Interviewing Project Managers

One approach
Agenda

- Challenges in interviewing
- My approach
  - Mid- to Senior-level people
  - Junior people
CHALLENGES IN INTERVIEWING
What does your job description ask for?
Overwhelming number of applicants to a somewhat generic posting
Finally, you narrow it down to a few...
And then begins the hard part...
Meeting person after person...
Trying to assess skills...
Each with a different background...
All with different projects under his/her belt...
Of different sizes, scope, structure...
Perhaps even in a different industry.
So how do you know if they can do the job for you?
And how do you ensure that you don’t ask generic questions...

And that you don’t get generic answers?
After all, anyone can give the “right” answer, right?
Things I Look For

• Understands an organization, moving parts, and influences
• Bigger picture thinking, but detail-oriented
• Technical enough in right areas
• Executes well, solid PM knowledge
• Relevant experience
• Situational leadership
• Influence without authority
Mini-Case Study Interviews

Dear Candidate,

Please find below mini-cases that may serve as a basis for discussion during your upcoming interview. You’ll have the opportunity to ask questions and talk about details involved. Please read through and think about these cases; you do not need to prepare anything formal for our discussion.

Thank you, and I look forward to our discussion!

Robyn Betts
Director, PMO
Babson College

3 mini-cases
Supplement to standard questions
Based in real-life
May or may not address all cases

Given 1-2 days prior to interview. Not *required* to prep anything written.
Case 1

PMO Mini-Case - A

You are getting ready to manage a project to implement a new 3rd party calendar and registration system for College events. Your project team members will be event managers from the Events Management Office, as well as distributed event managers around the College. Most of these team members have low technical skills. Due to various circumstances, the Events Management Office (EMO) feels they should have been more involved in the product selection. Everyone is very busy, and although the team really wants this product implemented, they feel strapped and resent all the time this project will likely take. The product is very complex to configure. At the end of the project, your team members need to be power users of the system, and the EMO will need to feel ownership of this product going forward. How will you build a sense of ownership and a high level of product expertise on the team?

- Team facilitation / management
- Expectation-setting
- Ownership
- Technical product interactions
- Non-perfect-world scenario!
PMO Mini-Case - B

Student Financial Services (SFS) has requested a custom web application that allows students to request partial tuition refunds if they drop a course mid-semester or if their financial aid changes. They want students to be able to enter information about their refund online. SFS staff should be able to review the details online and eventually issue an electronic refund directly from Babson’s bank to the student’s bank account.

a) You are tasked with doing some business analysis to understand more about this request and proposing a potential solution for this project. What are the questions you would ask to obtain the information you need?

b) Given the information that you have, propose a solution. Walk through a rough high-level work breakdown structure for this proposed solution.

- Web app development
- BA – seeing big picture, interacting parts, enough detail, right questions
- Security / Regulations / Compliance
- System interactions
- WBS understanding, as well as how you think about the work components
Case 3

Project Manager Mini-Case - C

You are managing a highly technical project for a client group with low- to mid-level technical skills. The project team includes both technical experts and client representatives. The directors of both groups reflect the styles of their teams. Some of the other stakeholders do not have resources to participate on the project team because they have operational responsibilities that limit their direct project involvement. The CIO and the Dean of Faculty are both Project Sponsors and want to be kept abreast of high-level status.

a. What kind of communication mechanisms and approaches would you use for the various audiences?

b. Describe some of the risks for this project. How would you mitigate them?

- Risk identification and management
- Situational Communication
- Status reporting
- Stakeholder / Sponsor management
Case 4

Project Manager Mini-Case - D

You are running a 9-month project. You are on month 1, and a team member is consistently not meeting his deliverables. What do you do?

- Escalation
- Team management
- Project governance
- Schedule management
How do you assess skills of a recent grad / Jr. person?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Original Value</th>
<th>New Value</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>Events Management Office Web Forms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>The EMO office has three forms that are used frequently by our clients:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Internal Event Intake Form</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. External Event Intake Form</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Flag Request Form.</td>
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<td>Currently, forms are printed and scanned or mailed to our office, we would</td>
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<td></td>
<td>like these three forms to be available on our website as web forms so folks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>can fill them out via our website and they are submitted right then and there.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business Goals</td>
<td>To streamline our requests</td>
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<td>Existing Solution</td>
<td>print</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benefit</td>
<td>Describe advantages from cost savings, productivity, business process</td>
<td>Productivity and business process improvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>improvement, or revenue opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number Affected</td>
<td>21-100</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Visibility/Impact</td>
<td>this will impact all members of the Babson community that utilize EMO's</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>services, as well as those external; to Babson who are looking to host events</td>
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<td></td>
<td>on campus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
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<td>Budget Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mandatory Level</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mandatory Nature</td>
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</table>

Rewrite a poorly written project request. Write it to comply with our well-documented standards.
Project Request Revision
Interview Deliverable

Project Management Office

IT Project Intake Guidelines

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide detailed instructions on how an IT Project Request should be filled out. The goals of this process are to:

- Provide a consistent, clear voice to community external to IT describing our IT Project List. This means that a project entry should be understandable to non-technical staff outside of ITSD.
- Provide sufficient detail to evaluate an IT project on a number of criteria including link to the College’s goal, benefits, timeline, risks, resources required, etc.

It is the responsibility of the person assigned to the request to make sure that the above criteria are met, and that all requirements below are fulfilled.

Project Request Items

Even though only certain fields are required for validation, all fields should be addressed before submission for review.

Summary

This is the title of the project. It should be a clear summary of what this project is to accomplish.

- It should be an action and very descriptive. For example:
  - “Update Athletics eForms for 2011-12 Season”

Writing skills
Reasoning
Tech skills
Following instructions!
Detail-oriented?
Deliver back to me on time?
How many gas stations are there in <city of your choice>?
How many shampoo and conditioner bottles does a hotel in <location of your choice> go through in 1 year?
Thank you