



| HUMAN RESOURCES |

HR's Diary – Interviewing (Part 2)



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With a sigh of relief Zahid came out of the interview venue. The mounting pressure got diffused fast. He took a deep breath, looked up, the azure blue sky came into his sight. He had never thought that the sky could be so blue in Dhaka after a battling hour of 'game of wits.' He pondered for a moment; was it really a 'game of wits' that he fearfully perceived before facing the interview! In reality, it had been all-through a structured and planned process of eliciting information about him. Pressure built up not on letting them know how much knowledgeable he was on everything around but on what really needed to be revealed about his job-fit competencies backed by concrete evidences.

'Tell me, how was it', his wife asked quizzically. He knew exactly the question he would face after coming back to the house.

'It was interesting though. I was not nervous and did not sigh out anything but did not feel comfortable either as all the time they wanted me to talk about myself - proving them impeccably that I have every single competency required for the job and that too looking straight at their probing pairs of eyes,' Zahid replied convincingly. He also described the interview scenario frame by frame.

Intelligence Test and Psychometric Mapping

'Why they made you write the intelligence and psychological tests before facing the interview? This is not an entry position after all', she sounded not very happy about it and felt that the affair was somewhat condescending for Zahid considering his status as well as seniority. He explained that those were meant to judge his mental abilities and emotional standing which included flexibility in thinking, seeing relationships (commonly called insight), alertness, speed of thought processes, and creative or inventive reasoning.

After all these years, Zahid knows now that emotional intelligence has emerged as a very powerful tool for assessing people for selection. A technically proficient executive or professional with good emotional intelligence is someone who picks up more readily, more deftly, and more quickly than others - the budding conflicts that need resolution, the team and organizational vulnerabilities that need addressing, the gaps to be leaped or filled, the hidden connections that spell opportunity, and the murky, mysterious interactions that seem most likely to prove golden and profitable.

Zahid was not very sure as to what would happen next. At the end of the interview they thanked him for taking part in the selection process and further told that he might be called for the final round of interview or otherwise. But whatever happened they would let him know in writing. Next few days went about with a queer kind of feelings not yearning for the job but for the success in overcoming the challenges of getting selected. Zahid sincerely craved for the next round of interview, basically to get exposed to the MNC process of

selection. Finally, in an afternoon when he was busy with routine chores, an envelope arrived with the request to appear before the final interview. He was glad and felt very much sure of himself.



Behavioural-based Structured Interview

He wanted to take some preparations but did not know as to what type of interview would take place this time. However, he could gather from some people that it would be in line with what is known as behavioural-based structured interview. This Company must be having their own competency profile for the senior managers and they would be targeting those competencies constituting that profile and the interview will be designed to search on those personal core competencies, Zahid thought but could not be certain.

Like the previous interview session, Zahid was put at ease and introduced to the final round of interview. The selection process was explained to him, which would lead to the final selection and resultant job offer to the deserving candidate. Also the interview format was explained to him. The interviewer said, "I would like to find out more about you first"; "I will then be focusing more on what you have done by asking you to give us examples of various activities and situations in which you have been involved, so that I can assess where you have demonstrated the qualities and skills we are seeking."

Behavioural Competency One

"Mr. Zahid, Tell us about a critical situation that you faced in which you had to assess all the options before going ahead? How did you go about identifying the issues? What ultimate success did you have?" He could very well guess the reason behind asking these questions. The interviewer was trying to find out how he analyzed available options and built up effective plan based on that, gained the commitment of the team members, aligned the existing practices and ultimately delivered the results. Perhaps the competency the interviewer was trying to pin down was his result orientation and focus on the delivery.

Behavioural Competency Two

"Can you tell me about a situation you have been in where you saw a need to involve the team members to achieve a goal and then recognize the contribution they were making? How did you encourage them to be involved? What recognition did they achieve and what reaction did you get?" Zahid could instantaneously understand by the pattern of the question the competency the interviewer was focusing on. This was all about competency on leadership. The interviewer probed into how he encouraged others, how he set stretching target, how he monitored the performance level and recognized the achievement. When he looked back later, he got amazed how the interviewer structured the questions and the style of getting closer to the competency.

Behavioural Competency Three

"When was a time you felt that your communication skills were really challenged in getting your views across to someone else or a group of people? What approach did you take? How did it turn out at the end?" Zahid could deduce easily that his competency on communication was the point of focus behind this set of questions. With probing questions further the interviewer was trying to find the evidences of his behavioural demonstration on identifying Information needs of others, keeping concerned people informed by communicating effectively, and using appropriate communication styles.

Behavioural Competency Four

"Mr. Zahid, Give me one example when you tried to understand the needs of a person whom you are supposed

to provide support/assistance professionally? What all did you do in that event to provide the support?" The interviewer enquired to find out whether his assistance was like supporting a customer, whether he cared about fostering relationships, whether he met the needs like meeting customers' needs etc. Zahid could not ascertain the competency at that point but felt it had to do with focusing on a competency on providing customer like assistance to others.

Behavioural Competency Five

"Can you recall a time when you felt there was an opportunity that occurred to you due to undesired change in the situation? What did you do to avail yourself of the opportunity? How successful were you?" The interviewer was genuinely trying to find out whether Zahid approached change positively and championed any change initiative. It went to the extent of probing whether he challenged the current practices also. Zahid clearly understood the rationale behind asking these questions - identifying his competency on change management.

Trained Interviewer

Throughout the interview session the interviewer tried to see the behaviour indicators on the answers under each competency (as per the above profile). These described behaviours making up the competency, which Zahid may or may not have displayed during the time of occurrence of the incidents he referred to. Zahid felt that only those who were trained to assess, and were familiar with the competencies, should be able to assess the candidate effectively in a structured behavioural interview like this. The whole interview was designed to elicit from candidates behaviours related to the competencies.

Providing Information

After the interviewer had finished questioning, he was prepared to explain what the job was all about. Zahid found this when he sought some clarification about the job being asked whether he had some questions.

Zahid was informed about the next stage. He also found that the interviewer used couched words and was careful enough not to make any promises that he was unable to keep (e.g. how soon he would get back to Zahid) and at any point DID NOT imply that Zahid would be offered a position.

Use of Behavioural Questions

This particular behavioural-based structured interview gave an insight into the in-depth interview process to Zahid for the first time. In his HR career thereafter, Zahid used this type of interview techniques many a time in the selection processes - be it recruitment through assessment center or selection for promotion or succession planning or redeployment.

While interviewers may have their own questions to ask in evaluating target attributes, to ensure consistency in applying a behavioural-based approach to selection, interviewers are required to ask the set "Primary Questions" in the interview. These questions are meant to ask the candidate to describe a situation; what action they took and what outcomes they achieved. Where necessary, additional probing questions are also asked to get quality responses, actions and outcomes as well as to verify the interviewer's assessment.

In a structured interview, although questions are pre-set but the interviewer can also paraphrase the question and add descriptive or empathetic lead-ins to questions in order to soften delivery as well as maintaining rapport and his/her interview style. The "Operational Question" is also pre-set as backup question if the interviewer feels that the candidate is having undue difficulty answering the primary question or if the interviewer wishes to probe further. r This is HR's Diary Sequence 3. To be continued...

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