perform the job, usually between 6-12 broad competency areas
- Reflect organisational culture - are clearly defined in the language of health and personal social services
- Are discrete - are independent from each other. Beware of competency overlap, it makes selection more difficult and causes confusion and ambiguity
- Are observable - it is important that the behaviour can be observed and recorded
- Are visionary/forward looking - should project into the future and take account of likely shifts in the needs of the organisation and consequently the skill base required.

Competency Content

Competencies can be generally grouped into four main areas:

- Task management skills - what behaviours lead to superior task management?
- People management skills - what behaviours lead to superior people management?
- Intellectual skills - what intellectual behaviours are necessary for superior performance?
- Motivation - what motivational behaviours are necessary for superior performance?

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Preparing for a Competency-Based Interview

Credit will be awarded by the interview board to candidates who demonstrate at interview that they possess the experience, competencies and skills listed in the Job Specification and as stated by the candidate in their application form.

Think clearly about the key skills needed for the job. These are likely to be the ones which will be assessed at the interview through questions to test your previous history of using these skills.

The interviewer will be concerned with pinning you down in terms of your previous actions in the skill areas they are assessing. It is important to understand that a behavioural question is very different from a theoretical one which many interviewers often ask. It uses words like "did", "having done", or "currently doing" and will involve you talking about a specific past experience.

Try to define each skill in behavioural terms i.e. when someone with sensitivity is likely to "Consider the feelings and needs of others; demonstrate a flexible approach to people handling; build trusting relationships". As you define the skill in these sort of terms so you will get a better picture of the likely behaviour the interviewer will be looking for.

The next step is to think about past experiences/examples, or projects, which you can use in the interview situation to illustrate such behaviour. If we go back to the example on sensitivity, can you give evidence in your career of building trusting relationships? How did you set about developing them? The interviewer, of course, will be keenly interested to know if you can demonstrate past behaviour which suggests an adequate competence in the skill under assessment. Some examples below will show you the technique.

Examples

If you were being assessed on the criterion of sensitivity, an interviewer could adopt a number of approaches. They could assess this competence by asking you the question "What would you do if you had someone working for you who was confrontational?" - a theoretical question. But an interviewer trained in criteria-based interviewing would frame the question as "When was the last time you had to deal with an aggressive or uncooperative member of staff? What did you do?"

Another example might be if the interviewer was looking at the criterion of influencing. Again there are at least two approaches. The theoretical one is to ask the question "What would you do if someone disagreed with you and you felt strongly on the subject?" The behavioural approach would be "Tell me about an important incident where you disagreed with a member of staff. What did you do?"

Coping with the Competency -Based Interview Itself

Before they ask a question, interviewers will decide on the skill to be assessed and then design a specific question which attempts to tease out of you your behaviour in that area. So, before you answer it, pause. Decide which skill is being assessed and only then decide which past experiences best demonstrates your competence in it. Avoid rushing into the answer - that first step of working out which skill is being assessed can be crucial in giving your best answer.

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Some examples of working out which skill assessed might help you. Look at the following questions and work out the skill being assessed - the likely one is shown at the end of the questions.

1. We all upset people at times. Tell me about an incident when you did... How did you try to correct it?

2. What specifically have you done to set an example to your staff?

3. What is the toughest decision you had to make in your present role? What were the alternatives?

4. Describe the toughest problem you have faced in the last six months. How did you handle it? What would you have done differently if you tackled it again?

Skills being assessed in the question above.

1. Sensitivity
2. Leadership
3. Judgement
4. Problem Analysis

Since the interviewer is concerned with what you actually "did" and "said", don't be put off if they record in detail your answers. Making comprehensive notes, often using your exact words, is important for the evaluation process after the interview.

There are a host of questions that you could be asked against many possible criteria. Some examples of questions you might be asked follow. Identify the difficult ones and try to work out a really good answer in terms of what you actually

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did. Before deciding your response, remember to choose a past example which best illustrates your competence in the skill being assessed.

Even if the interviewer doesn't adopt a competency-based approach, it is well worth preparing for one each time, as the specific examples identified will stand you in good stead during any sort of interview.

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Examples of Competency-Based Questions

Sensitivity

What is the toughest staff problem you have had to deal with in your present role?

How did you handle the situation? What was the outcome?

Describe a situation where you improved working relationships. What did you do?

What has been the biggest disagreement with your boss? What did you do?

Influencing

Tell me about a situation where you had to change someone's opinion on something important.

What did you do? What did you say?

What has been the best idea you have ever sold to your manager this year? How did you go about achieving it?

Influencing continued

Give me an example of an idea you have tried to sell to more senior management, but which has not been accepted.

Why did it not succeed? What did you do about it?

Delegation

How did you get other people to help you on theProject?

Cite to me an example where you delegated responsibility. How did you set about doing it?

What did you do to manage it?

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What has been your biggest mistake in delegating? What did you do to handle the situation?

Leadership

Tell me about a new idea you introduced. How did you approach your staff so that they would go with it?

When was the last time you disciplined a staff member? How did you handle that particular situation?

Judgement

What has been the most important decision you have had to take recently? How did you go about it?
Looking back at the steps you took before making the decision, what would you have done differently?

Give me an example of a good decision you made in the past 6 months. What were the alternatives?
How did you reach your decision?

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Interview Format

An interview usually lasts 30-40 minutes and can be describes as "WASP".

1. *Welcome*

Settling down and small talk - this is normally done by the Chairperson - two to three minutes.

2. *Acquiring Information*

Assessment of the candidate and what he or she has to offer / looking at the possibility of "fit" about 20 - 30 minutes.

- Going through the application form
- Specific questions related to the post and ability to carry out duties
- Criteria/competency/behavioural questions

3. *Supplementing*

Providing the candidate with an opportunity to ask question and to make a final submission/pitch regarding their suitability for the post - about 5-10 minutes

4. *Parting*

Discussing next steps - two to three minutes.

Preparation for Interviews

You would not attend any important meeting without considerable thought and preparation. Successful interviews call for the same approach.

Prepare for Success!

Research the organisation thoroughly, making use of all publicly available information, press cuttings, information from the web site and personal contacts. Ensure you are familiar with relevant government/health board/hospital reports and publications, in particular relevant legislation (e.g. the Freedom of Information Act) and its implications. If possible try and talk to line managers and job incumbents. Finally, study thoroughly the information pack which is available for many Health and Personal Social Services Vacancies - this will normally include a job description, person specification and information about the organisation. This information will be key in assisting you to prepare for interview and in helping you to anticipate likely questions.

In view of the particular job opportunity, consider beforehand:

- What impression you want to make
- What experience and accomplishments you plan to cover
- Which achievements you will use as evidence to validate your accomplishments
- How you will add colour to your examples
- How you will describe your personal qualities
- How you will describe your leaving story

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- How you will describe your career aspirations.

Design your Response

Decide how best to present your information to meet the interviewer's needs – and yours.

Just as you would not consider delivering a 15 minutes stand-up presentation to a group of important people without first organising your material, it makes little sense to conduct an interview by making it up as you go along. Have your homework done and have your answers ready for those questions that usually come up.

Do not plan the interview in too much detail, as it will undoubtedly not go the way you expected and you might come across as too prepared. Over-reliance on a script will only serve to confuse you and disrupt the flow of your responses.

Listen to questions carefully and give your response as naturally as you can. However, just relying on the interviewer's questions to guide you is a poor idea; professional recruiters will lead you skilfully while line managers often overlook key questions. In order to sell yourself properly, be prepared to volunteer pertinent information not covered by interviewer's questions. You will give a better impression if you are able to present the relevant information without being prompted and without too much thinking time.

Types of Questions

Open Questions

Good interviewers are trained to ask open-ended questions – question which should elicit useful information. They usually start with How, What and Why and allow you to open up. Give as full an answer as possible, but don't waffle.

Closed Questions

Closed questions are ones that need a yes or no answer. A good interviewer will ask them to check out information. A poor interviewer will ask a lot of them! If you do have a string of them, help the interviewer out by following on with other appropriate information about yourself.

Indirect Questions

Interviewers will rarely ask you to direct questions to which they need answers e.g.

“Are you any good at what you do?” “Should I believe you?”

To overcome this behavioural constraint, interviewers ask indirect questions like:

“Tell me about yourself” or “Why do you want to work here?”

Negative Questions

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Questions like: “*We all have disappointments in life, what has been your biggest?*”
“*What do people criticise you for? Or who was your worst boss?*”

Invite us to be negative and feel inadequate. Turn the question into a benefit, for example:

Questions: “What do people criticise you for?”

Answer: “People sometimes see me as impatient, but I have a great drive to get things done, for example....”.

This gives you the opportunity to open up a relevant achievement or experience – a positive contribution.

Question: “Who was your worst boss?”

Answer: “I have worked for some very demanding people and have learned a great deal from them, for example...”

Don't fall into the traps set by such questions. Prepare your answers so you end on a positive note.

Questions which mean what they say

These are often technically based and are requested for facts, evidence or proof of competence. Focus on giving evidence of what you have done and how you have done it i.e. your personal style.

Hypothetical Questions

Always try to relate the hypothetical problem to a similar situation in a previous job. “*It sounds very similar to a situation I encountered at XYZ and the approach I took there was.....*” Don't try to solve the problem for them – you aren't in full possession of the facts.

Double Questions

Questions like: “I want you to tell me about your job in Kuwait and what career decision you had to make when you finished the project” need a response like: “Let me start with the job and then I'll move on to the career decisions”.

Don't forget the second point. You may need to ask which you should answer first.

Avoid

Textbook answers – “I believe in motivating people... Drucker is my model....” T

Cite your successes and the hurdles you cleared. The interviewer will infer from your actions that you are a good developer of people.

Clichés – “I want to challenge and stimulation”, I want to work with people.” Instead, give examples of the work you do now or areas you would like to move into which are challenging.

Inconsistency – where the image you have of yourself is different from the one you project. For example, you tell the interviewer, without facial emotion or warmth, that you have an open-door policy and you like to be on good terms with

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your people.

Questions you may be asked

You should be prepared to give good answers to specific questions. Below, we set out a sample of questions to prepare you for the job interview. Prepare your answers to these and others that you will have thought of that are specific to the job.

About job attitude

- What do you look for in a job?
- What position do you expect to have in five years?
- Why do you want to work for this organisation?
- What do you want to avoid in your next job?
- What are your long-term objectives?

About your last position

- What did you like most/least about your last job?
- In your last position, what two problems did you identify that had previously been overlooked?
- What two things did you learn in your last position?
- What do you think of your former boss?
- Why did you leave your last position?

About you, personally

- Tell me a little about yourself
- If you could start over again in your career, what would you do differently?
- What are you looking for in a job?
- How would your colleagues describe you? In what ways would you disagree?
- What makes you believe you are management potential?
- How do you react when people disagree with you?
- How do you handle discretion?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

Your Philosophy and job approach

- How have you changed the nature of your job?
- What do you think “communication” means?
- What do you look for when hiring someone?
- What do you feel are the criteria for getting ahead?
- What action would you take if you joined our organisation?
- What is your philosophy on management?
- What is your style of management?

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About your accomplishments

- How creative are you?
- What were your five biggest accomplishments in your last job? (Or in your career to date)
- Are you a good leader?
- What size budget are you used to administering?
- What experience could you bring to this position?
- Give me an example of where you have managed change in difficult circumstances.

About your educations

- What subjects did you find most interesting in school/university/professional training? Which least? Why?
- In looking back, what do you feel you got of your education/training?
- In what ways do you feel you might further your education or training from this point? How do you plan to go about this? How do you feel about taking additional courses? In what? When?

Miscellaneous question

- What do you know about this organisation? Our Services? Our patient groups?
- What do you know about the structure of the health service in Ireland?
- What do you think the outlook is for the health service over the next five years?
- Do you think you could work for someone younger than you?
- What do you hope to get out of this job?
- What other jobs (organisations) are you considering?

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Should YOU ask questions?

Given that most positions in the Health and personal Services are filled through panel interviews, the panel will generally be interviewing against a strict timetable and there may be limited opportunities and indeed time for you to ask questions. To overcome this you will normally have been sent information (job description, person specification, the organisation) beforehand.

Make sure that you have read this thoroughly beforehand and are therefore not asking what would appear to the panel to be very obvious questions. If you have not been sent information you should certainly do your own research and talk to people who can help you.

If you do ask questions aim to keep these to a maximum of three. It is not appropriate to enquire about the quality and quantity of other shortlisted candidates during your interview – concentrate on you! Nor should you make enquiries about the salary and benefits during the interview.

On the Day

- The golden rules are: be yourself, relax and enjoy the experience.
- Go into the interview prepared to present the interviewer with all that is needed, but be relaxed and ready for the interview to take a different direction
- Have any questions prepared.

Bits and Pieces

- Take with you the advertisement, your job application letter, spare copies of your CV, the job brief (job description/person specification) and any vital organisation literature. Put them together in a way which leaves them accessible but not spill able. But avoid producing them unless it appears really necessary
- If you find it helpful, put in your pocket two 3" x 5" cards, one for "keyword" prompts, the other for your questions.
- As a general rule it is best to avoid waving any paper around – it creates a diversion. It is you they are interested in.

Arrival

- Announce yourself no earlier than 5-10 minutes before the interview time. Aim to have time to kill and use it to look about you, read literature and notice boards, observe how the organisation appears to operate
- Remember that your selling starts the minute you walk into the reception area

- Refresh yourself after the journey; leave overcoats, umbrellas etc. at reception
- If you are held up unexpectedly – phone ahead, give them a revised arrival time that allows you time to calm down and re-prepare before you announce yourself.

Establish Rapport

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- Greet the interviewer with a smile and a firm handshake
- Be quietly confident
- Establish how the meeting will proceed
- Check how much time is available

Listen Actively

- Respond with interest to what the interviewer is saying and ask appropriate questions
- When you give the interviewer information, ensure it is relevant to the employer's needs and demonstrates high worth. Bear in mind that you will always be able to convince employers of your potential value if you are able to relate your skills and experience to their needs
- Interviewers themselves may have limited understanding of the organisation's needs or have difficulty in presenting them. By asking intelligent questions, you may help the interviewer to define the needs more clearly.

Answering Questions

- Answer questions briefly and positively
- Be articulate
- Avoid long pauses, do not mumble words
- Avoid forcing the interviewer to probe to get the answer
- If there are periods of silence, don't feel you have to fill them
- Never take total charge of the interview, and do not interrupt
- Keep cool even if provoked. Some interviewers will try to upset you to see how you react to stress.
- Never criticise your past employer or colleagues
- When answering questions remember the formula

The situation was

The action I took was

The result was

The benefit was.....

- Listen, Observe your interviewer's reactions
- Adopt a positive, enthusiastic attitude – you want a positive result
- Focus on contributing – matching the employer's needs and exceeding their expectations – what extra can you give?
- Avoid talking about your own needs until the employer is committed to you
- Be reassuring
- Talk the employer's language
- If discussion of a sensitive area is probable, bring it up yourself and handle it quickly and neatly
- Don't oversell yourself and don't push the interview to meet your timetable or needs. Until you have an offer they are in the driving seat!

Difficult Questions

Some questions will be difficult to answer. Interviews do not always expect immediate answers:

- Pause, think about what the question means

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- If necessary ask for clarification
- Ask for more information
- Ask if your answer was adequate

Expect some questions about compatibility issues – your style and how you relate to your superiors, colleagues and staff. The interviewer will try to establish whether you will fit into the organisation. In answering these questions demonstrate a positive attitude, reassuring your interviewer with answers in language they understand and can relate to in order to prompt the reaction: “I like this person; he/she really understands how we do things here”

At The End of the Interview

- The interviewer will normally signal when the interview is at an end
- Establish what will happen next and who should do what
- Be sincere in your thanks, even if you have been given a rough ride
- Reinforce your enthusiasm for the job. Even if you have reservations, look forward to the next meeting remember you can't turn down something you haven't been offered.

After the Interview

Complete a sample Interview Report for your own personal use immediately after every interview. Focus on what when well and those things that didn't go well. What lessons can be learnt for the future?