Strengths-based interviewing
Q&A
What is a strengths-based interview (SBI)?

The goal of a strengths-based interview is to ascertain whether the candidate has the natural strengths needed for the job. The interviewers seek to discover whether the candidate would be naturally good at the role, love doing it and be energised by it.

Is there more than one type of strengths-based interview?

Yes there is more than one type. Strengths-based interviews vary depending upon the approach that the prospective employer takes to strengths-based recruitment.

There are two most commonly used types of strengths-based interview. The first is where the questions are based on a strengths profile that has been developed specifically for the role in question (so the interviewers know exactly what strengths great performers in the role actually have). This is the Engaging Minds approach.

The other type of strengths interview is where interviewers are trying to discover generally what strengths a candidate has and whether they are the same as the ones they judge are needed for the job in question.

In both cases interviewers are seeking to discover whether someone possesses the innate strengths for the job, will love it and will thrive in it (as opposed to just being able to do it which is what interviewers discover in a competency based interview).

What questions are asked in strengths-based interviews?

There are a number of different questions that can be asked at strengths-based interviews. The exact questions depend upon the type of interview and can include 'What do you enjoy doing most?', 'What do you least like doing'? 'What gives you the biggest buzz?', 'What would you do even if you didn't get paid'? What's very much like you (chosen from a list of possible strengths).

What do the interviewers look for in a strengths-based interview?

The interviewers are looking for evidence that a candidate has the strengths needed for the role they are being interviewed for. They are trained to gain insight into each candidate as an individual. They take notice of how each candidate answers the questions not just what they say.
Is it true that interviewers favour candidates that answer quickly and are expressive?

There are some misunderstandings about what interviewers are looking for in an interviewee. Good interviewers are not marking people on whether they answer quickly and are expressive. They are trained to seek evidence on whether a person has the strengths they are looking for. They treat each candidate on their merit as an individual. Two candidates may have the strengths but behave in different ways eg one might answer quickly, one might not. One might be very expressive, one might not. The important thing is whether they have the strengths. The best advice is to act as naturally as possible – if you try and ‘fake’ certain types of behaviour the interviewers will notice.

Can anyone conduct a strengths-based interview?

No. Strengths-based interviewers are specially trained. The strengths-based interview training teaches them how to judge whether a person has particular strengths. Like all good interviewers they are also good at building rapport, relaxing the candidate, listening and observing.

Is it possible to prepare for a strengths-based interview?

A candidate cannot prepare for a strengths interview in the same way as they might for a behavioural competency based interview\(^1\). The best way to get ready for a strengths-based interview is to relax and, be open in your answers and be yourself. You might also want to think about what you love most and least in your work life.

People who are used to preparing examples of particular competencies for competency-based interviews sometimes worry about having a strengths-based interview because they cannot prepare in the same way. It's best not to worry. Just be yourself and answer the questions as best you can. Good strengths interviewers can discern whether or not an individual has the strengths needed for a role. It's not possible to 'fake' strengths like you could, if you wanted, 'fake' competencies by preparing well. With strengths-based recruitment it means you're much less likely to end up in a job that is not right for you!

How long does a strengths-based interview take?

Normally between 45 minutes and an hour.

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\(^1\) Behavioural competencies are people’s ability to behave in certain ways. Technical competencies are things they can do eg giving injections, using PowerPoint, driving. The term ‘behavioural competency-based interviewing is normally used inter-changeably with the term ‘competency-based interviewing.
How does a strengths-based interview differ from a behavioural competency-based interview?

In a strengths interview the interviewers are assessing whether someone has the natural strengths for the job and whether they are likely to love the job and be energised by it. In a behavioural competency-based interview the interviewers are simply assessing whether, based on past performance, a candidate can do the job.

Interviewers in strengths interviews are assessing how someone answers the question as well as what they say. As well as listening to the interviewee’s responses they pay attention to body language, choice of words and tone.

Candidates may worry about it beforehand but they almost always really enjoy the process and find it a positive experience. And if they don't get the job they realise that it's because they are not a good fit, rather than they're deficient in some way. Most also say that they learnt more about themselves during the interview.

How effective is strengths-based interviewing?

We've trained thousands of people to be strengths-based interviewers. They almost always love the approach and say that it's a rigorous way to select the right person for a job. They tell us that they get to know the ‘real person’ and they are confident in their selection decisions.

There is a growing body of quantitative and qualitative evidence that strengths-based recruitment enables organisations to select the right person for the job. In contrast, such evidence doesn’t exist to support behavioural competency based recruitment.

What are the benefits to the candidate of a strengths-based interview?

The interviewers gather so much more insight into candidates than they do in traditional behavioural competency-based interviews. 97% of interviewers surveyed in a study of the impact of strengths-based recruitment in five companies² said that they were confident in their selection decisions when using strengths-based interviewing.

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² Welcome to the Strengths Revolution: the benefits of strengths-based recruitment experienced by five top companies. 2013
What is the candidate’s experience of strengths-based interviews?

Candidates usually greatly enjoy the experience of a strengths-based interview. It’s a relaxed and positive experience where they can be themselves and they feel that the interviewers really get to know them. If they are not offered the job they don’t feel deficient in some way, they realise that they are just not suited to it so wouldn’t be happy in it.

Do organisations rely solely on the strengths-based interview for selection?

Usually a prospective employer needs to know a number of things about a candidate in addition to whether they have the natural strengths for the role. They may need to know about certain technical competences eg a nurse would need to know how to carry out certain clinical procedures. The company decides which technical competencies a person must have before they can be offered a job and which are not necessary because they can be taught. An example of the latter might be knowledge of a particular computer software. Some organisations also use language and numerical aptitude tests. If an organisation has adopted strengths-based interviewing it has no need to also do behavioural competency interviewing.

Why are more and more organisations adopting strengths-based interviewing?

Organisations that adopt strengths-based recruitment do so because of the evidence of its effectiveness. Those who have implemented it have found huge benefits in terms of reduction of staff attrition rates, increase in engagement and performance, improvement in customer service ratings and a positive impact on their culture.

Which organisations conduct strengths-based interviews?

More and more organisations are adopting strengths-based approaches to recruitment and interviewing for some roles. They include the AA, Allied Healthcare, Barclays, Ernst and Young, Nestle, Morrisons, the NHS, Saga, Standard Chartered Bank and Starbucks.

Please call us on +44 (0)207 998 3120 or email hello@engagingminds.co.uk to find out more.

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