

Strengths Profiling:

Competency Interviewing Guide

***Assessing 10 competencies that impact
on performance at work.***

Strengths Profiling: Competency Interviewing Guide

Competency Based Interviewing provides a way of assessing the attitudes, ability and behaviour contributing to more-effective performance in a particular role. Competency models describe the *approach and attributes* required in a particular role and should highlight what is required to achieve more-effective performance in the role. However, it is also important to appreciate that competencies are more than a simple list of behaviours. Underpinning each competency are *personal strengths* that draw on personality characteristics, job-related skills, *and* the motivation to engage in an activity.

The potential for high performance is greater when people are able to use and apply their personal strengths. These strengths are reflected in personal enthusiasm and commitment, which can be linked to role demands. A candidate at an interview should therefore be able to describe work they have completed that enabled them to use their strengths effectively. To understand the application of personal strengths, it is useful to review three broad competency 'clusters' that are identified using the 3H Model. This is based on the 'Head' (Analysis), 'Heart' (Interpersonal) and 'Hands' (Drive and Achievement). Managers should have strengths across all three areas.

In broad terms, these three competency clusters can be described as follows:

1. Cognitive and analytical capability linked to dealing with problems, developing ideas, assessing priorities and putting activities in context, coupled with the planning and monitoring of work.
2. Interpersonal skills required to influence and communicate effectively with others, including the ability to appear responsive and supportive, and the organizational awareness needed to understand people's concerns and how best to introduce new initiatives.
3. Personal conviction and a clear sense of purpose concerning objectives, a willingness to deal with problems, backed by the drive and resilience to overcome problems and setbacks.

Personal strengths that underpin competencies may be associated with

- Conceptual Thinking and Consideration of Wider Issues
- Innovative Thinking and Questioning of Existing Methods
- Attention to Detail, Accuracy and Risk Avoidance
- Planning and Organization
- Interpersonal Effectiveness, Influencing and Communication
- Responsiveness to Others and Team Engagement
- Organizational Awareness and Anticipation of Issues
- Setting Direction, Leadership and Decision Making
- Courage in Surfacing Problems and Dealing with Issues
- Striving to Overcome Problems and Achieve Results

Strengths contributing to competencies can therefore be viewed in terms of specific types of analysis, interpersonal effectiveness and focus on delivering high quality outcomes. Whilst personality traits are anchored *within* the individual, strengths can be related to the *outcomes* that are required to secure high performance in the role.

A Strengths Based competency interview aims to identify the behaviour contributing to more effective performance in a given role. The objective is to find evidence of what *the individual* said and did (in similar work situations) to achieve an outcome, what *they* considered to be the key issues or priorities, and the *skills* they were able to apply to get a result. If the individual was simply following directions and there is no evidence of commitment or energy, enthusiasm and initiative, then this is less likely to be an area of personal strength.

Skills and experience are not sufficient to demonstrate effectiveness in terms of competency or underlying strength. Look for evidence that the individual has taken action to improve a situation, whether through their analysis, interpersonal skills, or their focus and drive to deliver results.

The following model focuses on the ten 'core competencies' that are assessed with the Pario 10 online questionnaire.

Analysis and Planning:

Broad-Based, Reflective Thinking (Potential Strength: Strategic Perspective)

Considers the consequences of action and reflects on wider, longer-term issues relating to a problem.

Innovation and Change Oriented (Potential Strength: Identifies Possibilities)

Adopts an independent and forward-looking approach and is strongly orientated towards change.

Accurate and Careful (Potential Strength: Avoids Risks)

Personally checks details and emphasizes precise, accurate work to avoid the risk of mistakes.

Planning and Organization (Potential Strength: Systems and Procedures)

Adopts a structured & systematic approach, characterized by planning and organization.

Interpersonal Effectiveness:

Influencing Others (Potential Strength: Motivating Others)

Achieves personal impact, gains people's attention and influences the team's thinking and direction.

Supportive and Responsive to Others (Potential Strength: Facilitator & Coach)

Works well with others in the team, discusses issues and is supportive when people have problems.

Organizational Awareness (Potential Strength: Managing Change)

Discusses issues, assesses reactions to new proposals, and adapts approach to achieve change.

Achieving Results:

Setting Direction & Decision Making (Potential Strength: Leadership Focus)

Sets priorities and defines requirements for others, displaying a confident, positive approach.

Courage and Conviction (Potential Strength: Professional Objectivity)

Openly discusses problems and takes a firm stand on issues relating to quality and professionalism.

Positive Approach (Potential Strength: Achievement & Results Focus)

Sets high performance standards and works hard to overcome problems and achieve results.

To make an accurate assessment of capability it is important that managers involved in competency interviewing have received appropriate training. This ensures that consistent standards are being followed by all managers. If *Role Profiling* has recently been completed, interview skills training will also familiarise managers with the key activities and competencies linked to effective performance.

The following page summarizes the 'Pario 10' competency model.

'Pario Ten' Competencies
<i>Broad-Based, Reflective Thinking</i> (Strength: Strategic Perspective)
Considers the consequences of action and reflects on wider, longer-term issues relating to a problem. This reflective thinking should be backed by relevant technical skills / knowledge. The competency is linked to taking an overview and seeing the bigger picture.
<i>Innovation and Change Oriented</i> (Strength: Identifies Possibilities)
Adopts an independent and forward-looking approach and is strongly orientated towards change. There is a willingness to question existing methods and look towards future requirements
<i>Accurate and Careful</i> (Strength: Avoids Risks)
Personally checks details and emphasizes precise, accurate work to avoid the risk of mistakes.
<i>Planning and Organization</i> (Strength: Systems and Procedures)
Adopts a structured & systematic approach, characterized by planning and organization.
<i>Influencing Others</i> (Strength: Motivating Others)
Achieves personal impact, gains people's attention and influences the team's thinking and direction.
<i>Supportive and Responsive to Others</i> (Strength: Facilitator & Coach)
Works well with others in the team, discusses issues and is supportive when people have problems.
<i>Organizational Awareness</i> (Strength: Managing Change)
Discusses issues, assesses reactions to new proposals, and adapts approach to achieve change.
<i>Setting Direction & Decision Making</i> (Strength: Leadership Focus)
Sets priorities and defines requirements for others, displaying a confident, positive approach.
<i>Courage and Conviction</i> (Strength: Professional Objectivity)
Openly discusses problems and takes a firm stand on issues relating to quality and professionalism.
<i>Positive Approach</i> (Strength: Achievement & Results Focus)
Sets high performance standards and works hard to overcome problems and achieve results.

The Pario 10 Competency Framework is derived from the "3H" Model, which describes effective behaviour under the three broad headings of *Head, Heart and Hands*. Not all competencies are required to the same level in a particular role, and high performance may well be linked to a *clearly differentiated profile*.

Analysis, Planning, Innovation and Detail

People vary in their focus and areas of clear Personal Strengths. Innovative and Reflective people tend to be more open to new experience. When coupled with attention to detail, a probing, questioning style is suggested.

Influence, Support and Awareness

The ability to influence and work positively with others may be accompanied by a supportive and responsive style. Organizational Awareness is also important in some roles.

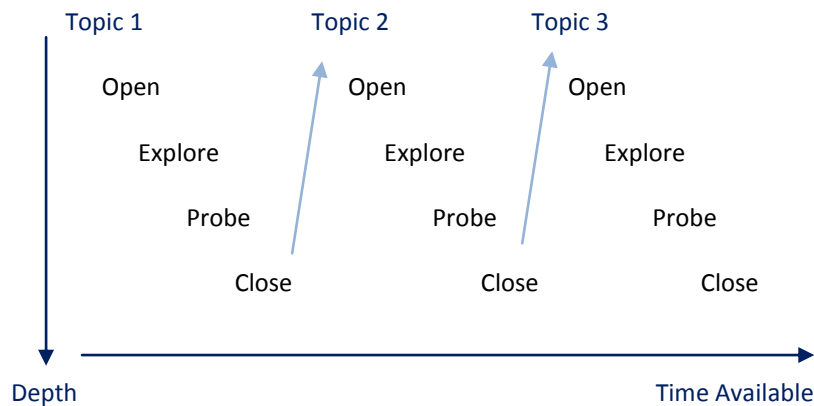
Setting Direction, Conviction and Achievement

The ability to set direction and confront issues is important in many roles and can be viewed alongside achievement motivation.

A competency based interview provides the opportunity to clarify areas of strength and assess the profile against role requirements.

Competency Interviewing

The competency based interview refers to previous experiences to assess an individual's typical behaviour when responding to a situation. The process is based on a *funnel* that moves from open questions that encourage conversation, to more probing evaluation of key points. Not least, this approach avoids the problem of being too direct in trying to assess areas of potential weakness. It also encourages the effective management of time, so three or four topics might be explored during the course of the interview.



It is recommended that up to 10 minutes might be allocated to each topic. The format is as follows;

1. Start with an **Open Question or **Request** for Information**

For Example: Describe a situation...
Tell me about....

2. **Focus on an interesting/important issue and **Explore** what happened**

For Example: Tell me more about X...
So what aspects did you consider....?

3. **Probe for more information**

For Example: Which option was most important...?
What did you do then...?
...and how did they react...?
Who decided on this...?

Show you are listening... use eye contact, nod, and say things like: "hmm", and "yes, I see..".
Recap on key points and check that you have understood correctly.

4. **Close with some direct questions on the key points**

For Example: What did you achieve...?
Was this really satisfactory...?
Why did you settle for...?

You should **summarise** the main points as you go along and check your understanding of what the candidate has been telling you. (It is always possible that you have misheard something or need to clarify a particular point). Use phrases like:

“let me re-cap on what we have covered...”

“...so let me check that I understand. You are saying...”

“can I just clarify that I understand that fully...”

If the person you are interviewing is talking excessively, and you feel you are losing control, you can also use summarising to re-gain the initiative.

For Example:

“OK, we have spent some time talking about,
I would like to move on now and discuss...”

Avoid **leading** and **superficial** questions when you are trying to explore issues or probe (to make a clear, impartial assessment). So avoid questions that lead to agreement with your views, encourage vague comment, or result in ‘superficial’ self-description. These include:

Do you think you are able to...?

Are you confident about...?

How effective/capable are you at....?

What are your thoughts on...?

How would you describe your main strengths/weaknesses...?

(not recommended unless a simple check on your own assessment)

If you are trying to identify trends or consistent patterns of behaviour, look for **specific examples** of what they said, or did, in the context of particular situations, or problems they have dealt with. Assess their approach - and their evaluation of the issues - by asking neutral questions, and do not show disapproval!

For example:

So how did the rest of the team react...?

...and when everyone walked out, what happened next...?

What further action did you take...?

...and when the police had to be called...

What exactly did you do...?

You might also wish to ask:

On reflection, would you have done it differently....?

or,

What did you learn from the experience...?

At the end of the process you should have a clear understanding of the key issues and the factors which are likely to affect individual or team performance.

Interview Timing

Decide the length of the interview and the format. If there is more than one interviewer, make sure that the topics have been agreed and everyone is clear about the process. It may be helpful for one interviewer to ask questions on relating to topic and the other to note key points from the answers. The roles can then be switched for the next topic. Allow time for a short 'wash-up' review session at the end of each interview.

Keep the initial introduction fairly short and explain the process. Allow up to 10 minutes for each of the competency related topics. *Remember that the interview itself gives you the opportunity to assess communication skills and the candidate's general demeanour.* Do not over-interpret 'body language' or aspects of behaviour that may be related to nervousness about the interview process. If you complete the competency-based interview within the time allowed, you may have time for further questions. Allow at least 5 minutes at the end to give the candidate time to ask questions.

Possible Topics for Competency-Based Interviews (up to 10 minutes per topic)

Note: Listen and probe for evidence of personal responsibility in assessing issues, deciding on actions, and delivering outcomes and results.... if there is regular reference to "we" then it may be useful to ask directly: "what was *your* view?" or "what was *your* preference?" or "what did *you* do?"

Topic 1: Tell me about the most significant project you have been working on in the last year...

"How did you get involved / decide on this?" orWhy was this of interest to you ?
check the motivation and reason for their involvement...

"What were the main challenges you faced?"
possible follow up question: "Tell me how you viewed the choices /options?"

"Tell me about the technical issues ..."
possible follow up question: "What action did you take?"

"How did you decide...?"

"What was the outcome...?"
possible follow up question: "How satisfied were you with the result...?"

Topic 2: Tell me about another experience, preferably in the last couple of years, which presented you with a challenge and involved doing something differently, or finding a new approach...

"How did you get involved / what was the background to this?"
check their perceptions

"What were the main issues you faced?"
possible follow up question: "Tell me how you viewed the choices /options?"

"Tell me about the risk involved or the safety issues ..."
possible follow up questions: "What action did you take?"
"How did you assess the benefits...?"

"What was the outcome...?"
possible follow up questions: "What impact do this have ...?"
"Would you do anything differently?"

Topic 3: Thinking about a work (or possibly a social /leisure) situation, can you describe a time when you had to complete a routine or tedious task that was not using your Strengths?

“How did this come about...?” orWhy was this required...?

check their reaction and assessment of the task... was there commitment?

“How did you respond to this situation?”

possible follow up question: “Tell me how you viewed the choices /options?”

“Tell me about the implications of do things differently (or not completing?)...”

possible follow up questions: “What were the possible consequences?”

“Were there easier options available to you...?”

“What did you learn from this...?”

possible follow up question: “Can you sum up the main learning points...”

Note: look for evidence of commitment to a task (even if it’s routine or not intrinsically interesting). Is there evidence of awareness of the wider issues and objectives (and a sense of personal responsibility).

Topic 4: Tell me about a time when you realised that something could be done more effectively. This might relate to a project or assignment (e.g. at university) or linked to work experience.

“What was the background to this...?” orWhy was this an issue...?

check their perspective and assessment of the problem

“How did you handle this situation?”

possible follow up question: “Tell me how you viewed the choices /options?”

“What were the potential benefits... ?”

possible follow up question: “What were the potential risks / ‘downside’ ?”

“Were there other issues you needed to consider...?”

possible follow up question: “What would you do differently next time...”

“How did other people react...?”

possible follow up question: “What would you do differently next time...”

The choice of topic can be related to candidates’ experience and the type of skills, whether analytical, interpersonal or task-focused, which are required in a particular role. The topic provides the basis for exploring how candidates have responded to real-life situations.

It is generally best to avoid hypothetical questions e.g. “What would you do if...?” unless these are linked to well-researched *Scenario Judgement Tests*. These ‘scenarios’ are usually linked to Critical Incidents comprising challenging situations where the more-effective person will adopt a different approach, and consider more options, than someone who is less-effective. Responding effectively to Critical Incidents may well require ‘Learning Agility’ (i.e. the ability to apply existing knowledge in new ways) backed by appropriate competencies.

A Practical Tip: Before interviewing for a role, identify Critical Incidents and how more-effective people respond. Clarify requirements by discussing role demands with experienced high performers. Use Critical Incidents to gain a clear view of the Strengths required for high performance in the role.

Additional Questions

- tell me more about your work
 - who are your customers?
 - who benefits from your work?

- say more about your role in this team
 - tell me about any changes that are taking place or in the pipeline...
 - how are these new developments (changes) affecting you?

- what challenges are you facing in your work?
 - what challenges are faced by others in the team?
 - what steps have you taken to change things?

- is your work affected by other people in the team?
 - to what extent does other people's performance affect you?
 - how does your work (your role) link to others in the team?

- what has been the most significant challenge for you in your current / previous role?
 - what steps did you take to deal with this situation?
 - how did this affect your work / relationships with colleagues / your manager ?

Refer to the Pario 10 for Additional Interview Prompts & Follow-Up Questions

Review of the Pario 10 profile will highlight the emphasis placed on each of the ten competencies - and the appropriateness of the profile viewed in the context of specific role requirements.

The Pario 10 Report includes possible questions and provides an overview of the candidate's scores.

Review a sample report at <http://www.pario-innovations.com/download-resources-par28dsa.html>