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INSIGHT

The Behavioural Interview Guide

Contents

	About This Guide	02
	Why Behavioural Interviewing Works	03
	How to Run a Behavioural Interview	04
	Scoring the Evidence	05
01	Adaptability	06
02	Culture Add	07
03	Collaboration	08
04	Leadership	09
05	Growth Potential	10
06	Prioritisation	11
	Interviewer Checklist	12
	Key Takeaways	13
	What the Data Says	14
	See It in Practice	15
	About Maxwell Stephens	16

About This Guide

This guide helps hiring managers identify high-potential candidates on the strength of evidence, behaviour and judgement, not just experience on paper. It is the framework Maxwell Stephens uses in its own assessments, and we share it with clients so that every interviewer on a panel is working to the same standard.

Behavioural interviewing rests on a simple idea: the best guide to how someone will behave in future is how they have behaved in the past. Instead of asking candidates what they would do, you ask them what they did, and then probe until you understand their actions, their reasoning and the result.

The guide covers six competencies that matter in almost every Facilities Management appointment, from coordinator to director:

- Adaptability
- Culture Add
- Collaboration
- Leadership
- Growth Potential
- Prioritisation

For each one, you will find what good looks like, five behavioural questions, what to listen for, warning signs and a probe specific to Facilities Management. You do not need to ask every question. Choose two or three per competency that fit the role, and spend the time you save on follow-up questions.

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Experience is not the same as judgement

Why Behavioural Interviewing Works

Most hiring decisions still rest on the interview, and most interviews are less reliable than the people running them believe. Unstructured conversations reward confidence, fluency and familiarity. Structured, behavioural interviews reward evidence.

.42

Structured interviews had the highest mean validity of the common selection methods examined in a major meta-analytic review, compared with .19 for unstructured interviews.

Source: Cambridge University Press / SIOP, Revisiting the design of selection systems in light of new findings regarding the validity of widely used predictors (Sackett, Zhang, Berry & Lievens), Industrial and Organizational Psychology 16, 2023

Competency-based and behavioural interviews are already common. The CIPD found that 90% of UK organisations use some form of selection interview and 52% use competency-based interviews. The gap is in how well they are run.

39%

of UK employers admit their staff's interviewing and assessment skills should be improved.

Source: Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC), Hiring mistakes are costing UK businesses billions each year, 2017

The cost of getting it wrong is significant, particularly in senior roles where a poor appointment affects teams, suppliers and service for months.

£132,000

The REC found that a poor hire at mid-manager level on a £42,000 salary can cost a business more than this.

Source: Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC), Hiring mistakes are costing UK businesses billions each year, 2017

How to Run a Behavioural Interview

The questions matter less than the discipline around them. These six steps make the difference between a structured interview and a conversation with a script.

01 Agree the competencies before you meet anyone

Decide which three or four competencies matter most for this role and what a strong answer looks like for each. Write it down and share it with the panel.

02 Ask every candidate the same core questions

Consistency is what makes answers comparable. Vary the follow-up questions, not the core ones.

03 Probe for specifics

Use the STAR structure (Situation, Task, Action, Result) to guide follow-up questions. Ask what the candidate personally did, why, and what happened as a result.

04 Take notes on evidence, not impressions

Record what the candidate said they did. "Confident" is an impression. "Renegotiated the cleaning contract after two missed KPIs" is evidence.

05 Score independently

Each interviewer scores each competency before the panel discusses. This prevents the most senior or most vocal person setting the view.

06 Decide together, against the criteria

Compare scores, discuss differences and decide against the competencies you agreed at the start, not against the candidate you liked most.

Score each competency using the scale on the next page, then compare notes.

Scoring the Evidence

A shared scale keeps the panel honest. Score what the candidate showed you, not what you think they could do. Use the same four levels for every competency and every candidate.

1 Little or no evidence

General statements, hypothetical answers, or an example that does not answer the question.

2 Some evidence

A relevant example, but the candidate's own actions or the outcome are unclear.

3 Clear evidence

A specific, recent example with clear personal actions, reasoning and a result.

4 Strong evidence

Several specific examples showing a consistent pattern, with honest reflection on what they learned.

Using the scores

- Agree in advance which competencies are essential for the role and the minimum score you will accept for each.
- Where interviewers differ by two points or more, discuss the evidence each of you heard before anyone changes a score.
- A high score on one competency should not compensate for little or no evidence on an essential one.
- Record the reasons for the final decision. It improves the next hire and makes feedback to candidates easier.

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Senior FM hiring is a judgement call

Competency 1: Adaptability

Facilities Management rarely goes to plan. Buildings fail, occupiers change their minds, contracts end and regulations move. Adaptable candidates stay effective when the ground shifts beneath them.

What good looks like

A calm response to change, rapid learning and ownership in unfamiliar situations. Strong candidates describe change as something they worked through, not something that happened to them.

Questions to ask

- ☐ Tell me about a time you were asked to do something you had never done before. How did you approach it?
- ☐ Describe a situation in which you adopted a new system, process or technology.
- ☐ Recall a time you were given a task outside your job description. What did you do?
- ☐ Tell me about the biggest change you have had to deal with professionally.
- ☐ Describe a time you had to adjust to a colleague's working style to achieve a result.

What to listen for

- specific steps they took to learn quickly;
- a realistic account of what was difficult; and
- evidence that they helped others through the change, not just themselves.

Warning signs

- describing change only as a frustration or an imposition;
- examples where someone else did the adapting; and
- no clear result or lesson.

A Facilities Management probe

Ask about a mobilisation, a contract change, a relocation or the introduction of a new CAFM system. These are where adaptability in FM shows most clearly.

Competency 2: Culture Add

Culture fit too often means hiring people who look, think and sound like the existing team. Culture add asks a better question: what will this person bring that the team does not already have, while still sharing its values?

What good looks like

Clear values, authentic motivation and the ability to add perspective rather than mirror others. Strong candidates know what matters to them and can explain why this role fits.

Questions to ask

- ☐ What are the three things that matter most to you in a job?
- ☐ Tell me about a recent time you felt energised and productive at work.
- ☐ What is the most interesting thing about you that is not on your CV?
- ☐ What would make you choose this organisation over others?
- ☐ What is the biggest misconception your colleagues have about you?

What to listen for

- answers that are consistent with what they have actually done in their career;
- genuine curiosity about the organisation and the role; and
- self-awareness and honesty.

Warning signs

- generic answers that could apply to any employer;
- motivation driven only by salary or title; and
- an inability to describe themselves beyond their job description.

A Facilities Management probe

Ask how they would want building users to describe the service their team provides. The answer reveals what they value and the standard they hold themselves to.

Competency 3: Collaboration

Facilities teams succeed through other people: colleagues, contractors, landlords, occupiers and senior stakeholders. Collaboration is often the competency that separates a good technical manager from a good Facilities Manager.

What good looks like

Constructive communication, accountability and low-ego teamwork. Strong candidates share credit, own their part in problems and keep relationships working under pressure.

Questions to ask

- ☐ Give an example of working with someone you found difficult.
- ☐ Tell me about a time someone misunderstood you. How did you handle it?
- ☐ Describe one of your favourite team experiences and your contribution to it.
- ☐ Describe the best manager or partner you have worked with, and why.
- ☐ Tell me about a project that changed direction at the last minute.

What to listen for

- a balanced view of the other person in a difficult relationship;
- clarity about their own contribution within the team; and
- actions taken to repair or improve a relationship.

Warning signs

- blaming others for every difficulty;
- taking sole credit for team outcomes; and
- avoiding conflict rather than resolving it.

A Facilities Management probe

Ask about a time a contractor relationship was under strain. How they describe the supplier tells you a great deal about how they will manage yours.

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The right leader steadies the whole team

Competency 4: Leadership

Leadership is not limited to people with direct reports. In FM it shows up in incidents, in negotiations with suppliers, in influencing senior stakeholders and in setting standards for a team.

What good looks like

Ownership, influence and decisive action under pressure. Strong candidates make decisions, explain them and take responsibility for the outcome, including when it goes wrong.

Questions to ask

- ☐ Tell me about a time something significant did not go to plan.
- ☐ Describe a time you needed to persuade someone to see things differently.
- ☐ Give an example of when you led by example.
- ☐ Tell me about the toughest decision you have made in the last six months.
- ☐ Have you ever had to sell an idea internally? What happened?

What to listen for

- a clear decision and the reasoning behind it;
- ownership of the outcome, good or bad; and
- influence achieved through evidence and relationships rather than authority alone.

Warning signs

- decisions that were always someone else's;
- no examples of failure, or failures blamed on others; and
- leadership described only in terms of hierarchy.

A Facilities Management probe

Ask them to walk you through a serious building incident they managed, minute by minute. Calm, sequenced decision-making is the clearest leadership signal in FM.

Competency 5: Growth Potential

Many FM roles grow faster than the people in them. Growth potential tells you whether a candidate will keep pace with the role, and whether they could step up into the next one.

What good looks like

Self-directed learning, feedback-seeking and ambition without entitlement. Strong candidates take responsibility before the title arrives.

Questions to ask

- ☐ Tell me about a time your manager was unavailable when a problem arose.
- ☐ Describe a time you volunteered to expand your knowledge or experience.
- ☐ What would motivate you to leave your current role?
- ☐ When did you last ask for direct feedback, and why?
- ☐ What is the biggest career goal you have achieved so far?

What to listen for

- learning they initiated themselves;
- specific feedback they sought and acted on; and
- ambition that is realistic and connected to effort.

Warning signs

- development that only ever came from formal training;
- defensiveness about feedback; and
- expectations of progression without evidence of stretch.

A Facilities Management probe

Ask what they have done to broaden beyond their specialism, whether that is hard services, soft services, projects or budgets. Breadth is the best predictor of progression in FM.

Competency 6: Prioritisation

Facilities Managers juggle planned maintenance, reactive repairs, compliance deadlines, projects and stakeholder requests, often on the same day. Prioritisation is where good intentions meet operational reality.

What good looks like

Clear thinking under pressure, disciplined execution and realistic planning. Strong candidates explain how they decide what comes first, and they deliver what they commit to.

Questions to ask

- ☐ Tell me about a time you had to juggle several projects at once.
- ☐ Tell me about a project you planned from start to finish.
- ☐ Describe a time when you felt stressed or overwhelmed. What did you do?
- ☐ Give an example of effective delegation.
- ☐ How do you decide what amount of time is reasonable for a task?

What to listen for

- a clear method for ranking priorities, especially around risk and compliance;
- honest recognition of limits, and action taken; and
- delegation that develops others rather than offloading work.

Warning signs

- treating everything as equally urgent;
- no examples of saying no or renegotiating deadlines; and
- plans that only worked because of heroic effort.

A Facilities Management probe

Give them a realistic Monday morning: a failed boiler, a compliance audit due, a senior visitor arriving and a contractor no-show. Ask them to talk you through their first hour.

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Ask harder questions before the offer

Interviewer Checklist

Use this checklist before, during and after each interview.

- ☐ The competencies and what good looks like have been agreed and shared with the panel.
- ☐ Two or three questions have been chosen for each competency.
- ☐ Every candidate is asked the same core questions.
- ☐ Follow-up questions probe for situation, task, action and result.
- ☐ Notes record evidence, not impressions.
- ☐ Each interviewer scores independently before the panel discusses.
- ☐ The decision is made against the agreed criteria.
- ☐ Every candidate receives timely feedback, whatever the outcome.

Key Takeaways

- Behavioural interviews ask what candidates did, not what they would do.
- Structured interviews predict performance far better than unstructured conversations.
- Agree the competencies and what good looks like before the first interview.
- Ask the same core questions, probe for specifics and score independently.
- Look for culture add, not culture fit: shared values, different perspectives.
- In FM, the strongest evidence often comes from incidents, contractors and change.

This guide reflects Maxwell Stephens' advisory-led approach to recruitment: structured, evidence-based and focused on long-term success rather than short-term placement.

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References tell you what a CV cannot

What the Data Says

The evidence behind structured, behavioural interviewing: what research and UK employer data show about how interviews are run and what poor decisions cost.

- Structured interviews have the highest mean validity of common selection methods (.42) in the Sackett et al. meta-analytic update.

  Source: Cambridge University Press / SIOP, Revisiting the design of selection systems in light of new findings regarding the validity of widely used predictors (Sackett, Zhang, Berry & Lievens), Industrial and Organizational Psychology 16, 2023

- Unstructured interviews predict job performance far less well: a mean operational validity of .19, versus .42 for structured interviews.

  Source: Cambridge University Press / SIOP, Revisiting the design of selection systems in light of new findings regarding the validity of widely used predictors (Sackett, Zhang, Berry & Lievens), Industrial and Organizational Psychology 16, 2023

- 90% of UK organisations use some form of selection interview; 52% use competency-based interviews.

  Source: CIPD, Resourcing and talent planning report 2024

- Four in ten UK employers (39%) admit their staff's interviewing and assessment skills should be improved.

  Source: Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC), Hiring mistakes are costing UK businesses billions each year, 2017

- A poor hire at mid-manager level on a £42,000 salary can cost a business more than £132,000, the REC found.

  Source: Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC), Hiring mistakes are costing UK businesses billions each year, 2017

- 85% of UK HR decision-makers admit their organisation has made a bad hire; a third believe these mistakes cost nothing.

  Source: Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC), Hiring mistakes are costing UK businesses billions each year, 2017

- 41% of UK organisations that selected candidates in the past year said new recruits always, mostly or sometimes resigned within their first 12 weeks.

  Source: CIPD, Resourcing and talent planning report 2024

Sources were checked in September 2026. Select a source to open the original research.

See It in Practice

Head of Facilities for The Royal College of Psychiatrists

The Royal College of Psychiatrists engaged Maxwell Stephens to recruit a Head of Facilities who could combine operational FM expertise with events management and the ability to work credibly with members and senior stakeholders. The brief weighed cultural alignment as heavily as technical capability. Alongside screening and tailored shortlisting, we carried out in-depth behavioural assessments of each candidate's interpersonal skills, leadership capability and ability to perform in a demanding, fast-moving environment.

It shows how behavioural assessment helps identify the right leader when a role depends as much on judgement and relationships as on technical credentials.

Read the full case study at maxwellstephens.com

Related Reading

- How to Interview Facilities Management Candidates Properly
  maxwellstephens.com/resources/how-to-interview-facilities-management-candidates-properly
- Facilities Manager Interview Questions Guide
  maxwellstephens.com/resources/facilities-manager-interview-questions-guide
- The Psychology of Great Hiring Decisions
  maxwellstephens.com/resources/the-psychology-of-great-hiring-decisions
- How to Reduce Hiring Risk in Facilities Management
  maxwellstephens.com/resources/how-to-reduce-hiring-risk-in-facilities-management
- The Biggest Hiring Mistakes in Facilities Management
  maxwellstephens.com/resources/the-biggest-hiring-mistakes-in-facilities-management

About Maxwell Stephens

Maxwell Stephens is a specialist Facilities Management, estates and workplace recruitment consultancy. Since 2006 we have helped organisations across the UK and Europe identify, attract and appoint Facilities Management professionals, from operational specialists to Facilities Directors.

We have completed more than 450 client engagements, and 95% of the candidates we place remain in role one year after appointment. We have more than 50,000 FM professionals in our network across the UK and Europe.

Every search we run includes structured, evidence-based assessment of the kind set out in this guide. To discuss an FM, estates or workplace appointment, contact us at info@maxwellstephens.com or on 0207 118 4848.

Talk to Maxwell Stephens

Planning a senior FM, estates or workplace appointment? Contact us for a confidential conversation, or browse our case studies.

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