

Career Transition Series

PIVOTING OUTSIDE THE UN SYSTEM

WELCOME TO

MASTERING INTERVIEWS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR



UNITED NATIONS
GENEVA



UNITED NATIONS



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



World Health
Organization



Teresa Callejo

Career Strategy & Development

10+ years helping global professionals gain clarity & confidence:

- ✓ Navigating growth in transitions
- ✓ Translating UN experience into market value



UNITED NATIONS
GENEVA



UNITED NATIONS



World Health
Organization

Zoom - Housekeeping rules



You are muted by default. The chat function is disabled.



Expect to participate dropping words and questions in the chat function.



If you have any questions, please submit them through Zoom Q&A button.



The session will be recorded. The recording and presentation will be available on: [Career Transition Series webpage](#).

Capability recognition → communication

SESSION 1 “Finding your Path...”

- ✓ Identity
- ✓ Transferable capability
- ✓ Complexity navigation
- ✓ Possibility

SESSION 2 “Mastering Interviews...”

- Positioning
- Communication
- Storytelling
- Executive presence

PRACTICE QUESTION #1

Where are you connecting from today?

From which country or city
Or which Agency?

Share in the chat.



PRACTICE QUESTION #2

**What is your energy level today?
Chose one number:**

- 5- Very high
- 4- Ok
- 3- So-so
- 2- Not so good
- 1- I need coffee ASAP

Share your number in the chat.



Agenda

- 1. Understaing Private-Sector logic**
- 2. Translating UN Experience for the Market**
- 3. Interviews as Translation Exercises**
- 4. Mastering Common Interview Questions**
- 5. Q&A**

Interviews are translation exercises

The market will not automatically interpret UN experience.

Translation becomes critical.



Understanding Private-Sector Hiring

Institutional systems:

Standardization
Comparability
Procedural fairness
Role clarity


Market systems:

Growth
Execution
Adaptability
Solving business problems

The race changes

As environments become more unpredictable, organizations increasingly value professionals who can adapt when conditions change.



 Reference: Claudio Fernández-Aráoz, "21st-Century Talent Spotting," *Harvard Business Review* (June 2014)

Why Job Descriptions Often Feel Confusing

**Job descriptions describe
business problems companies
are trying to solve**



RESEARCH THE JOB

Focus on the goal and purpose of the role.

amazon Search Amazon jobs Find jobs Sign in

Business Intelligence Engineer

Amazon | Seattle, WA

DESCRIPTION

The Recruiting Engine Team is reinventing how we recruit at Amazon. Recruiting the right candidates across all of Amazon is critical to our ability to innovate and build on behalf of customers. As the search for talent becomes more competitive, we are bringing together recruiting, science, tech, programs, and process teams to find and hire candidates who raise the bar more quickly and efficiently.

Are you motivated by solving the tough problem, data-savvy, and business focused?

We are looking for an analytical and technically skilled Business Intelligence Engineer to build analytical solutions for the Recruiting Engine team. The successful candidate is passionate about developing business metrics and insights from complex datasets. They will work closely with data engineers, software development engineers, product managers, and recruiters to produce reports and analyses that help improve the recruiting experience.

You will turn ambiguous business questions to clearly defined problems, develop quantifiable metrics, and implement reporting to support the data needs across the organization. The successful candidate will be a self-starter, comfortable with ambiguity, with strong attention to detail, and an ability to work in a fast-paced and ever-changing environment.

INDUSTRY
Computer Software, Information Technology & Services, Internet

EMPLOYMENT TYPE
Full-time

JOB FUNCTIONS
Strategy/Planning, Analyst, Information Technology

BASIC QUALIFICATIONS

- 3+ years of experience in data analysis, BI, or related role
- Strong SQL skills
- Experience with data visualization tools (e.g., Tableau, QuickSight)
- Bachelor's degree in Computer Science, Engineering, Statistics, or related field

Save job Apply now



FOCUS ON THE GOAL/PURPOSE OF THE ROLE



UNDERSTAND THE MISSION

What is the team trying to achieve and why does it matter?



IDENTIFY KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

What are the core outcomes and deliverables?



LOOK FOR COLLABORATION

Who will you work with and influence?



NOTE THE MINDSET & IMPACT

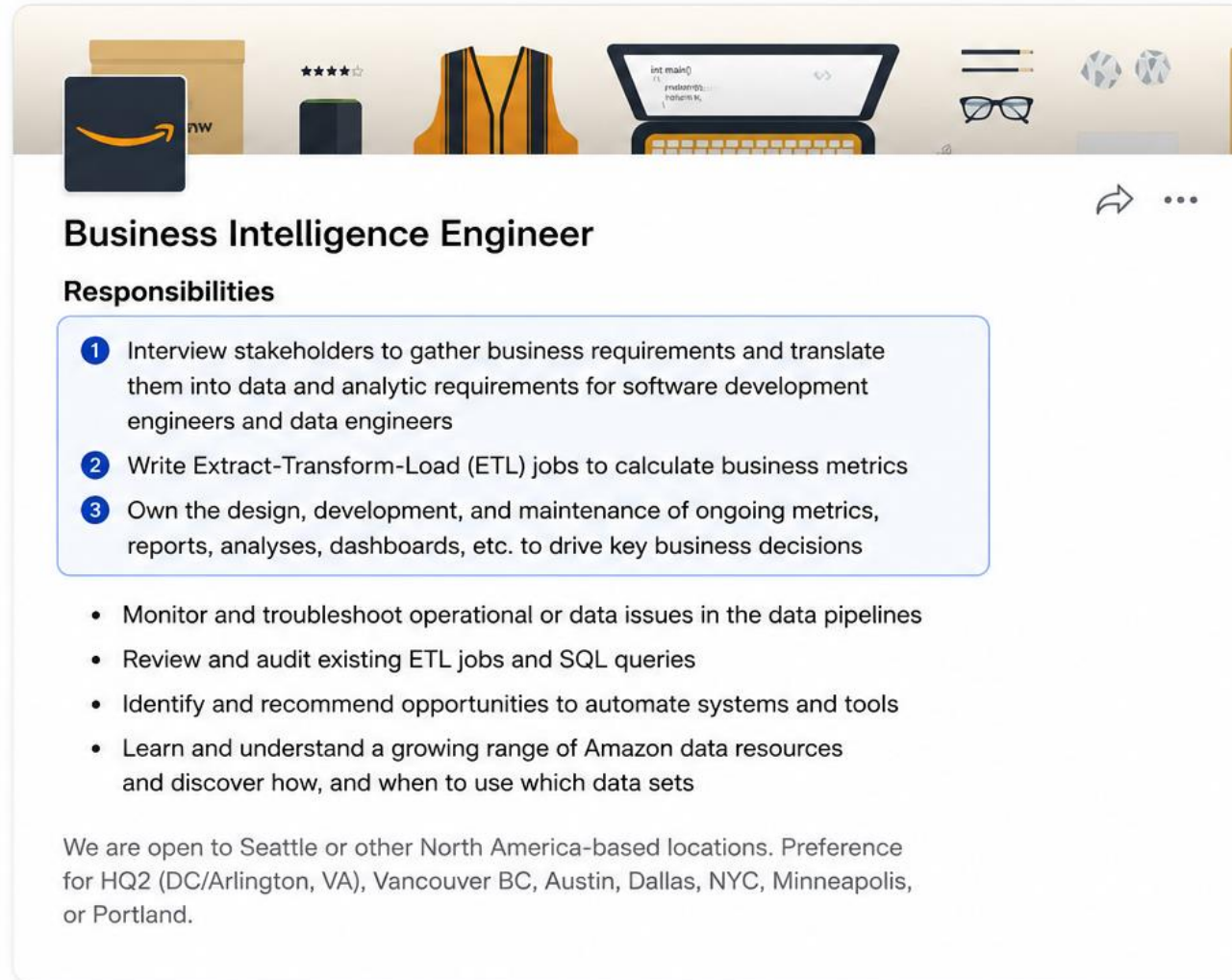
What qualities and impact are emphasized?



TIP: Understanding the goal and purpose of the role helps you tailor your experience to what matters most to the hiring team.

RESEARCH THE JOB: FOCUS ON KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Focus on the most important responsibilities at the beginning.



Business Intelligence Engineer

Responsibilities

- 1 Interview stakeholders to gather business requirements and translate them into data and analytic requirements for software development engineers and data engineers
- 2 Write Extract-Transform-Load (ETL) jobs to calculate business metrics
- 3 Own the design, development, and maintenance of ongoing metrics, reports, analyses, dashboards, etc. to drive key business decisions

- Monitor and troubleshoot operational or data issues in the data pipelines
- Review and audit existing ETL jobs and SQL queries
- Identify and recommend opportunities to automate systems and tools
- Learn and understand a growing range of Amazon data resources and discover how, and when to use which data sets

We are open to Seattle or other North America-based locations. Preference for HQ2 (DC/Arlington, VA), Vancouver BC, Austin, Dallas, NYC, Minneapolis, or Portland.



TIP: Build your stories and examples around the top responsibilities. That's where you'll create the strongest impact.



FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS MOST

Job descriptions list many responsibilities, but the ones at the beginning are usually the most critical.

These are the priorities the hiring team needs you to deliver.



Identify the must-haves

Focus on the first 2–3 responsibilities. These are the core expectations.



The rest is flexible

Responsibilities listed later are often nice-to-haves and may be open to negotiation.




Tailor your experience

Prepare examples and stories that align with the key responsibilities that matter most.

RESEARCH THE JOB: FOCUS ON KEY TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Focus on the most important technical requirements — often hard, but essential.



The header of the job listing features a row of icons: an Amazon logo, a 4.5-star rating, a yellow vest, a laptop displaying code, a pair of glasses, and two globe icons.

Business Intelligence Engineer

Basic Qualifications

- BA/BS degree in Engineering, Statistics, Computer Science, Operations Research, Business Analytics, Information Systems or related field
- 3+ years of professional experience in business analysis or comparable analytics position

- ✓ **SQL and ETL Experience**
- ✓ Understanding and experience working with data warehousing, data quality

Preferred Qualifications

- Experience applying visualization tools such as Tableau, AWS QuickSight
- Experience implementing basic software solutions to automate data source, visualization and/or data modeling application
- Experience managing and leading a business intelligence team
- Programming experience in Python, Java, C++ or other language
- Strong verbal/written communication and data presentation skills
- Ability to solve complex problems quantitatively and develop clear, data-driven business recommendations



TIP: Prioritize the technical skills that are must-haves for the role. For the rest, show that you're adaptable and ready to learn.



FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS MOST

Technical requirements are often listed in the qualifications section.

Some are must-haves (hard skills), others are nice-to-haves (easy enough to learn if needed).

For this role, SQL and ETL are the most important technical requirements.



Hard / Must-have

SQL and ETL experience
Essential to succeed in the role.



Nice-to-have / Learnable

Tools, languages and platforms
can be learned on the job
or quickly upskilled.



What to do

Be ready to demonstrate your SQL
and ETL experience with concrete
examples.

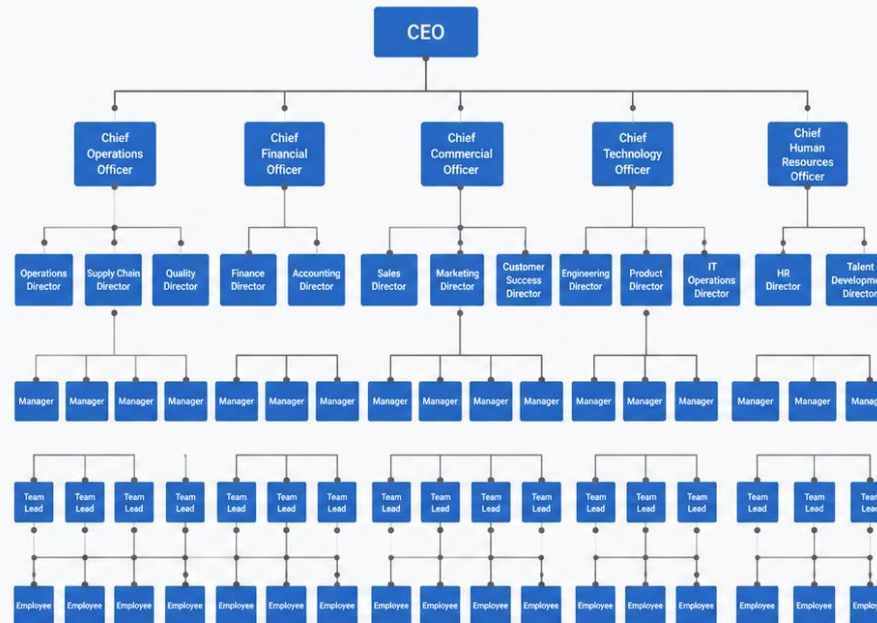
Capabilities travel better than titles

Titles do not translate cleanly across organizations

Previous successful profiles
Future organizational needs
Multiple stakeholder input
Changing business priorities

LARGE CORPORATION

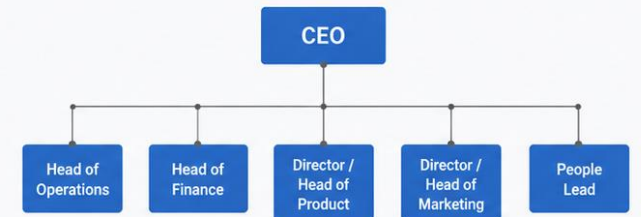
Many layers. Many people. Narrower spans of control.



Example: A "Director" here may manage hundreds of people across multiple teams and regions.

SMALL COMPANY

Fewer layers. Broader spans of control.



Example: A "Director" here may oversee the entire function or a small team with broad responsibilities.

Capabilities travel better than titles



HR filing systems for real

Translating UN Experience

Translation in the market:

Complexity → Operational Relevance

Coordination → Execution

Diplomacy → Stakeholder Management

Institutional Experience → Business Value



Pulse check

How familiar or unfamiliar do these ideas feel? Chose one number:

- 5-** Very familiar
- 4-** Mostly familiar
- 3-** I had an inkling
- 2-** Somewhat new
- 1-** Completely new

Share your number in the chat.



Interviews reflect organization priorities

Different organizations evaluate differently to solve different problems.

Selecting an expedition team



Arctic Scientific Expedition



Globally Televised Expedition



Same Mission, Different Organizations

SpaceX

Speed
Innovation
Uncertainty



NASA

Coordination
Reliability
Accountability

Bringing it back to interviews

Interview processes themselves are often adaptive.



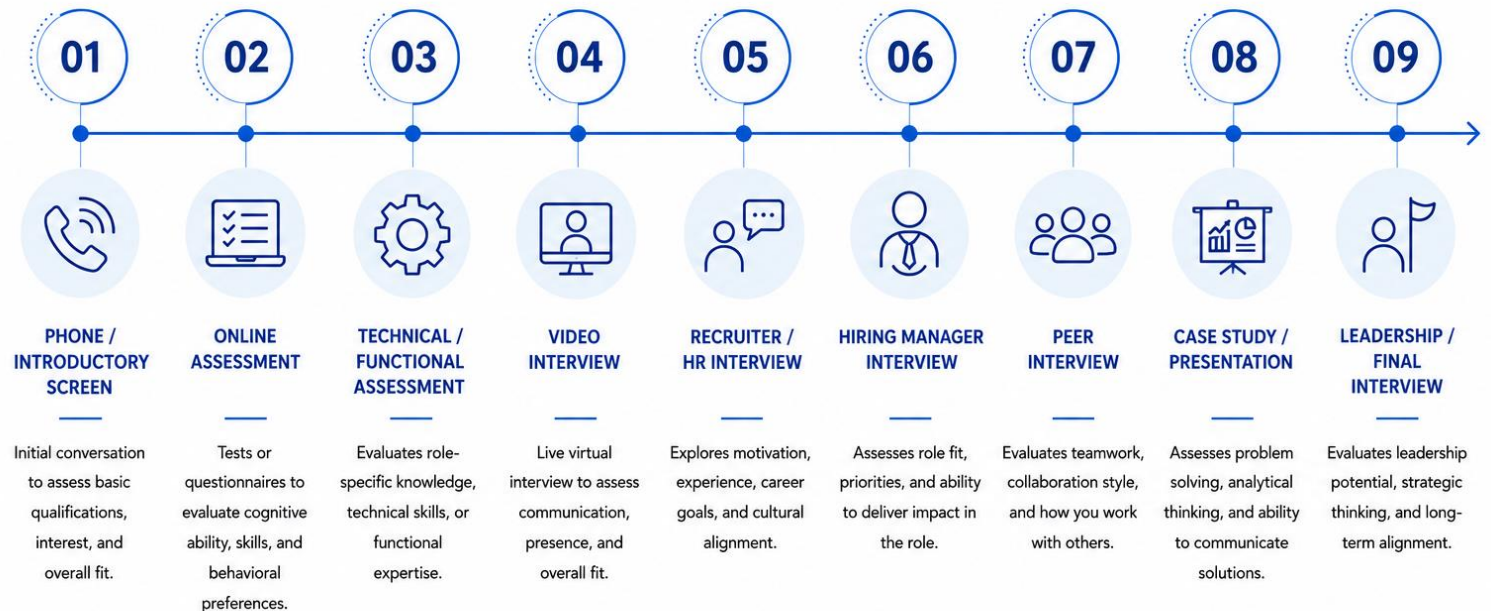
The Interview Landscape

8 possible stages
+ video interviews

Different stages evaluate
different dimensions of
capability

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Different stages. Different perspectives. One objective: finding the right fit.



PROCESSES MAY VARY
DEPENDING ON:



INDUSTRY /
SECTOR



SENIORITY
LEVEL



ORGANIZATIONAL
CULTURE



BUSINESS
PRIORITIES



ROLE
REQUIREMENTS

Phone / Introductory Screen

Typically evaluating:

overall fit
communication
motivation
coherence
logistics
progression potential

Often conducted by:

recruiter
talent acquisition
or headhunter

01



PHONE / INTRODUCTORY SCREEN

Initial conversation to assess
basic qualifications, interest,
and overall fit.

ATS + Phone interview: screening for progression

Online Assessment

Typically evaluating:
cognitive ability
behavioral preferences
judgment reasoning
attention to detail

Often administered by:
Talent Acquisition teams
external assessment platforms
specialized hiring providers

02



ONLINE ASSESSMENT

Tests or questionnaires to evaluate skills, cognitive ability, or behavioral preferences.

Early-stage evaluation at scale

Technical / Functional Assessment

Typically evaluating:

technical expertise
structured thinking
analytical ability
practical problem-solving
functional credibility

Often conducted by:

Talent Acquisition teams
+
Managers or senior peers

03



— • —
**TECHNICAL /
FUNCTIONAL
ASSESSMENT**

Evaluates job-specific
knowledge, technical skills,
or functional expertise.

Evaluating for how candidates approach real operational or technical challenges.

Video interviews

Typically evaluating:
communication
structured responses
motivation and fit
role relevance
clarity under time pressure

Often conducted by:
automated interview
platforms
HR & hiring teams
reviewing recordings
asynchronously



Assesses scalable fit and progression potential across distributed hiring stakeholders.

Recruiter /HR Interview

Typically evaluating:

Overall motivation
career logic organizational
cultural fit
communication style
values alignment
salary and logistics
competency-based evidence

Often conducted by:

Talent Acquisition first
Human Resources BP
Human Resources Dir.

04



RECRUITER / HR INTERVIEW

Conversations to understand
motivation, experience,
communication style,
and cultural fit.

Assessing how candidates communicate, operate, and align with the organization

Hiring Manager Interview

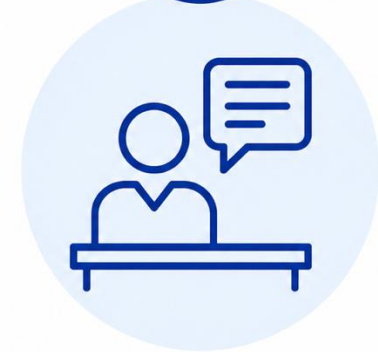
Typically evaluating:

operational relevance
judgment execution
capability
problem-solving
role impact

Often conducted by:

Hiring Manager + 1
Hiring Manager +2

05



HIRING MANAGER INTERVIEW

Assesses practical experience,
decision-making, leadership,
and ability to deliver results.

Assessing whether the candidate can operate effectively in the role

Peer Interview

Typically evaluating:

Collaboration
communication style
team dynamics
working style
interpersonal trust

Often conducted by:

peers
collaborators
cross-functional partners

06



PEER INTERVIEW

Assesses collaboration, communication style, team dynamics, and ability to work effectively with others.

Assesses how candidates operate inside collaborative working environments.

Case study / Presentation

Typically evaluating:

analytical thinking
structured problem-solving
strategic judgment
communication under
pressure a
daptability and resilience

Often conducted by:

hiring managers
technical specialists
strategy teams
senior leadership
interview panels



CASE / ASSESSMENT CENTER

OFTEN USED TO EVALUATE:

- analytical thinking
- problem-solving
- decision-making
- leadership potential
- collaboration

OFTEN CONDUCTED BY:

- hiring managers
- HR professionals
- subject matter experts
- assessment facilitators
- or evaluation panels

ASSESSING FOR:

- competencies in action
- behavior under pressure
- adaptability
- teamwork
- overall fit and potential



Simulates real work situations through exercises, presentations, group discussions, and role plays to assess how candidates think, act, and collaborate.

Assesses how candidates analyze, communicate, and respond under pressure.

Leadership / Final Interview

Typically evaluating:

strategic thinking
executive presence
leadership potential
business judgment
long-term organizational fit

Often conducted by:

senior leadership
business unit leaders
final decision-makers



LEADERSHIP / FINAL INTERVIEW

TYPICALLY EVALUATING:

- strategic thinking
- executive presence
- leadership potential
- business judgment
- long-term organizational fit

OFTEN CONDUCTED BY:

- senior leadership
- executives
- business unit leaders
- or final decision-makers

ASSESSING FOR:

- long-term fit
- strategic perspective
- leadership potential
- ability to grow within the organization

Assesses long-term fit, trust, and leadership potential.

Reflection question

Which interview stage do you think differs **MOST** between the UN and the private sector?

Share a number 1-8 in the chat.



Interviews as Strategic Conversations

They are simulations of future collaboration:

Both sides are gathering evidence!



Preparation Creates Freedom



Evaluating the company

Ask questions to help you understand:

What makes people successful here?



What are the biggest challenges facing the team?



What tends to frustrate people in this role?



Why is this position open?



How would you describe the leadership culture?



Rejection Is Not Failure

Hiring is often influenced by:

Team dynamics

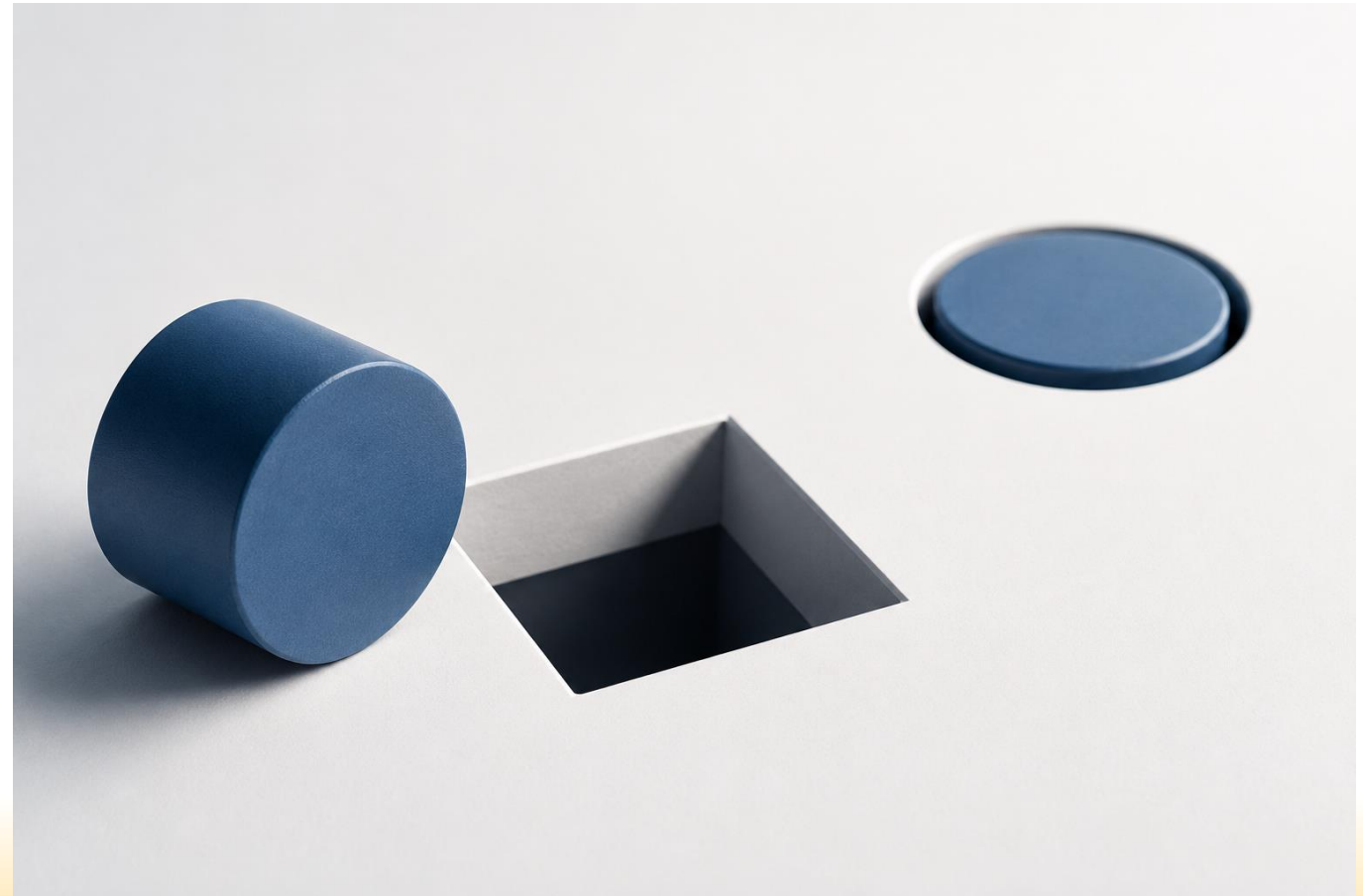
Internal succession plans

Stakeholder preferences

Complementarity of profiles

Manager needs

Future organization considerations



5 Frequently Asked Questions in Interviews

1. **"Tell me about yourself"**
2. **"Why us?"**
3. **Competency questions**
4. **Area for development**
5. **Salary expectations**

What Organizations Are Really

Question

Tell me about yourself →

Why do you want to work for us? →

Competency questions →

Area for development →

Salary expectations →

What they evaluate

Narrative and positioning

Motivation, alignment, research

Evidence of capability and behavior

Self-awareness, coachability

Market awareness, positioning

1. “Tell Me About Yourself”

Why organizations ask this:

to understand how you position yourself professionally

to help them understand you



“Tell Me About Yourself” HOW TO

“As you’ve probably reviewed my CV, I’ll focus on the three things that matter most for this role.”

- **Your career thread** what you’ve consistently done
- **Your value creation** how you create impact
- **Your direction** why this role makes sense now

“Would you like me to go deeper on any of those areas?”

OR

“Which part would you like me to expand on?”

“Tell Me About Yourself” ANSWER I

“Currently I’m a P-3 Programme Officer working on regional refugee response coordination across Africa and the Middle East. I support inter-agency reporting processes, stakeholder coordination, and operational planning activities with country offices and implementing partners.

Previously I worked on policy support and programme management functions across different humanitarian settings, including coordination with UN agencies, NGO counterparts, and government stakeholders. My responsibilities have included preparing situation reports, supporting regional planning cycles, consolidating inputs from field offices, and contributing to donor reporting and inter-agency coordination mechanisms.

Over the years I’ve gained exposure to different aspects of humanitarian operations and cross-functional coordination, and I’m now interested in exploring opportunities where I can continue developing professionally in a new environment.”

 *Please read this answer*

“Tell Me About Yourself” ANSWER II

I am a humanitarian policy and coordination professional supporting programs across Africa and the Middle East with a USD 40–60M in regional humanitarian funding.

One of the consistent threads in my experience has been helping organizations translate complex policy priorities into operational implementation. In my most recent role, for example, I supported refugee response planning across 8 country offices, with their government counterparts, 3 UN agencies, and NGO partners. It would be like coordinating across multiple country teams, external partners, vendors, and senior stakeholders simultaneously.

Part of my work included streamlining information flows and standardizing reporting inputs from country teams, which reduced reporting turnaround times by roughly 25% during key planning cycles.

In many ways, I feel I’ve already been working in a fairly consultative capacity — helping different teams align priorities, improve processes, and move implementation forward across decentralized environments. That’s why this consulting role feels like a natural next step in my career.”



Please read this answer

“Tell Me About Yourself” ANSWER III

Camila interviewing for Head of Finance:

“The reason I am here today is because of strawberries. I remember walking through the supermarket with my dad when I was around five years old and noticing that the price of strawberries kept changing.

Why was the number never the same?

My dad explained supply and demand to me, and Mercosur, and I remember becoming fascinated by how markets worked. Looking back, that curiosity never really changed.

Across the different finance and risk roles I’ve held since then, the common thread has been understanding and hedging volatility — whether through market analysis, or risk management [...]”

 *Please read this answer*

2. “Why do you want to work with us?”

Why organizations ask this:

to assess motivation

to evaluate alignment

to test preparation and research

to understand long-term fit



“Why do you want to work for us?” HOW TO

- **Talk about them. What you know about the company that makes them special.**
- **How you can help. Connect your experience with the business.**
- **How you connect with their mission and values**

“Why do you want to work for us ” TIPS

A strong answer will have:

- **How they are perceived in the market** _ what sets them apart from competitors?
- **How you can help them** _ reach their 2030 goals or solve a specific challenge they are facing
- **How they are perceived by their employees** _ mention your conversation with an employee or employees you have spoken to
- **How you will connect with their values and mission** _ are you joining their diversity initiative?

“Why do you want to work for us ” ANSWER I

Adam interviewing for MBA Program:

“Eli Lilly has always been one of my target companies, and I had the opportunity to learn more about your culture and job opportunities in the Business School Talent Forum, in the webinar presented by John Doe and Jane Doe.

What I find most striking about Eli Lilly is your sense of community: you have an excellent business culture and encourage employees to be proactive. On the other hand, I am fascinated by your passion for improving the lives of thousands of patients. Programs like Connecting Hearts Abroad, Life for a Child and, during the current crisis, Lilly Insulin Value Program are what motivate me to work for a company like this”.

 *Please read this answer*

“Why do you want to work for us?” ANSWER II

Margaret interviewing for Strategy Consultant:

“[...] John Doe from the Chicago office first exposed me to the fast-paced and highly collaborative environment Bain and Co. offers. Our conversation gave me a much clearer sense of the type of strategic work Bain teams are exposed to early in their careers, particularly supporting large-scale transformation projects for Fortune 500 clients in sectors like healthcare and consumer goods.

I was also very drawn to the firm’s emphasis on mentorship and community-building initiatives. In particular, I would be very excited about the opportunity to contribute to Blacks at Bain, both as a way to continue fostering collaboration around diversity and to support mentoring initiatives that help create a stronger sense of belonging within the organization.”

 *Please read this answer*

3. Principle of Competency questions

**Past Performance is the
BEST indicator
of Future Performance**

If you have done it before,
chances are you will do it again.

SHOW YOU HAVE DONE IT

UN Competency framework

3 CORE VALUES

Integrity
Professionalism
Respect for Diversity

8 CORE COMPETENCIES

Communication
Teamwork
Planning & Organizing
Accountability
Client Orientation
Creativity
Technological Awareness
Commitment to
Continuous Learning

6 MANAGERIAL COMPETENCIES

Vision
Leadership
Empowering Others
Building Trust
Managing Performance
Judgement/Decision
Making

Private Sector Competency frameworks

Each company has a unique Competency framework

McKinsey
& Company

Themes

Connection
Drive
Leadership
Growth

amazon

Leadership Principles

Customer Obsession
Ownership
Invent & Simplify
Are Right a Lot
Invent & Simplify
Learn & Be Curious

MORE Competencies



For Leaders:

The focus on resilience, empathy, adaptability, and intuition rather than just planning and control

For Organizations:

Encourages building flexibility to manage potential system failures

Hack Competency questions

Craft stories from your experience to face any question

- ➔ Simple and fast approach to think about your experience
- ➔ You can adapt easily to any Competency framework
- ➔ Craft additional stories as you go

6 stories for ALL competency questions

1. **Success story:** a time you were very successful
2. **Leadership story:** a time you shined as a leader
3. **Challenge story:** a time you had a setback
4. **Innovation story:** a time you introduced a new idea
5. **Technical story:** a time your expertise made a difference
6. **Resilience story:** a time you recovered or adapted

Effective CBI answers: example 1

 SUCCESS STORY A time you were very successful				
 S  SITUATION	 T  TASK	 A  ACTION	 R  RESULT	 R  REFLECTION
A regional UN coordination team was struggling with inconsistent reporting formats across 8 country offices during a refugee response operation.	I was asked to streamline the reporting process before a major donor review meeting.	I redesigned the reporting template, aligned indicators across teams, and introduced a simplified regional review process with focal points in each office.	Reporting preparation time decreased by approximately 40% , and the regional office delivered consolidated reporting two weeks ahead of the donor deadline.	I learned that operational improvements often come from simplifying processes and creating alignment early across stakeholders.



Please read this answer

4. Area For Development

You may use:

A planning mistake

The first time you led a team

The first time you led a Budget



AREA FOR DEVELOPMENT EXAMPLE

“When I first led a team... I was leading four specialists and initially approached projects the same way I had as an individual contributor. During one particularly time-sensitive project, my instinct was to take on most of the work myself while also managing reporting and coordination responsibilities. Within a week, I was exhausted and struggling to balance delivery with leadership. After speaking with a mentor, I realized I was still behaving like a high performer rather than a team leader.

Since then, I’ve become much more intentional about delegation, workload planning, and involving the team early in defining ownership and strategy. It was a major lesson in learning how to lead collaboratively rather than trying to carry everything myself.”

 *Please read this answer*

HACK Area For Development

PART 1

STRENGTH DEVELOPED IN UN ENVIRONMENTS	POSSIBLE FLIPSIDE	HOW I ADAPTED SINCE I REALIZED
 Strategic stakeholder management	Over-consensus / slower decision-making	<i>Since then</i> , I make sure to define decision timelines and align stakeholders earlier in the process.
 Diplomacy and relationship management	Avoiding direct conflict or pushback	<i>Since then</i> , I address disagreements earlier and communicate recommendations more directly.
 Operating in ambiguity	Difficulty simplifying for fast-paced environments	<i>Since then</i> , I lead with conclusions and simplify key takeaways upfront.
 Cross-cultural coordination	Adapting communication too much to different audiences	<i>Since then</i> , I communicate priorities more directly and check alignment early.

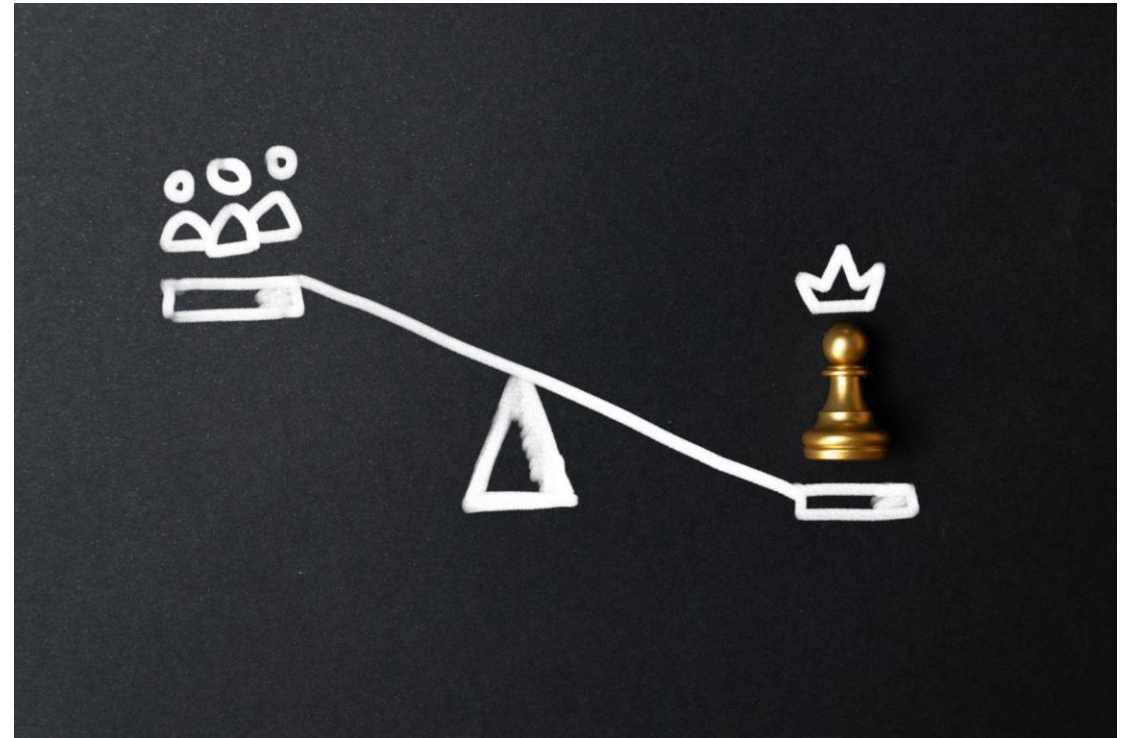
PART 2

STRENGTH DEVELOPED IN UN ENVIRONMENTS	POSSIBLE FLIPSIDE	HOW I ADAPTED SINCE I REALIZED
 Humanitarian mission orientation	Underestimating commercial realities	<i>Since then</i> , I consciously connect impact-oriented work to operational and business outcomes.
 Resilience in resource-constrained environments	Tendency to take on too much under pressure	<i>Since then</i> , I define ownership and distribute workload earlier with the team.
 Matrix and inter-agency collaboration	Diffused accountability	<i>Since then</i> , I clarify roles, responsibilities, and decision ownership upfront.
 Strong analytical and reporting skills	Over-explaining context and process	<i>Since then</i> , I focus first on recommendations, impact, and concise communication.

5. Salary Expectations

Compensation conversations are usually less about “winning a negotiation” ...

and more about alignment, motivation, and long-term fit.



What Companies Are Really Evaluating

Evaluating **sustainability of motivation**, not the compensation figure itself



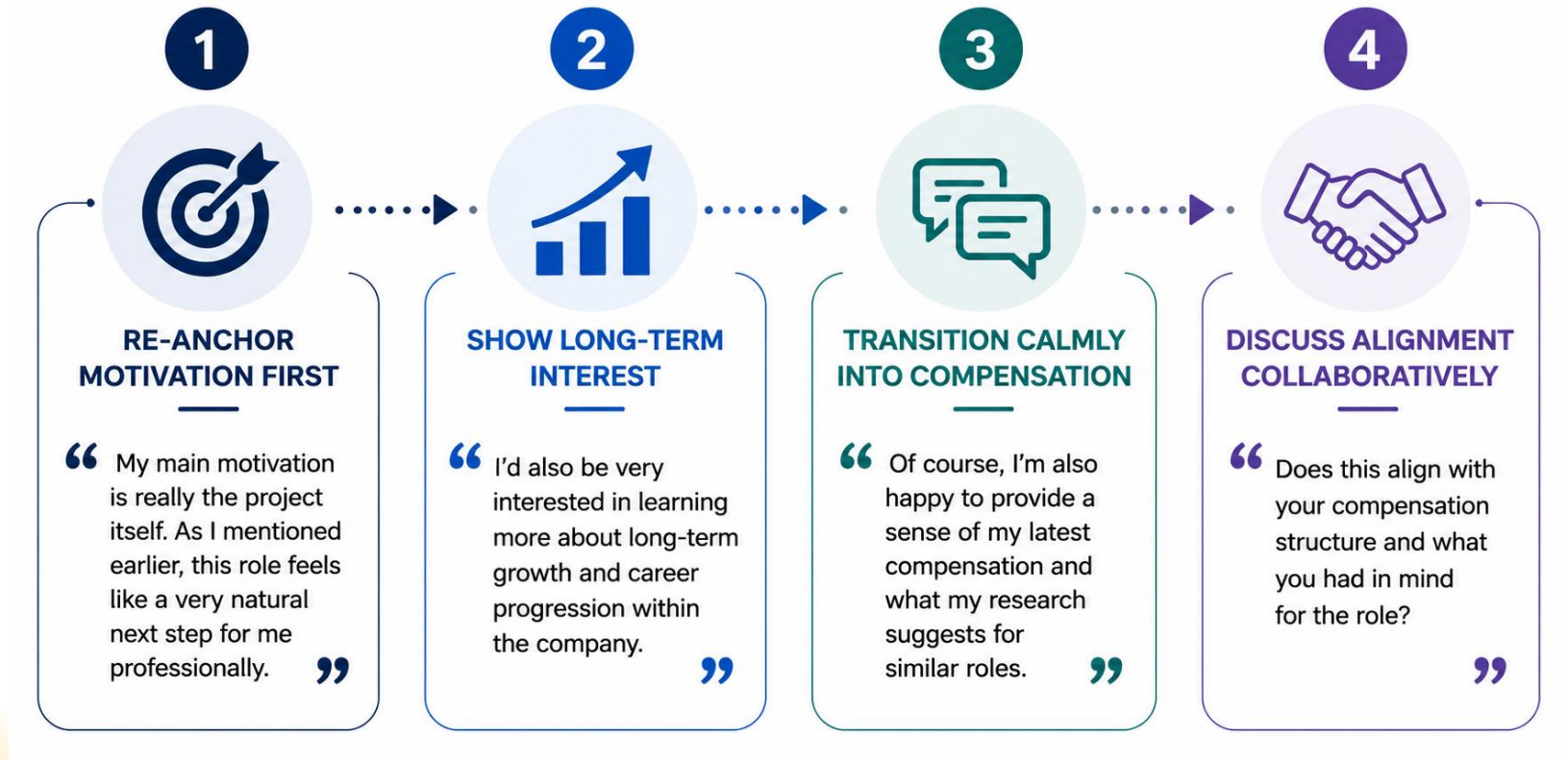
Approaching The Salary Conversation

The strongest leverage is usually:

perceived value

alignment

credibility



A



Adapt your message

Translate your experience into language the market understands.

D



Listen strategically

Understand what the organization is truly trying to solve.

A



Illustrate impact

Move beyond responsibilities and communicate outcomes and value creation.

P



Ground your stories

Use concrete examples, measurable results, and operational evidence.

T



Narrate your direction

Explain why this move makes sense and where you want to grow next.



Interviews are not only evaluations.
They are exercises in **ALIGNMENT**.
You are helping organizations understand
your value, your relevance, and your future contribution.

Evaluation Form

Let us know your thoughts
about the session!

👉 Click [here](#) or scan the QR code.



Career Transition Series

PIVOTING OUTSIDE THE UN SYSTEM

Thanks for your participation!



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