Blackblot® PMTK

Interview Process

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1.   Introduction
      1.1.   Document Objective
              This document provides a framework for administering a product management-oriented interview process.

      1.2.   PMTK Interview Process
              The "PMTK Interview Process" is a procedure that evaluates a prospective employee (a.k.a. candidate) for a product management position. An interview is an ongoing exchange of information between company employees (interviewers) and a candidate to determine whether there is a match between the candidate's professional history, skills sets, and past workplace contributions in conjunction with the job's description, requirements, and needs. The candidate's overall "fit" for the job is evaluated by the interviewers on three levels: "personal fit", "team fit", and "professional fit". The impression of a personal and team fit is formed during interpersonal interaction with the team members and is made on an emotional and unscientific level. Establishing professional fit is done in a more structured and rationalistic way through a questioning process, which is the focus of this document.

      1.3.   Interview Reciprocity
              From the company's perspective, the objective of the interviewing process is to verify if the candidate can successfully perform the core functions of the job and create dynamics that help establish a notion of whether the candidate will fit in with their assigned team on a social level. Yet the interview is a reciprocal exchange during which the candidate is also evaluating the interviewers (the candidate's future team members and peers) and the company. Seemingly unprofessional and poorly carried out interviews can discourage a suitable candidate from accepting the job if they have more than one job offer to consider. Knowing how to interview is an acquired skill. Yet, the lack of interviewing experience and knowledge can be considerably alleviated by performing planned interviews within the context of a structured interview process.
              <Comment: The goal of the "PMTK Interview Process" is to make the interviews more organized, efficient, and successful by helping to guide the interaction that takes place with a focus on finding a mutual fit between the company and the candidate.>

2.   Product Management Interview Context
      2.1.   Section Objective
              This section describes the contextual focus of a product management oriented interview process.

      2.2.   Scope of Skills
              Those in the field of product management must possess a multitude of skills with a cumulative emphasis on strategic thinking and numerical analysis. Responsibilities may vary from company to company, but the core job function encompasses formulating market requirements and

contributing to the search for the most productive way to build long-term value for a product.

<Comment: Hiring managers, when looking for qualified product managers, should carefully consider and query candidates on the four business competency components: domain expertise, functional expertise, soft skills, and strategic aptitude. Therefore, the product management oriented interview process is designed to uncover and assess the candidates' capability levels in these four areas.>

2.3.   Business Competency Components

This section identifies and discusses the various business competency components that the candidate's background and experience should exhibit. These are: domain expertise, functional expertise, soft skills, and strategic aptitude.

- Domain Expertise
  Specific industry experience and technological know-how
  - Industry experience
  - Workplace accomplishments
  - Appropriate blend of education, training, and credentials.
- Functional Expertise
  Knowledge in processes, tools, and techniques to plan and market products
  - Writing quality market requirements
  - Ability to execute specific product management tasks
  - Understanding of relevant terminology and definitions
  - Knowledge of product management processes and procedures
  - Familiarity with product definition and management team structures.
- Soft Skills
  Non-technical skills, mainly communicative (written, verbal, and presentation), used in business
  - Thought leadership
  - Communication skills.
- Strategic Aptitude
  Long-term planning and decision-making abilities that help achieve corporate objectives
  - Professional development
  - Executing a product definition process
  - Product and market strategy formulation.

3.   Product Management Interview Process Logistics

3.1.   Section Objective

This section describes the logistics that guide a product management oriented interview process.

<Comment: There are three classes of interviews used in the overall hiring process: a "screening interview" (customarily conducted over the telephone), an "appraisal interview" (initial in-person interview), and a series of one or more "hiring interviews" that follow. The interview class described and focused upon in this document is the hiring interview. This

document does not elaborate on screening or appraisal interviews. There are three types of hiring interviews: "unstructured interviews" which are based on questions that are not planned, "semi-structured interviews" which use a combination of interviewer experience and pre-interview question planning; and "structured interviews" which are based on questions prepared in advance and asked of all job candidates. The "PMTK Interview Process" advocates and relies on structured interviews. This document does not deal with unstructured interviews or semi-structured interviews.>

3.2.   Company Recruiter Briefing

The company recruiter meets the candidate on the day of interviewing, before and after the series of actual hiring interviews. These meetings are referred to as the *Initial Recruiter Briefing* and *Final Recruiter Briefing*.

Section	Content	Duration
Initial Recruiter Briefing	o The company recruiter provides the candidate with information about the interview process, schedule, and conditions. o The company recruiter reviews the job description with the candidate and explains its specification and characteristics. *<Comment: See the "PMTK Job Description" template.>* o The candidate signs any required legal documents.	Thirty Minutes.
Final Recruiter Briefing	o The company recruiter summarizes the day's events. o The candidate provides feedback on the interviews. o The company recruiter informs the candidate on future steps.	Fifteen Minutes.

3.3.   Hiring Interviews Team

The hiring interviews team is comprised of at least four individuals who are often peers (usually people the candidate will directly work with) and the hiring manager. Each hiring interview team member interviews the candidate on a different business competency component. The last person to interview the candidate should be the actual hiring manager.

The company recruiter is the first and last person that the candidate meets with during the day of the hiring interviews. The company recruiter will meet the candidate for the *Initial Recruiter Briefing* and then introduce the candidate to the first interviewer. The first interviewer will introduce the candidate to the second interviewer and so on. The last interviewer should bring the candidate back to the company recruiter by whom the candidate will be briefed on the next steps and the time frame in the hiring process.

<Comment: The hiring manager is the person that makes the final determination of whether to hire the candidate or not, based on their own impression and feedback from the other interviewers. The hiring manager is often the most senior ranking team member, but not necessarily so.>

3.4.   Hiring Interview Session Characteristics

The total amount of time allotted for each hiring interview session is fifty minutes, which allows the candidate a ten-minute gap to rest between sessions and transition to the following hiring interview. Each session aims to glean enough relevant information to support making the correct hiring

decision. Each hiring interview session comprises three sections: introduction, core, and ending.

Section	Content	Goal	Duration
Introduction	Informal and cordial exchange on light topics that are not business or job-related.	Get acquainted and establish a comfortable environment.	Five Minutes
Core	A discussion prompted by deliberate pre-planned questions focused on a particular business competency component.	Verify the candidate has the appropriate level of the business competency component for the job.	Forty Minutes
Ending	A candidate-led Q&A and a recap of the interview session by the interviewer.	Summarize the session and conclude on a positive note.	Five Minutes

3.5. Interviewer Guidelines

From the interviewer's perspective, the actual interview session is part of three distinct stages: "*before the interview*", "*during the interview*", and "*after the interview*". The instructions for the interviewer for each stage are listed below.

- Before the Interview
  - o Read the job description and the candidate's curriculum vitae (a.k.a. résumé).
  - o Turn off all possible office distractions (e.g., phone or email) and post a "do-not-disturb" sign outside the room to deter untimely visitors.
  - o Prepare at least five questions that will serve as a platform for the discussion. Internalize the gist of the questions.

  <Comment: Prepare intelligent, insightful, job-centered interview questions that challenge the candidate professionally.>

  - o Acquaint yourself with the legal constraints that govern interviewing and understand which types of questions or comments are considered illegal or inappropriate.

  <Comment: Illegal or inappropriate questions or comments often deal with issues pertaining to race, religion, gender, marital status, disabilities, health, family, ethnicity, and individual privacy. The company's legal and human resources department should brief all interviewers on current laws in this matter.>

  - o Wear respectful clothing, mind your appearance, and always be punctual (keep a clock in view while interviewing).

- During the Interview
  - o Ask realistic, direct, and poignant questions and give the candidate ample time to think and answer.
  - o Remember to probe on the answers and do a "drill-down" to uncover the candidate's knowledge and views on the topic. Listen carefully to the replies.
  - o Be constantly aware not to reveal confidential information or corporate plans.
  - o Remain neutral and polite at all times. Focus on the candidate, not yourself.

o Jot notes and comments only after the interview session is complete.
o Close the interview in a friendly and constructive manner.
- After the Interview
  o Escort the candidate to the next interviewer.
  o Send the company recruiter written interview feedback and your hiring recommendation immediately after the interview session.

3.6.   Interview Questions Guidelines

This section provides suggestions for potential interview questions for each business competency area: domain expertise, functional expertise, soft skills, and strategic aptitude.

- Domain Expertise

  Questions in this area focus on the candidate's work history, industry experience, and technological know-how. For example:
  o Describe the positions you held and the challenges you overcame in previous roles.
  o Describe the industry's dominant players, their success, and their mistakes.
  o Describe the advantages and disadvantages of a particular technology or product.

- Functional Expertise

  Questions in this area focus on the candidate's knowledge in processes, tools, and techniques to plan and market products. For example:
  o Questions on Product Planning
    · Describe the structure of an MRD and the methodology for writing quality market requirements.
    · Describe the process you would follow to create a product's pricing model.
    · Describe the overall product planning process.
    · Describe the structure of a product definition team and its roles.
  o Questions on Product Marketing
    · Describe the structure of a market plan.
    · Describe the process you would follow to create a product differentiation or demand.
    · Describe the overall product marketing process.
    · Describe the role of a product marketer.

- Soft Skills

  Questions in this area focus on the candidate's human interaction skills related directly to communicating and managing relationships with others in a social structure of a professional environment.
  <Comment: Please visit www.blackblot.com/career for a list of open-ended soft skills and strategic aptitude interview questions.>

- Strategic Aptitude

  Questions in this area focus on the candidate's potential to assume in the future broader leadership roles that demand strategic planning and decision-making abilities. The questions center on managing people, executing overall and broad product

management processes, and product and market strategy formulation.

<Comment: Please visit www.blackblot.com/career for a list of open-ended soft skills and strategic aptitude interview questions.>

4. <u>Product Management Interview Process</u>

    4.1.   <u>Section Objective</u>

This section describes the structure and format of a professional product management oriented interview process.

<Comment: Given the importance and cost of labor, it is in companies' best interest to hire the right people. This is of greater importance concerning roles in product management that are crucial to a company's success. Accordingly, it is of essence to execute a consistent and structured interviewing process that will help identify the right people for the job.>

    4.2.   <u>Overall Interview Process Guidelines</u>

The following describes the overall interview process guidelines for interviewing job candidates.

- The hiring interviews process a candidate undergoes begins with an Initial Recruiter Briefing, involves at least four hiring interview sessions, and ends with a Final Recruiter Briefing.
- Ideally, the candidate is interviewed by progressively more senior individuals (tenure, seniority, or rank), ending with the hiring manager.
- All interviews are personal encounters meant to verify a professional fit and are not a confirmation or validation process of the candidate's curriculum vitae (a.k.a. résumé).

    4.3.   <u>Overall Interview Process Stages</u>

The following provides a sample overall interview process, according to stages. The candidate progresses through the stages and must pass each stage to continue to the next. The overall interview process stages are:

1. The company recruiter initiates a phone screening interview with the candidate.
2. The hiring manager conducts a phone appraisal interview with the candidate.
3. The candidate is invited to the company site for an in-person appraisal interview with the hiring manager.

<Comment: Following this stage, the hiring manager will decide if the candidate has good potential to be a job fit. If so, the candidate will progress to a series of hiring interviews scheduled for a later date.>

4. The hiring manager selects a team of interviewers and assigns to each interviewer a business competency they will cover during the interview session.

    o <u>Interviewer Assignment</u>

       · Interviewer #1 discusses with the candidate their domain expertise.

       · Interviewer #2 discusses with the candidate their functional expertise.

- Interviewer #3 discusses with the candidate their soft skills.
- Interviewer #4 discusses with the candidate their strategic aptitude.

<Comment: Interviewers #1-3 are possible candidate peers, and interviewer #4 is the hiring manager.>

5. Each interviewer prepares their interview questions and sends their proposed questions to the hiring manager and the company recruiter to verify legality, validity, and coverage.
6. The candidate is invited for a series of hiring interviews at the company site and begins by meeting the company recruiter for the Initial Recruiter Briefing.
7. A series of hiring interviews are performed at the company site.
8. The candidate meets the company recruiter for the Final Recruiter Briefing.
9. All interviewers send written interview feedback immediately after the interview session, via email and using a standard template. The feedback is sent only to the company recruiter and hiring manager.

<Comment: Stages 6-9 are planned and meant to occur on the same day.>

10. Interview feedback is analyzed jointly by the company recruiter and the hiring manager, with the hiring manager making the final hiring decision.

<Comment: Depending on the company, the company recruiter can veto a decision to hire a candidate. This is a safety measure to reduce the possibility of cronyism, nepotism, or unilateral or biased decision-making.>

11. A hiring decision is made and propagated.

4.4.   Feedback Template Email

After each hiring interview, each interviewer summarizes their experience with the candidate and sends a report back to the hiring manager and the company recruiter. Below is a suggested template for the interviewer to summarize their hiring recommendation and impressions of the candidate.

-----Start Message-----
From: Interviewer
Sent: Monday, October 16, 20xx 3:24 PM
To: Hiring Manager, Company Recruiter
Subject: Interview feedback — <Enter position name> — <Enter candidate name>
Importance: High

- Hiring Decision — I recommend that <Enter candidate name> <Enter "be hired" or "not be hired" decision> for the position of <Enter job name>.

<Comment: A recommendation to hire the candidate constitutes a declaration that the candidate is a fit for both the job and the team. The default should always be not to hire when the interviewer is uncertain which decision to make.>

<Enter employment potential for this candidate in other company departments and explain why. This section is contingent on a "not to hire" recommendation.>

<Comment: Only if the recommendation is not to hire the candidate, the interviewer may also indicate if the candidate is a potential fit for other jobs or functions in the company.>

- Decision Rationale — <Enter a concise, clear, and unbiased explanation of why the particular hiring decision was reached. Be objective.>
- Decision Support — <Enter information and examples about the candidate that justify and support the hiring decision. Be factual.>
- Business Competency Questions — <Enter the name of the business competency component that was the focus of the interview and list the key business competency component questions that the candidate was asked during the interview.>
- Comments — <Enter any additional comments and conclusions whatsoever.>

Regards,
<Enter interviewer name.>

-----End Message-----

4.5.   <u>Candidate Reference Checks</u>

Candidate reference checks can occur at any time within the overall interview process. The company recruiter usually performs this task, and the timing for reference checking is at their own discretion. Reference checks are commonly done before the hiring interviews or after a decision to hire the candidate is made. Information obtained during reference checks that were carried out before the hiring interviews is made available to the interviewers. Reference checks are used to verify various issues about the candidate, including:

- Achievements and accomplishments
- Educational background
- Employment background
- Past titles and positions
- Salary history.