

CASE STUDY

The **co-operative**

SITUATIONAL JUDGEMENT TEST

BACKGROUND

The Co-operative Group were faced with the challenge of sifting around 2,000 applications for their two graduate schemes each year, which was placing significant demands on the time and resources of their recruitment team. With the graduate jobs market being continually squeezed the number of applications for both their finance and business management streams was predicted to rise further. A solution was needed to enable them to shortlist applicants more efficiently, and identify the cream of the crop from this growing talent pool.

The Co-operative chose to work with Criterion Partnership to develop a Situational Judgement Test (SJT) for pre-selection which would not only enable assessment against relevant competencies, but also communicate positive messages about the role and values of the organisation. Criterion Partnership were chosen based on their expertise in developing bespoke recruitment tools for leading retailers, which as a result had led to a proven:

- Increased calibre of candidates going through to the second round
- Reduction in the number of assessment centres required to fill vacancies
- An increase in the offer-acceptance rate

OUR APPROACH

In order to gain maximum value for the Co-operative, Criterion set to work on developing a bespoke SJT which would meet the following critical success factors:

- The situations in the assessment **would precisely simulate the range of demands and responsibilities in the role itself**; the SJT would be based on Co-operative Group scenarios
- The content of the SJT would communicate the role demands, combined with the values and culture of the business to candidates – **delivering positive attraction messages and enabling less suitable candidates to self-select out of the process.**
- The SJT would measure a broad range of abilities, personality and values – **ensuring fit with the role, its competencies and the culture of the business**
- Results would be reported as a **sifting score to be combined with the application form score** to enable a quicker sifting decision
- The candidate's profile would be reported to enable **follow-up during the interview**

In order to meet these criteria and ensure the test was reflective of the role, it was essential to talk to members of the recruitment team, previous graduate hires and other key stakeholders.

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A short critical incidents questionnaire was distributed among the wider graduate group to elicit content and feedback for the assessment. Among the key challenges shown to be essential for representation within the test was the need to manage, influence and balance the different agendas of stakeholders in order to fulfil their personal and project objectives. The tests also needed to feature the graduate's task of balancing their own personal development requirements with the needs of the business.

THE RESULTS

Following these consultations it was agreed that the SJT should assess the Co-operative's critical competencies based on their behavioural competency framework for managers.

The candidate's results would be displayed in a report against each of these competencies individually along with an overall score of their whole SJT performance. The reports would also provide interview questions and development suggestions for the candidates. The assessment was added to the Co-operative's account on Criterion Partnership's online assessment system Coast, with the functionality built in for new scenarios to be created in the future.

The screenshot shows the 'The co-operative graduates' SJT interface. It features a scenario titled 'Scenario 1' with a description of an environmental target. Below the description is a table with two columns: 'Most effective' and 'Least effective'. The table lists four approaches: 'Change customers for single-use carrier bags', 'Train store colleagues to ask whether customers need carrier bags', 'Reorganise the bags for life so that they become a fashion accessory', and 'Give away bags for free for free to all customers'. Each approach has radio buttons in both columns. At the bottom, there is a 'Start' button and a progress bar.

The Coast system was integrated with the Co-operative's online recruitment system, which provided a seamless candidate journey from application form to SJT. A Co-operative web-skin was created for the candidate pages. Candidate results and reports were passed automatically from Coast to the online recruitment system to minimise response times to candidates.

In 2012 over 6,000 candidates completed The Co-operative Group's SJT as part of the pre-selection process for graduate roles.

What the Co-operative Group say:

"With 2000 applications to 'hand-screen' we were faced with a real resource problem. Criterion not only came up with a great solution, their in-depth knowledge of retail meant that the information gathering process was thorough, and the scenarios created were varied, accurate and appropriately challenging. In addition to this, we initially set very tight time-scales for the project – Criterion met our deadlines every step of the way."

Rachel Rotherham

Graduate Programme Manager, The Co-operative Group

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