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Your answer should begin with the following phrases:

A past challenging experience I dealt with was [..]. This was a challenge because [...]. To resolve the issue, I [..]

Then, divide the answer into 5 parts:

The following are examples of questions

- Tell me about a difficult decision that you have made.
- Tell me about an unpopular decision you have made.

In order to answer these questions effectively, make sure you understand what competency the interviewer is addressing and what component skills and behaviours make up that competency. For example, solving a problem may be very simple but if you look back to competencies 6 and 7 you can see that you're going to need to fit in a fair bit of info to satisfy this question as it involves:

- detailing the problem
- explaining how you approached/ analysed it and broke it down
- what resources did you use to help formulate effective solutions
- how did you select the most appropriate solution
- how did you implement it
- what were the results

A good interviewer will structure this conversationally, so you can break your answer up and be receptive to probing questions. A bad/ less competent interviewer will need you to do most of the structuring. Therefore, you have to be concise yet forthcoming with the info to make sure to give your best.

Apply this technique of breaking down competencies into their components in order to select the strongest examples from your experience to fit the questions. This will help when structuring as well.

When the interviewer asks the question about your most challenging experience and the actions you took to solve the problem (or the case), remember that the interviewer is trying to get a brief idea of several aspects related to your personality:

- Your problem solving and analytic thinking skills.
- Your ability to work in a stressful environment.
- How do you handle stress and pressure?
- How do you cope with complex situations?

Read further...

## Problem Solving Interview Questions

Problem Solving Job Interview questions can be asked in different ways and as follow up questions, for example:

- How did you handle your most challenging experience in your previous job?
- Describe the problem and the way you collect info and establish a problem solving model.
- How do you build a troubleshooting process?
- What are the steps you take for a project that requires collection of systematic data and risk management for conducting a performance analysis
- What are the steps you take to anticipate risks and resolve issues?
- Give an example of an effective/innovative solution you created to solve a problem.

## Problem Solving Interview Answers

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Your answer should begin with the following phrases:

A past challenging experience I dealt with was [...]. This was a challenge because [...]. To resolve the issue, I [...]

Then, divide the answer into 5 parts:

### 1. Define the Problem

Describe the problem in the workplace. What makes it a problem? What does this problem involve?

### 2. Analyze the Problem

Tell about how you collected information for data analysis: the process you utilized for extracting maximum information from the facts.

### 3. Generating Possible Solutions

Explain the factors taken into consideration when making a decision: how did you get to the root cause of the problem? How did you identify the likely causes of the problem? How did you generate a number of possible solutions?

#### **4. Selecting the Best Solution(s) and courses of action**

Describe the actions you took: why did you choose these actions? What results did you expect to achieve? Describe how you organized ideas into process flow and common themes and the way you monitored results. Don't forget the risk management factors.

#### **5. Lesson learned**

What did you achieve? What was going right? What did you learn from that experience?

You may find useful information reading the articles –

Questions about decision-making and judgment skills are asked in many job interviews, however most likely to be asked in interviews for executives positions and positions that require making quality decisions, such as: project managers, customer service, medical, finance positions and many more.

We all make decisions every day – People follow basic logical process for making decisions. We all view issues in (each on his own) unique angle, though there are some who have exceptional natural abilities...

When asking questions about your decision making skills, the interviewer is looking for the method/s you use to reach a decision.

#### **Are you a good decision maker?**

You have to realize that in reality different forms of decisions are ok for different cases. In an interview, it is your time to demonstrate that you have a balanced thinking process and, if required, you are able to make quality decisions assertively but never too impulsively.

Here are some questions that can be asked:

**Can you tell about any past critical situation in which you had to make an immediate decision? Give an example of a situation in which you had to make a decision when you didn't have all facts available. What process do you follow for making decisions for these different circumstances and were you satisfied with the results?**

The examples that you give should show how resourcefulness and initiative you are.

Many a times, we make decisions based on instinct having incomplete data. However, though the word is not ideal, an individual who possesses good logical and analytical skills will make high-quality decision when he takes the following procedure:

1. Using available info – Based his process on the information to hand.
2. Analyzing – Knows how to break complex issues into components.
3. Critical Thinking – Considers the outcomes of varying course of actions.
4. Investigating – Can take conclusions from different sources of data.
5. Acting – Can make decisions without complete info. Doesn't hesitate to act and able to make sound decision patiently, but in a timely manner.

6. Responsibility – Does not put off making a decision to avoid conflict, ‘getting it wrong’. Not afraid to take risks to come to a solution. Doesn’t delay actions because of outcomes or reactions.
7. Studying – Demonstrate a lesson learned ability in order to progress.

At the end of your answer, it is a good time to tell that you are not always perfect. Admit your fallibility:

“There were times when some decisions had turned out to be wrong, however I am sure, that these wrong decisions have made a mark on me so that I learn from it to avoid the same mistakes again. “

**Do you always take the process on your own? On what occasions do you recognize that you need other’s help? Do you always use established procedures to ensure that the correct action is taken?**

It is ok to tell that you to ask for advice and information when you are unable to get it by yourself as you are always looking for the best decision.

You also have to talk about your ability to take hard decisions (sometimes initiatives or creative ones) independently if required. You seek for being practical when assessing multiple, complex or contradictory data in order to reach the right decision.

Show that you understand Cause and Effect and during the decision-making process you are able to evaluate the relationship between short-term consequences and long-term gains.

## **Critical Thinking Interview Questions**

Critical thinking is known as the high level of decision making process.

The interviewer may ask you to define the meaning of critical thinking and to assess the importance of it to the decision making process. He may also present an issue and will want you to identify point of views, classify approaches or analyze a theory within this issue.

He will want to observe your knowledge of using thought processes – taking an issue and structure your analysis in a balanced way.

### **How to answer these questions:**

First let’s define the term – Critical thinking allows us to take control of our thinking rather than letting it become hijacked by mindset, assumptions and bias thus to understand the pathway and inputs that the thinking employs. It is the best way to approach problem solving with a level of detachment that permits a thorough and balanced analysis.

Critical thinkers take the time necessary to make excellent decisions rather than choosing to make fast, good-enough decisions. They seek first to understand and to find out what they do not know before reaching conclusions (or judgment) so as to make more effective decisions as a result.

Critical thinking is questioning. It requires practicing. Therefore, Show that you are questioning the process’s elements you are using.

You can talk about instances from your past when you had to base your actions and judgments on the competent assessment of relevant reasons/evidence and how you’ve monitored each route – way of thinking.

Way of thinking (or reasoning) is always based on the information gathered. Critical thinker must ask himself ‘upon which information am I basing my reasoning? Have I checked facts and refreshed my data?’ he never takes things for granted and that is what you have to demonstrate during the interview.

## ‘Solving a Problem’ Interview questions

Problem solving job interview questions can be formed in any work related case that the interviewer will present to you asking you to analyze it and suggest resolutions.

Further reading: [Case Study Interview Questions](#)

Similar to the decision making questions, the interviewer may also want you to tell about any real challenging problem that you had experienced in your previous job trying to assess your performance.

### **How do you go ahead when it comes to solving a problem?**

The interviewer will want to hear the logic that you use to solve a problem along with the outcome that you are able to achieve. Do you know how to collect data systematically and use well organized/accurate analysis methods to make decisions? Can you handle a position that requires anticipating and resolving issues frequently?

Do you possess the quality of being decisive?

It is recommended to tell a success story from your background. You can also how you narrow the options to make a decision, such as:

1. Writing down ideas about possible causes
2. Looking for related causes in order to group together symptoms of bigger problems
3. Studying these groups of causes
4. The real cause (to the problem in question) becomes readily apparent
5. Devising a route to getting a resolution.

Refer also to [Problem Solving Interview Questions and Answers](#).

### **Problem Solving**

Committing to an action after developing alternative courses of action that are based on logical assumptions and factual information and that take into consideration resources, constraints and organisational values.

Every employee is required to make decisions as part of [their job](#). Situational interview questions will explore your ability to use your judgment to make the right decisions.

***Tell me about a good decision you made recently at work.***

Your example should show how you gather all the necessary information to make a decision. How you consider available resources and possible outcomes before making your decision.

***Tell me about a recent problem you faced at work and how you found the best solution.***

How did you go about analyzing the problem before considering possible solutions. Describe how you weighed the pros and cons of each option before deciding on the best solution.

***Tell me about a mistake you made at work and how you dealt with it.***

The ability to recognize and acknowledge one's mistakes is a sign of maturity and self-growth. Your example needs to demonstrate how you used your judgment to review the situation and evaluate information to determine why it happened and what measures you put in place to prevent it from occurring again.

***What recent innovation have you made at work that had a positive outcome?***

The [focus](#) is on how you used your initiative to generate ideas for improvement and develop new approaches. How did you evaluate what needed to be changed, how did you decide on which changes to make and how to implement them ?

View more situational interview questions and excellent sample answers for these competencies by clicking on the table below.

Problem solving is a frequently required workplace competency whether the employer is exploring management competencies, sales competencies, customer service competencies or administrative competencies.

**Describe a difficult problem you had to sort out in your last job (Problem-solving)**

This behavior based interviewing question is designed to explore your ability to identify, analyze and solve problems.

Show how you are able to gather and organize the necessary information and identify the best solution.

Here is a sample behavioral interview answer that you can use as a guide to develop your own good answer.

*"We were getting a lot of complaints about late deliveries.*  
(Situation)

*I met with the staff involved in the customer delivery department and discovered that the problem seemed to be with the stock coming through on time.*



*I investigated and found that requests for new inventory were not been processed fast enough. The backlog was in the orders department as they were not following up adequately with the suppliers. A system for regular follow up was quickly implemented. (Action)*

*This sorted out the stock problems and the delivery staff were able to meet their deadlines." (Result)*

### **Describe a new idea or suggestion that you made to your supervisor recently (initiative)**

The ability to use your initiative is often explored during competency based interviewing. The interviewer wants to know if you are proactive and able to generate workable ideas. Show how you are a self-starter who will take action beyond what is asked of you.

*" I work in orders and the company was launching a new product. The sales team had in-depth training on it but we had none. (Situation)*

*I suggested that the orders department should also receive the training so that we would understand what was being ordered and be able to answer any questions if necessary. It was agreed we would all undergo a short version of the training. (Action)*



*This meant that we could deal professionally with the orders and it also motivated us, feeling part of the launch excitement." (Result)*

### **Tell me about a time that you had to use your judgment and make a decision in your previous job (judgment/decision-making)**

Judgment is another essential behavioral competency in the workplace. The interviewer is exploring your ability to make logical decisions and take action. Show how you consider all the relevant facts, weigh up the alternatives and commit to the most appropriate action.

*"I was responsible for ordering office supplies for the company. (Situation)*

*The company always ordered a month's supply at a time to keep inventory costs low. I had to decide whether to keep doing this or buy six month's supply and get a discount for ordering such a big volume and escape possible future price increases. I did some research and worked out we could reduce our costs by buying for six months, especially since the amount we used remained practically unchanged month on month. (Action)*

*I was right, the prices went up quite a bit during those six months." (Result)*

Remember that these are sample answers that can be used to help you formulate **your own examples** from your previous jobs or other contexts when answering *behavioral interview questions* like these.

## The 12 core competencies identified for job success

**Judgment/decision-making** - able to make sound decisions based on information gathered and analysed. Consider all pertinent facts and alternatives before deciding on the most appropriate action.

**Teamwork /interpersonal** - able to interact with people effectively. Able and willing to share and receive information. Cooperate within the group and across groups. Support group decisions.

**Quality Orientation/work standards** - maintain high standards, attention to detail, accuracy and completeness. Show concern for all aspects of the job.

**Work Ethic/motivation** - Energy and enthusiasm in approaching the job. Commitment to putting in additional effort.

**Reliability** - take personal responsibility for job performance. Complete work in a timely and consistent manner. Keep commitments.

**Problem Analysis/problem solving** - gather and organize all relevant information. Identify cause-effect relationships. Come up with appropriate solutions.

**Adaptability** - adapts to changing work environment, work priorities, organizational needs. Able to deal with change and diverse people.

**Planning /organizing** - plan and organize tasks and work responsibilities to achieve objectives. Set priorities. Schedule activities. Allocate and use resources properly.

**Communication** - express ideas effectively. Organize and deliver information appropriately. Listen actively.

**Honesty/integrity** - share complete and accurate information. Maintain confidentiality. Adhere to organizational policies and procedures. Meet own commitments.

**Initiative** - take action to influence events. Generate ideas for improvement, take advantage of opportunities, suggest innovations, do more than required.

**Stress tolerance**- emotionally resilient and able to withstand pressure on an on-going basis. Deal with difficult situations while maintaining performance. Seek support from others when necessary. Use appropriate coping techniques.