

IT managers

Management & Leadership framework · Management & leadership level · 5 competencies · approx. 75 minutes

How to use this guide

- Focus on these 5 competencies — the behaviours that matter most for this role — not a chronological career history.
- Ask every candidate the same core questions, then probe. Allow around 15 minutes per competency.
- Ask for real examples and use STAR — the Situation, the Task, the Action they took, and the Result.
- Stay neutral, capture what they say, and judge later. Gather evidence on one competency at a time.
- Rate each competency 1–5 against the positive and negative indicators, and note the evidence.

5 Outstanding 4 Good 3 Acceptable 2 Marginal 1 Poor

1. Effectively Executing the Task

Translates strategic goals into clear objectives and plans. Focuses on key priorities and ensures these are clear to others. Delivers high quality outcomes to time and budget. Regularly reviews progress and ensures appropriate risks and controls are in place

Why this matters for IT managers: IT delivery is plan-execute-measure heavy — budgets, schedules, risk and control, service delivery KPIs (uptime, MTTR, incident volume). SFIA Level 5 'plans the work of self and others'; CMI 'executing operational delivery'. Position 1 reflects the operational reality of IT management.

Even the most organised of us may overlook some of the details when planning an initiative. Tell me about a time when this happened to you.

- What was the situation? What were the consequences of this omission?
- How did you rectify the issue? What was the outcome?
- What have you learned from this?

Describe a situation where you had to translate a broad directive into tangible and specific goals.

- How did you go about doing this – take me through the steps?
- How did you communicate the goals/objectives to others?
- How did you manoeuvre between the detailed plans & the bigger picture?
- How did you manage the risks? What contingencies did you put in place?

We are often faced with conflicting demands on our time. Give an example of when you have had to really prioritise?

- How do you know you what to prioritise/that you were effective?
- How could you have increased your effectiveness?
- How did you ensure that others remained focused on the right things?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Fails to appreciate the importance of planning and review to task delivery		Creates comprehensive plans to support the delivery of the wider goal – is clear on the why, what and how

No evidence of contingency planning for changing circumstances/unforeseen issues or managing risk		Includes detailed contingency plans for delivery. Anticipates and mitigates risk to plans
Limited ability/willingness to flex/deviate from plan in the light of new information and/or changing circumstances		Rethinks plans in the light of new information
Fails to communicate changes to others in a timely manner. Leaves individuals without clarity on the plan		Keeps others informed and involved with necessary changes to plans so objectives remain clear and relevant
Struggles to translate strategic goals/broader directives into tangible and workable operational plans		Translates strategic goals into operational plans and objectives
Is more inclined to focus on the bigger picture or the detail of the plans – struggles to move between the two		Able to manoeuvre between the bigger picture and the detailed plans
Fails to manage conflicting demands– lets priorities slip or becomes overloaded/ can't see the wood for the trees		Able to (re)prioritise and juggle priorities on the basis of new information/changing circumstances
Promotes relentless activity with no means of ascertaining the value of tasks		Establishes clear measures to ensure that self (team) are focused on value adding activity
Fails to manage self/use of own time		Manages self and own time effectively
Fails to communicate changes in priorities to others		Communicates changes in priorities for others
No processes evident for managing progress/ measuring performance to time, budget and quality		Puts clear structures and processes in place for monitoring and managing progress/performance
Loses cool when things do not progress as expected – increases effort without tackling the source of the issue or checking the expected return on the increase in effort		Responds calmly when things go off track. Creates time to take stock and review when feeling under pressure to respond and deliver

Summary of evidence:

Rating (1–

5): _____

2. Making Sound Business Judgements

Makes sound decisions and commits to action based on the evaluation of complex information and consideration of alternative scenarios. Quickly cuts through the detail to identify the real issues, develops contingencies to deal with unexpected issues as they arise

Why this matters for IT managers: Tech choices, vendor decisions, build-vs-buy, security investment, architectural calls. SFIA management bands name decision-making. Material commercial consequences rest on IT manager judgement — the wrong vendor or wrong architecture compounds for years.

Describe a decision you made recently for which there was no established protocol.

- How did you go about making the decision? What worked well? Less well?
- How did you know what data was relevant/less relevant?
- How comfortable were you making it? How confident in its quality?
- What would have been the consequence of an incorrect/poor decision?
- How did you manage the risk?

Describe a situation where you had to choose between a number of alternative courses of action.

- Which did you choose? What criteria did you use to make the decision?

- What were the pros and cons of the other options?
- What was the outcome? What was the business impact of the decision?

Tell me about a time when you have challenged the information that you have been presented with.

- What was the source of the information?
- Why did you feel it was necessary to challenge it?
- What were the implications (e.g. how did your challenge impact on the final decision made)?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Limited thinking in novel situations. Fails to utilise all sources and/or effectively filter pertinent information		Seeks relevant information from a variety of sources, recognises what is pertinent
Accepts information at face value		Critically evaluates info. Probes/ challenges the facts
Fails to apply/adapt previous experience to new situations		Applies and adapts previous experience to novel situations
Is reluctant to make decisions in the absence of clear procedures or protocols		Makes and is prepared to stand by decisions in the absence of clear procedures and protocols
Uses the same style of decision making regardless of the situation		Considers the type of problem and how the decision needs to be made (e.g. when to direct, collaborate etc.)
Fails to consider a range of angles or the implications of different courses of action		Considers issues from a range of angles (e.g. cost, risk, impact, benefit, short and long term opportunities).
Approaches problems with interventions at the micro level		Takes a systemic approach to problem solving
Fails to consider the full range of alternatives or to accept that there may be alternative options		Considers a range of alternatives when making decisions
Lacks confidence in decision making when there is ambiguity or limited information		Deals with ambiguity and makes sound decisions on the basis of limited information
Considers the immediate impact of decisions/actions rather than their fit to the wider business agenda		Makes/monitors decisions against the wider organisational goals/strategy
No evidence of contingency/scenario planning in decision making		Makes detailed contingency plans to accommodate changing circumstances and mitigate risk
Fails to appreciate/articulate the risk associated with different courses of action		Understands the risk associated with different courses of action and builds plans to mitigate this

Summary of evidence: _____ **Rating (1–5):** _____

3. Building Positive Working Alliances

Proactively builds a wide network of internal and external stakeholders. Encourages cooperation between different groups, whilst being comfortable expressing disagreement and handling conflict. Ensures the needs of key stakeholders are met

Why this matters for IT managers: IT manager sits across all business functions — finance, HR, ops, sales, customer service all rely on IT. SFIA L5+ 'communicates fluently and reasons effectively'; DDaT 'works with stakeholders'. Cross-functional credibility is the force-multiplier.

Sometimes it is necessary to enlist the help of others in our network to solve an issue. Describe a time when it has been necessary for you to do this?

- How did you establish who was best placed to help? How approach them?
- How do you go about building/maintaining your network?
- What feedback have you received on your networking skills?

Sometimes stakeholders don't really understand what they want, or present us with requests that will not meet their need. Describe a time when you had to ascertain the exact nature of a stakeholder's need.

- How did you help the stakeholder to articulate the real need?
- How did they respond?
- What would have been the impact of you not acting in this way?

Give me an example of a time when you had to deal with conflict/frustrations working with a key stakeholder or another team/department?

- What steps did you take to resolve the problem?
- What was the outcome?
- What feedback did you receive?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Limited networks or reactive approach to networking -doesn't commit time and effort to maintaining networks		Proactively develops and maintains a network of relationships with key stakeholders
Networks on a needs basis. No evidence of having strong enough sustainable networks		Draws on network when required and with minimum effort as relationships are strong/have been maintained
Tends to withhold information from colleagues or share it widely enough or in an untimely manner		Regularly/proactively shares knowledge and information with colleagues within their sphere of influence
Responds to wants rather than needs of stakeholders. Fails to question/challenge to establish needs and drivers		Questions/challenges in order to really understand the needs of stakeholders. Is focused on needs not wants
Fails to respond to requests/feedback from stakeholders		Responds promptly to stakeholder requests / feedback
Treats others as a resource rather than as a person (not as they would like to be treated themselves)		Demonstrates a clear personal code of conduct with respect to how they engage with others
Fails to surface/deal with conflict and disagreement with different stakeholders. Pursues the task without paying attention to issues of climate/relationship		Effectively manages conflict/disagreement between different stakeholders
Fails to establish a common goal or purpose to align differing stakeholder groups		Encourages cooperation across different stakeholders – helps to establish/ascertain a common goal or purpose
Expresses disagreement in a less tactful way		Expresses disagreement tactfully/assertively
No evidence of building lasting/sustainable relationships with key stakeholders/following up formally or informally		Keeps communication channels open. Follows up to maintain relationships with stakeholders
No evidence of seeking feedback from/following up with stakeholders to ensure their needs are met		Follows up to ensure that the needs of stakeholders (continue to be) met

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1–5): _____

4. Leading the Way for Others

Creates a clear and compelling vision of the future, devolving accountability for delivery to the right level whilst offering appropriate levels of support. Drives performance through regular, honest feedback and by building a climate of openness and trust

Why this matters for IT managers: Multidisciplinary IT teams — developers, infrastructure, security, support, business analysts. Often global, often distributed, often hybrid. Modern IT leadership is people-leadership-heavy; technical credibility helps but is not sufficient.

How have you ensured that your team feel equipped to deliver the business plans in your area?

- How do you keep the team focused on the business goals/ensure they understand the link between their work and the wider company goals?
- How do you ensure your team feel empowered but not overloaded?
- How do you keep the vision real so it resonates with the team?

Give me an example of a time when you had to lead a de-motivated team or a team who were less enthusiastic/ committed to the task in hand.

- What did you do to keep spirits up and people focused on objectives?
- How were you sure that you had overcome the difficulties?
- What factors did you consider? What lessons did you learn?

Can you give me an example where, with the power of hindsight, you feel you may have pushed an individual or team too hard?

- What feedback did you receive from the individual/team at the time?
- What was the outcome? What might you have done differently?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Fails to engage others in the “why” or the longer term goal and get buy in and commitment		Communicates a compelling vision/picture of the future to generate motivation/enthusiasm in others
No clear mechanisms for monitoring and reporting to track progress to goals		Keeps the team focused on the goals through establishing clear mechanisms for monitoring and reporting
Keeps hold of too much themselves (fails to empower the team) and/or micromanages the process		Devolves accountability to the right level and offers appropriate levels of support without micromanaging
Rewards and recognises others in the same way, irrespective of their personal performance/ contribution		Provides differential recognition to others on the basis of objective measures of performance
No evidence of checking that the team see personal relevance of the change/direction and their contribution		Ensures the team understand the need for change/ the direction and that this resonates personally with them
Fails to provide the right balance of support and challenge		Provides an appropriate balance of support and challenge
No evidence of seeking feedback from the team re the suitability/effectiveness of their management/ leadership		Checks with the team to ensure that they are feeling appropriately supported and challenged

Provides only developmental feedback rather than praise and motivation to build confidence		Recognises and rewards good behaviour and performance
Has less flexibility in leadership style (e.g. struggles to take a directive stance or to collaborate/facilitate)		Adapts leadership style to suit the needs of the team and the circumstances
Fails to coach – does the job for others. As such may not get (sustainable) performance improvements from others		Coaches others to help them perform. Raises awareness and generates responsibility for action in others
Creates a command/fear climate where teams are less comfortable expressing their views or trying new things		Builds a climate of trust and openness where people are comfortable expressing their views and trying new things

Summary of evidence: _____ Rating (1–5): _____

5. Embracing Change and Ambiguity

Challenges the status quo, producing new ideas and approaches to improve performance. Open to new ways of doing things and modifies their approach to meet changing demands. Comfortable working without clear guidelines and rules, taking the initiative rather than waiting for direction

Why this matters for IT managers: IT is continuous transformation — cloud, AI/ML, cyber threat landscape, digital workplace, regulatory change (GDPR, AI Act). The IT manager who cannot operate in change does not last. SFIA at higher bands emphasises change leadership as a defining capability.

Tell me about a time when you have had to quickly adjust/ shuffle your priorities in response to an emerging issue?

- How did you go about doing this?
- What issues did you encounter? How did you tackle these?
- What was the benefit of changing to you/the team/the business?
- How did you stay positive and remained focused on performance?

Describe a situation where you challenged the merit of a tried and tested method or process.

- How did you raise the challenge? What was the response?
- What did you do to ensure your solution was implemented?
- How do you ensure that you/others focus on continuous improvement?
- How did you ensure that business requirements continued to be met while the change was introduced?

Describe the most significant change that you have driven in your business/area.

- How did you personally view the change (risks and benefits)
- How (& when) did you communicate the change to others?
- What reactions/barriers did you anticipate to the proposed change?
- What resistance did you actually encounter? How did you manage this?
- What did you do to keep others positive and focused on the change?
- How did you manage to maintain business as usual/current performance?
- How might you manage change differently in the future?

NEGATIVE INDICATORS	1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5	POSITIVE INDICATORS
Shows limited ability/willingness to flex/deviate from plan in the light of new information/changing circumstances		Able to flex and rethink plans/priorities in the light of new information or to meet changing demands

Fails to communicate changes to others in a timely manner. Leaves individuals without clarity on priorities		Keeps others informed and involved with necessary changes to plans. Engages others in a timely manner
Personal reservations about change can negatively impact performance		Maintains own performance and a positive outlook during periods of change
Provides little context/rationale to others about the change process and the need to change		Provides a context for change for others – communicates the bigger picture
Likes to do things own way – is less open to interference or intervention from others		Is open to new methods of working and new ways of doing things
No evidence of challenging existing practice (e.g. resource allocation, business processes, business plans) in an aim to improve or create increased value for the business		Is prepared to question the tried and tested (e.g. use of resources, business processes, plans) in order to make improvements or add greater value to the business
No evidence of focusing on continuous improvement		Brings in best practice from outside/other parts of the business to improve the efficiency of business processes
Does not encourage others to focus on continuous improvement and to challenge existing processes/be forthcoming with ideas for improvements		Fosters a culture of change and continuous improvement in others
No evidence of using review processes to learn lessons to apply to the future		Reviews situations and asks “what can we learn” when things do not go as expected
Works with change but loses day to day momentum needed for business as usual		Drives change through others whilst minimising disruption to business as usual
Fails to anticipate and respond to resistance to change		Anticipates responses to change, takes pre-emptive action to manage resistance
Struggles to operate in more fluid environments where there is ambiguity or little structure or rules/ guidelines for operation		Able to operate without clear rules or guidelines or in situations where there is ambiguous/incomplete information
Fails to recognise/respond to individual reactions to change/support individuals with ambiguity/ uncertainty		Supports others during periods of uncertainty/ ambiguity

Summary of evidence: _____ **Rating (1–5):** _____