



FSIS SUPERVISORY SUMMARIES

A series of "on target" supervisory selection guidance

TOPIC #4: EVALUATING RESPONSES IN A BEI INTERVIEW

Question: If a panel interview is being conducted and the evaluation guide is used, what is the process for evaluating the response to each question?

- The process should work as follows:
 - ✓ Each panel member should first rate or evaluate each candidate separately. Candidates should be rated against the evaluation criteria and not against each other
 - ✓ Ratings should then be discussed among panel members.
 - ✓ Final ratings should be achieved via consensus not an average.
 - ✓ Ratings should be supported with behavioral examples and differences in ratings should be discussed among panel members.

Question: What should I do when the response provided by an applicant is not described in the evaluation guide provided?

- The criteria in the evaluation guide are not all-inclusive nor do they have to be an exact match to the interview response. The evaluation guide is to be used as a guideline. The rating scale provides benchmarks of what is typical at each level. The rating given to the applicant must simply meet the general intent of the benchmark and *be supported* with behavioral examples. Prior to the interviews, selecting officials can review the criteria and if necessary, attach a supplemental page with additional descriptive behaviors indicative of these rating levels. The servicing HR specialist can provide guidance in developing additional descriptions.

Question: What if the panel cannot reach consensus, despite a discussion among the panel members? Who decides on the rating to be given?

- If the panel cannot reach consensus, the panel chairperson should present the notes and supporting documentation for each rating to the selecting

official. For example, if one panelist thought a rating should be “2” and another thought it should be a “4”, and consensus could not be reached, the panel chair would present what behaviors and supporting evidence was discussed to support a “2” and a “4”, respectively. The selecting official would then take the information into consideration when making a selection decision.

Question: Can you consider an answer given for one question when evaluating the competency for a different question?

- Yes. Information obtained when asking one question can also be considered when evaluating the response to a different question.

Question: What if the candidate provides a “trivial” or simple example in response to a question? How would you rate the response?

- According to PDI, if the candidate provides a “trivial” or simplistic response to a question, you should ask for another example; or reword the question to help clarify what you are looking for. For example, if a question on collaborating with multiple offices both inside and outside your organization to accomplish a goal resulted in a response on how well he/she coordinated the office picnic, you should seek another example directly related to the work that they perform. If the candidate cannot come up with additional examples of collaboration, it may be that the candidate may not perform the competency regularly in their job. Responses that involve highly uncomplicated situations should be annotated as such, and would typically result in a lower rating. However, as in all cases, ratings must be supported with job-based documentation.

Question: What if the candidate takes credit for a project you believe they didn’t perform?

- Supervisory reference checks are another piece of information to be considered in the selection decision. If you have any doubts, ask the candidate’s supervisor.

Question: What if the candidate uses the same example for every question?

- In the behavioral interview, you are looking for trends and the consistent application of a competency over time. One example is simply not enough. A highly qualified candidate has multiple examples of various competencies.

Be wary of a candidate who can only articulate one example. If they do, it may indicate that they do not apply the competencies consistently in their work, on a regular or recurring basis.

Question: If the candidate does use the same example, should you rate them down?

- It's important for the interviewer to use his/her own judgement when scoring repetitive examples. A top score might be given if supporting evidence for that competency has been provided in answers to other questions. On the other hand, a lack of other supporting evidence does justify giving a lower score on a competency (i.e. particularly if it seems that the one incident referenced is the only time the applicant has ever demonstrated a competency). The following points should also be considered when one example is repeatedly used:

(1) Did the interviewer actually encourage the applicant to share other examples? If the interviewer did not probe for more examples, it isn't fair to score the applicant lower for re-using an incident. Repeated use of an example could mean he or she didn't use the competency consistently or could mean he or she used a single example for convenience. Interviewers can get caught up in the interview and not realize until afterwards that they accepted the same incident several times.

(2) Consider the scope of the example and the applicant's experience. A small example used repeatedly should be considered weaker evidence than multiple small examples. Obviously, multiple rich examples are best, but interviewers should also be prepared to accept a single rich example and several small ones. If the applicant has had limited experience, an example in which he/she had a great deal of responsibility or numerous tasks (i.e. managing a project) may come up multiple times because it is the applicant's best example of demonstrating the behaviors in question. The issue here is whether the applicant has had many chances to demonstrate the behaviors in *non-trivial*, work-related situations.

- Based on the resume and the rest of the interview, the interviewer must judge whether it is reasonable to expect this person to have multiple rich examples. One thing the interviewer can do is to encourage the applicant to supplement that incident with others (even if small) to check that the competency is used consistently. For example, accept the project manager incident as an example because it is the person's best example, but also ask for the last time (no matter how small) the applicant dealt with a difficult co-worker, made a decision, etc...

Question: What is an “ice-breaker” question and should it be rated?

- In an interview there are 3 types of questions: experience questions, opinion/hypothetical questions and behavior questions. What has frequently been referred to as an “ice-breaker question” in FSIS is generally an “experience question” that focuses on an individual’s background. “Ice-breaker questions” are typically questions that applicants feel comfortable in addressing and generally expect to hear in most interviews. According to our PDI consultant, by referring to it as an “ice-breaker” we may be giving the applicant the impression that it is irrelevant information. It was suggested that during interviews, questions should not be labeled as one type of question or another, but simply referred to as “interview questions”.
- While “ice-breaker questions” are not individually rated as stand-alone questions against the PDI criteria, they do provide important information about a person's experience, some of which may be in the application. The information is part of the interview and should be considered when evaluating competencies. In other words, if you have one question that specifically targets leadership skills, but the response to another question (including the “ice-breaker”) provides some good information on the individual’s leadership skills, this information should also be considered in rating the leadership competency. **IMPORTANT: ALL** information received in the interview can be considered when evaluating ANY competency
- Finally, if an opinion/hypothetical question is asked which focuses on what the candidate think or how they think they would act in a particular hypothetical situation, it is suggested that a follow-up behavioral question be asked to determine whether their assertions can be supported. Responses to the behavioral question can be evaluated or rated against PDI evaluation guide.

Question: What weight should the interview play in the selection decision?

- There is no prescribed weight. The interview is one piece of information the selecting official should consider. Other information includes the written application, performance appraisal, and supervisory reference checks. The selecting official should take into consideration all the information he/she has when making a decision. Ultimately, whatever decision is made, it must be supported with documentation that is directly related to the requirements of the position.

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