CHARTA LEARNING · INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Behavioural and Fit Questions (Strategy Consulting)

Interview preparation summary · SC track

IN THIS SUMMARY

- Motivation
- Fit

INT.KB.1.a · Motivation

Answer why consulting and why strategy with two or three specific reasons, each backed by evidence from your own record and honest about the trade-offs of the job.

Why consulting is asked first because it shows whether you understand the job and will still want it in month eight. Interviewers at firms like these hear the same list again and again: variety, problem solving, fast learning, smart colleagues. Each is true of many careers, so none distinguishes you. A strong answer separates two questions. Why consulting is about the work: short engagements, structured analysis, advice to senior executives, a steep learning curve. Why strategy is about the kind of question: where to compete, whether to enter a market, how to restore profit. Give two or three reasons, and put a piece of your own evidence behind each, ideally with a number: something you did that you enjoyed and that resembles the work. Then show you have tested the idea by talking to consultants, reading about engagements or doing a project. Admit one trade-off, such as advising rather than deciding. The usual mistakes are flattery, prestige or pay as the lead reason, and a memorised speech that cannot survive a follow-up question.

WORKED EXAMPLE: REBUILDING TOMAS REYES'S ANSWER TO WHY CONSULTING

Tomas Reyes is an invented candidate with three years in supply planning at Ardenfield Foods, an invented manufacturer. His first draft is: I like solving problems, I learn quickly and I want to work with smart people. In a review of 48 product lines he proposed dropping 12, which cut inventory held from 7.2m to 5.4m. Rebuild the answer to last about 85 seconds at a pace of 140 words a minute.

Answer: A 198-word answer with a one-sentence opening, evidence of 12 of 48 lines dropped and 1.8m of inventory released (25% each), a separate reason for strategy, and one stated trade-off.

> **Interview tip:** Say it aloud: I want consulting because I like starting with a blank problem and ending with a number and a recommendation. In my last role I did that for 48 product lines, and I want to do it for bigger questions more often. Then stop and let the interviewer pick which part to probe.

INT.KB.1.b · Motivation

Explain why this firm and this office, what you want from the first years, and show you have priced in the travel and hours.

Why this firm tests whether you have done research and whether you understand what you are signing up for. A good answer rests on facts you can state from public sources and from conversations: the type of firm (a generalist strategy firm, a boutique or an advisory arm), the sectors and kinds of project, how teams are staffed, the training and the people you met. It must be true only of this firm, so say what differs from others without criticising them. Why this office is a separate question: language, sector strength, family or your willingness to travel. Be honest about lifestyle. Strategy teams often work at the client site for part of the week, may stay away several nights, and work long hours when a deadline is near. Say you have thought about it and give the reason you accept it. For what you want from the first years, name a skill, a breadth of exposure and a stretch in responsibility, not a title. The usual mistakes are repeating the website, claiming to love travel, and sounding like the firm is a stepping stone.

WORKED EXAMPLE: PRICING THE LIFESTYLE BEFORE ANSWERING WHY HALDEN AND WHY MANCHESTER

Amara Okafor is an invented candidate applying to Halden Partners, an invented generalist strategy firm, in its Manchester office. Published facts: teams of four to five, projects of ten weeks, on site Monday to Thursday. Staff in the Manchester office work on about 40 client weeks a year, and 60% of Manchester projects are within a normal commute so need no hotel. Typical weeks run to about 55 hours against a contracted 40. Work out what she is accepting and build a fair answer.

Answer: She is accepting about 64 nights away (18% of the year) in the Manchester office, against 160 (44%) if every project needed a hotel, and about 600 extra hours over 40 client weeks.

> **Interview tip:** Say it aloud: I have looked at what the job costs, about 64 nights a year in this office and long weeks near deadlines, and I accept it for these two reasons. Then give the firm reason. Showing the numbers you have priced is more convincing than saying you are flexible.

INT.KB.1.c · Motivation

Walk through your CV in about two minutes as a story with reasons for each move, and answer the exit-options question without sounding like a stopgap.

Walk me through your CV is often the opening question, and it tests structure before it tests content. Do not read the document aloud. Give a story with a spine, usually the theme that connects the steps, and a reason for each move: why you chose the degree, why you took each job, what you owned, what you learned and why that leads here. Spend most of the time on the last two roles, give two or three achievements with numbers, and finish with a sentence that links to consulting so the interviewer can pick a thread. Two minutes is about 280 words at a normal pace. The exit question, in the form where do you see yourself in five years, is a test of honesty and commitment. Consulting is a good start for many careers and a career for some, so say what you want to learn, that you would be glad to stay if it goes well, and do not name a destination that makes the firm a stopgap. Do not name a date you will leave.

WORKED EXAMPLE: SHAPING A TWO-MINUTE CV WALK-THROUGH FOR LENA BRANDT

Lena Brandt is an invented candidate: a BSc in engineering, two years at Kestrel Components (an invented manufacturer) as a process engineer, then three years at Marlow Logistics (invented) as an operations analyst. At Marlow she cut average pick time per order from 9.0 minutes to 7.2 minutes across 180,000 orders a year. Plan a 120-second walk-through at 140 words a minute and compute the saving she can quote.

Answer: A 280-word walk-through with a spine, a 20% faster pick time, 5,400 hours saved a year (equal to 2.7 staff at 2,000 hours), a budget per section and a link to consulting.

> **Interview tip:** Start with the sentence that connects the steps, not with where you were born. For example: my career has moved from the machine to the system around it. Finish by naming the thread you would like the interviewer to follow.

INT.KB.2.a · Fit

Tell a teamwork or difficult-colleague story that shows what you did, understands the other person and shows a result, using I for your own actions.

Consulting is done in small teams under pressure, so interviewers test whether you are easy to work with and whether you can handle friction without drama. The question comes as tell me about a team you led, tell me about a disagreement, or tell me about a difficult colleague. A strong story has a structure: the situation in two sentences, what the other person needed or feared (to show you tried to understand them), the action you took yourself, the result with evidence, and what you now do differently. The sequence of action matters: speak to the person first, agree a practical arrangement, and escalate only if that fails, not as the opening move. Use I for what you did and we for what the team did, because interviewers probe ownership with follow-ups such as what exactly did you say. Do not make the other person a villain, and do not claim there was never a problem. Choose a real example with a number, such as the share of deliverables on time before and after, so the result is not just that it went well.

WORKED EXAMPLE: REWORKING A DIFFICULT-COLLEAGUE STORY FOR PRIYA NAIR

Priya Nair is an invented candidate. In a six-week project at Oakridge Retail (invented) with a team of four, a colleague, Marc, delivered only 6 of his 12 work packages on time. Her first draft: we had a problem with a team member, we talked, and we fixed it. It uses we 14 times and I twice. After she asked Marc about his workload and agreed a mid-week checkpoint with him, 11 of his next 12 packages were on time. Rebuild the story and compute the figures.

Answer: The ownership check shows 12.5% of actions were hers in the draft. The result is a rise from 50% on time (6 of 12) to 91.7% (11 of 12), a gain of 41.7 percentage points, reached through a private talk first and escalation last.

Interview tip: Say it aloud: I noticed half of Marc's work was late. I asked him privately what was getting in the way, and we agreed a Wednesday checkpoint. His on-time rate went from 6 of 12 to 11 of 12. Use I for each action and we only for what was agreed.

INT.KB.2.b · Fit

Handle strengths, weaknesses, feedback and failure questions with a real example, a changed practice and a result you can measure.

Consultants receive feedback after every project and are expected to act on it, so interviewers test how you take it. Four related questions share one structure. For a strength, pick one that the job needs and prove it with an example the interviewer can probe. For a weakness, pick a real one that is not fatal for the job, say how you found out (often from feedback), what you changed and what has improved, ideally with a measure. Avoid the disguised strength such as perfectionism, which sounds evasive. For feedback, show the sequence: listen without defending, ask for a specific example, change one thing, follow up. For failure, choose a real setback with a cost, own it in the first sentence with I, say what it cost, say what you do differently now, and say how you know it works. Resilience is the thread: you can be wrong and continue. The usual mistakes are blaming others, a failure with no real stake, and a lesson that is only that you will work harder.

WORKED EXAMPLE: TURNING A VAGUE WEAKNESS INTO A MEASURED ONE FOR JONAS WEIR

Jonas Weir is an invented candidate. His draft weakness is: I care too much about getting things right. A manager at Tamsin Energy (invented) once told him his slides were too dense. He checked: his last 10 slides averaged 96 words each. He set himself a limit of 45 words and a rule that every slide needs a one-line headline stating the so what. Six weeks later his next 10 slides averaged 41 words. Rebuild the answer and compute the change.

Answer: The real weakness is dense slides; the evidence is 96 words a slide, then 41 after a 45-word rule, a fall of 55 words or 57.3%, with a one-line headline on every slide.

Interview tip: Say it aloud in four parts: the weakness, how I found out, what I changed, what the number is now. Then add what is still imperfect. Finishing with a limit shows self-awareness, which is the real test.

INT.KB.2.c · Fit

Address a gap or weak spot in your record briefly and honestly, and prepare questions for the interviewer that show real curiosity.

Every record has something an interviewer may ask about: a gap between jobs, a lower grade, a change of direction, a short job. The task is not to hide it or to over-explain. Give the plain fact in a sentence, the reason if you are comfortable sharing it, what you did or learned, and move on to the present. Spend about as much of the answer on the forward-looking part as on the gap. Nothing is gained by apology or by blaming others, and you should not claim that the gap was spent on something it was not. The closing question, do you have questions for me, is also assessed. Prepare two or three that cannot be answered from the website, and that ask for the interviewer's own experience: a project that changed their view, how teams give feedback, what they wish they had known in their first year. Avoid pay, holiday and anything that signals you stopped listening. Listen to the answer and respond to it, because that shows you can hold a client conversation.

WORKED EXAMPLE: ANSWERING A SEVEN-MONTH GAP FOR INES VARGA

Ines Varga is an invented candidate. Her career is 30 months as an analyst, a seven-month break to care for a parent after surgery, then 13 months in a new role. The interviewer asks about the break. Work out how large the gap is relative to her record, build a 25-second answer and choose two questions to ask the interviewer.

Answer: The break is 14% of her 50 months of record. Answer in about 26 seconds with fact, action and present, and ask the two questions that need the interviewer's own experience.

> **Interview tip:** Say it aloud in three sentences: what happened, what I did, where I am now. Then stop talking. A short answer delivered calmly tells the interviewer it is a closed matter.

Summary of the Charta interview-preparation topic. Companies and figures in the examples are invented. Draft content, not yet expert reviewed.