Case Study: Assessment Centre for International Enterprise (IE) Singapore Scholar Selection

40th International Congress on Assessment Center Methods
About IE Singapore

• Singapore Government agency driving Singapore’s external economy
  • Spearhead the overseas growth of Singapore-based companies
  • Promote international trade
  • Attract global commodities traders to establish global or Asian home base in Singapore

• Global network in over 35 locations which provide the necessary connections for many developed and emerging markets
Background

• One of several government agencies that award undergraduate scholarships
• Scholarship scheme for economic agencies decentralised to the respective agencies
• HR initiated a review of the scholar assessment framework and selection process to ensure relevancy and efficacy
• CSC was engaged to conduct the review
• Scope of project includes not only the assessment centre, but the entire scholar selection process
Types of Scholarship

- **Undergraduate scholarships (local and overseas)**
  - For students with ‘A’ level, International Baccalaureate (IB), NUS High School diploma and Polytechnic Diploma with Merit qualification.

- **Mid term scholarship**
  - For undergraduates who have completed at least one (1) year of studies at NUS, NTU, SMU, SIT and SUTD.
Application Cycles

• **Early cycle**
  - Based on pre-university final school exam results (offer is conditional on actual ‘A’ level, IB, Diploma results when released later on)

• **Main cycle**
  - Based on ‘A’ level, IB and Diploma results

• **Mid-term:**
  - Based on undergraduate academic results
## Project Phases, Methodology & Deliverables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Phase 1: Information Gathering & Analysis** | • Documentation review of the existing frameworks  
• Consultation with key stakeholders in IE Singapore  
• Proposed competency framework for selection |
| **Phase 2: Review of Existing Selection Process & Assessment Materials** | • Review of existing selection process and assessments  
• Proposed refinements and modifications to the selection process |
| **Phase 3: Design & Development of Selection Process & Assessments** | • Development of new or revision of existing AC content, scoring systems and training materials; trial of new assessments  
• Streamlining of other stages in the selection process |
| **Phase 4: Provision of Assessor Training** | • Design and delivery of a 1.5-day AC assessor training session |
| **Phase 5: Implementation** | • Advice and input on AC implementation  
• Active monitoring of the first round of AC implementation  
• Recommendations for further refinements |
Phase 1: Information Gathering and Analysis

Aims

• Determine assessment needs and desired outcomes of the IE Singapore scholar selection exercise
• Information gathered to form the basis for the identification and development of the IE Singapore scholar competency framework and suitable assessment methodologies in the selection process

Key Activities

• Documentation review of the existing frameworks (e.g. core values, leadership and scholar competency, performance appraisal, etc.)
• Consultation with key stakeholders in IE Singapore to gain a more nuanced understanding of the organisation’s strategic objectives, operating environment and core values and competencies
Phase 2: Review of Existing Selection Process & Assessment Materials

Aims

• Review existing IE Singapore scholar selection process to identify strengths to harness and limitations to be rectified/improved upon

• Recommendations for revised selection process

Key Activities

• Examine existing stages in the selection process, specifically the existing AC activities and materials used, to identify the strengths as well as gaps and areas for improvement

• Propose potential refinements and modifications to the IE Singapore scholar selection process and assessment methodologies, with additional input obtained from Phase 1
Phase 3: Design & Development of Selection Process & Assessments

Aims
• Refinement/development of suitable assessment methodologies, evaluation systems and training guides for the AC to enhance accuracy of assessments
• Streamlining of the selection process to increase the overall efficiency and cost-effectiveness

Key Activities
• Develop new or revise existing assessment content that are job-relevant and can assess critical competencies with greater precision
• Trial new assessments on mock participants and make further revisions to the materials
• Develop/revise scoring systems and training materials for the assessors
• Refine existing assessment stages to streamline the selection process
Phase 4: Provision of Assessor Training

Aims
• Equip assessors involved in the selection process with the relevant content knowledge and skills required to make reliable and accurate assessor judgements

Key Activities
• Design AC assessor training
• Deliver a 1.5-day training session to equip AC assessors with thorough knowledge and understanding of the AC competencies and exercises, as well as develop their assessment skills, through interactive discussions and hand-on assessment practice
Phase 5: Implementation

Aims

• Ensure a smooth transition from the existing to the revised selection process and seamless implementation of new AC exercises

Key Activities

• Provide advice and input on implementation issues such as assessor deployment, venue selection and set-up, as well as communication to candidates and assessors prior to the commencement of the AC

• Monitor the implementation of the first round of assessments, provide support on any assessment issues that come up and facilitate the integration discussion during the first AC round

• Conduct a thorough review of the assessments and make recommendations for further improvements
Review Methodology
Review Methodology

Job Analysis Interviews

• Conduct job analysis interviews
  • 7x Senior Managers
  • 6x Middle Managers (supervisors & AC assessors)
  • 6x Individual Contributors (scholars and high-performers)

• Transcribe interviews

• Code interviews and identify main themes emerging in responses
Review Methodology

Critical Incident Survey

• Surveyed 20 IE officers (scholars and high-performing non-scholars)
• Critical incidents (positive and negative)
• Response rate = 13/20 (65%)
• Code surveys and identify main themes emerging in responses
Review Findings
Operating Context

Organisational Mandate

• Key economic agency under Ministry of Trade & Industry
• Grow external economy by helping Singapore based companies to internationalise successfully
• Responsible for making Singapore a global trading hub
Operating Context

Environment and Challenges

• Rapidly changing business environment
• Having to deal with diverse cultures, nationalities
• Retention of talent
Operating Context

Role and Tasks of IE Officers

- Business development
- Consulting
- Research
- Planning and organising
- Implementing and executing plans
- Facilitating discussions

- Writing
- Giving presentations
- Relationship building / Networking
- Negotiating
- Administrative tasks (e.g., vetting submissions)
## Scholar Qualities

### Scholar Assessment Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global</th>
<th>Enterprising</th>
<th>Talent Developer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global Mindedness</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>Results Orientation</td>
<td>Dedication to Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Influence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Review of assessment process
Previous Assessment Process

Candidates apply → Short-listing based on academic results, CCAs → HR interview → Assessment Centre → Group Director Interview → Senior Management Interview → Scholarship offer
Previous Scholar Competencies

- Written and Oral Communication
- Perception, Analysis and Judgement
- Drive and Initiative
- Teamwork
- Performance under Pressure
- Innovation
- Alignment to National Objectives
- Interpersonal Skills
- Team Leadership
IE Scholar Assessment Process

Strengths and Limitations

• **Strengths**
  - Multiple hurdle screening process narrow pool of candidates
  - Multiple assessors
  - Some variety of assessment methods used

• **Limitations**
  - Assessment activities not aligned to work at IE
  - Assessors not adequately trained in assessment
  - Repetitive exercises / activities
  - Resource-intensive, especially at the start of process
Enhanced Assessment Process

Candidates apply

Short-listing based on academic results, CCAs

Psychometric Testing

HR interview

Assessment Centre

Panel Interview

Scholarship offer
# Assessment Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Psych Testing</th>
<th>HR Interview</th>
<th>Assessment Centre</th>
<th>Panel Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Mindedness</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results Orientation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication to Organisation</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Psychometric Testing
Psychometric Testing

• Psychometric tests are objective and standardised measures of certain attributes

• Identified two cognitive ability tests which have been validated within the Singapore Public Service as short-listing tool for the HR interview
  – Critical thinking test
  – Numerical reasoning test

• Competency assessed: Problem Solving
HR Interview

• One-on-one competency-based, structured interview conducted by HR personnel
  – Standardised interviewing and assessment process
  – Increases objectivity and effectiveness of assessments

• Competencies assessed:
  – Dedication to Organisation, Connectedness, Results Orientation, Resilience

• Revisions made:
  – Alignment to scholar competency framework
  – Greater guidance for interviewers by providing suggested follow-up probe questions
  – Generated rating scale with behavioural indicators
## HR Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous Version</th>
<th>Enhanced Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What was the most challenging situation you have faced so far? What did you feel / do / say / in the situation?</td>
<td>Describe a time when you had to complete an important and urgent project or assignment. [Drive; Initiative; Accountability; Quality Orientation]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How did this situation arise?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How did you prepare for the project/assignment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What was your approach towards the situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How did you address the situation? What steps did you take to ensure that deadlines were met?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How successful were you in adhering to your deadlines?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What was the final outcome?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How satisfied were you in the outcome?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• In retrospect, what could you have done differently for a better outcome?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessment Centre
Assessment Centre

• Assessment method that involves candidates undergoing multiple simulation exercises in a standardised manner and are assessed by multiple assessors

• Candidates take on role of IE officer as they undergo a range of job-relevant exercises
  – Provides realistic job preview
  – Increase candidate perceptions of fairness and relevance

• Consists of four exercises:
  – Individual Presentation Exercise (Revised)
  – Negotiation Exercise (New)
  – Business Development Exercise (Revised)
  – Business Proposal Exercise (New)
Assessment Centre

Individual Presentation Exercise

• Candidates research and prepare a written report and presentation on an industry relevant to the work of IE
  ▪ Given a choice of 1 out of 2 options
• 3 days in advance to prepare
• Makes a 10 minute presentation to the assessor, who will follow up with questions about the presentation for 10 minutes
• Competencies assessed:
  – Global Mindedness, Problem Solving, Resilience, Influence
Assessment Centre

Negotiation Exercise

• Candidates interact one-on-one with the CEO of a foreign company (played by role-player) with the goal of securing a business partnership for a Singapore company looking to expand into overseas markets
• CEO has prefers a different agreement and would pressure candidate to agree
• CEO would also present statements to challenge candidate’s integrity
• 15 minute preparation, followed by 20 minute interaction with role player
• Competencies assessed:
  – Connectedness, Problem Solving, Results Orientation, Resilience, Influence, Dedication to Organisation
Assessment Centre

Business Development Exercise

• Group of 5-8 candidates working together collaboratively to develop a business expansion plan for a Singapore company looking to expand overseas
• Collaborative effort with no assigned roles or leader
• Candidates have to come up with a feasible plan, addressing the challenges faced by the company
• Present business development plan to assessors (in the role of management team of company)
• Assessors engage in a Q&A with candidates based on their observations and presentation
• 10 minute preparation of individual proposal, 35 minute discussion, followed by 10 minute presentation and 15 minute Q&A
• Competencies assessed:
  – Global Mindedness, Connectedness, Problem Solving, Results Orientation, Influence, Teamwork
Assessment Centre

Business Proposal Exercise

- Group of 3-5 candidates represent a different division in IE Singapore managing a particular industry/company vying for use of land in planning for a township
- Each candidate has to advocate for their division and company/industry and reach consensus on a township plan that will help Singapore companies secure the tender bid
- After the exercise, each candidate prepares a written update to their supervisor, summarising the group’s decision
- Need to balance the Singapore companies’/division’s interests with the greater good of the organisation and nation
- 15 minute preparation, 30 minute discussion, 10 minute update to supervisor
- Competencies assessed:
  - Global Mindedness, Connectedness, Results Orientation, Influence, Teamwork, Dedication to Organisation
Panel Interview
Panel Interview

- Candidates are interviewed by a panel consisting of IE senior management
- Includes presentation and discussion on a business case study
- 45 minute preparation, 15 minute case study presentation and discussion, followed by interview
- Competencies assessed:
  - Global Mindedness, Problem Solving, Results Orientation, Resilience, Influence, Dedication to Organisation
Assessor Training
Assessor Training

• 1.5 days workshop to prepare assessors for the conduct of assessment centre
  • Develop and practice assessment skills
  • Ensure consistency and objectivity
  • Address uncertainties and concerns
Implementation
Implementation

• Ensure a smooth transition from the existing to the revised selection process and seamless implementation of new AC exercises
  • Advise on implementation issues such as assessor deployment, venue selection and set-up, as well as communication to candidates and assessors prior to AC
  • Monitor the conduct of the AC, provide support on any assessment issues that come up
  • Facilitate the integration discussion during the AC
  • Conduct a thorough review of the assessments and make recommendations for further improvements
  • Conduct After Action Review (AAR) and review candidate feedback
Participant Feedback

Mean

Today's assessment process made me feel that IE Singapore is concerned about identifying the most qualified scholar

Today's assessment process gave me a fair opportunity to demonstrate my skills and abilities

The outcome of today's assessment will be a good reflection of my capabilities

N=24 Participants from 2015-2016
Challenges
Challenges

• “Old habits die hard”
• Content leakage
• Building and sustaining an assessor pool
• Attempting to predict performance many years into the future
Best Practices
Best Practices

• Job analysis guides design
  • Make assessments job-relevant
• Trial new assessments
• Assessor training is crucial
  • Develop assessment skills, calibration of evaluations, source of feedback
• Competency matrix
  • Keep to manageable number of competencies
  • Do not need to assess every competency across every assessment
• Cognitive ability tests, Structured interviews for shortlisting
• Reduce load on assessors
• Review frequently
EQUIP  •  CONNECT  •  EXPLORE  •  CREATE

www.cscollege.gov.sg

www.facebook.com/CivilServiceCollegeSingapore
All copyright, trade marks and other intellectual property rights comprised in the information, text, graphics, data or any other materials or works used on or contained in this document (collectively "the Materials") are the sole and exclusive property of Civil Service College, Singapore and/or its licensors.

No part of the Materials may be reproduced, copied, reverse compiled, adapted, distributed, commercially exploited, displayed or transmitted in any manner or by any means or stored in any information retrieval system without prior written consent of Civil Service College, Singapore.