

# SITUATIONAL JUDGEMENT TESTS

UNDERSTANDING  
DECISION MAKING



## WHAT ARE SITUATIONAL JUDGEMENT TESTS

Situational Judgement Tests (SJTs) are designed to assess candidates' judgement regarding situations frequently encountered in the workplace. Respondents are presented with job-related scenarios that describe a problem or dilemma, followed by several possible courses of action. Respondents are asked to either evaluate each course of action for its effectiveness, or to sort the options based on the likelihood that they will perform each action.

SJT items can be presented in written, verbal, video-based or computer-based formats. Professions that have relied substantially on SJTs for the screening of applicants include the military, medical industry, college admissions and supervisory positions.

## WHY USE SITUATIONAL JUDGEMENT TESTS

- Good performance on SJTs has been found to be linked with a number of positive outcomes, including better job performance and leadership ability.
- SJTs assess candidates' ability to apply a wide variety of job-relevant knowledge, skills and abilities to address difficult situations, which is not fully captured by cognitive ability tests or personality tests alone.
- Combinations of multiple measures (e.g. SJT + Personality Assessment + Cognitive Ability Assessment) would produce superior predictions of job performance compared to utilising only one measure.
- Candidates often perceive SJTs to be more realistic and fair measures of job performance, increasing their positive perception of organisations that use them and the likelihood that they will accept job offers.

Some key research findings regarding the use of SJTs as an assessment tool are briefly described in the following section.

## RESEARCH ON SJTS

### JOB PERFORMANCE

There are a number of studies showing that performance on SJTs is a good predictor of future job performance. A meta-analysis of SJTs using data from over ten thousand participants found that the tests served as both valid and generalisable predictors of job performance.

A separate study on 723 medical students found that using SJTs as a measure of procedural knowledge of interpersonal behaviour could predict both internship performance and job performance up to 9 years after the initial test.

In a paper by academic experts David Chan and Neal Schmitt examining SJTs, they found that SJTs could predict both task performance (i.e. technical proficiency) and contextual performance (i.e. job dedication or interpersonal facilitation), more so than cognitive tests and personality tests combined.

Candidates view SJTs as fairer measures of job performance

## LEADERSHIP

SJTs have been found to be useful assessments of leadership effectiveness. Not only are there a number of SJTs specifically tailored for leaders on the market, but numerous experts have recognised SJTs as a central assessment technique capable of capturing the various nuances that leaders are expected to adapt to.

An extensive study published in The Leadership Quarterly yielded results strongly suggesting that leadership SJTs provide additional predictive insights over and above established measures, and are uniquely equipped to account for contextual elements involved in leadership.

## EMPLOYEE PERCEPTION & WELL-BEING

Research suggests that Situational Judgement Tests tend to be perceived as being more fair and relevant by applicants because the test appears to be highly related to the job. SJTs ask applicants about their responses to situations likely to occur during work, compared to cognitive and personality assessments, which assess more abstract characteristics of applicants. Applicants' subjective perception of the fairness of selection could prove important for two reasons.

First, applicants' perception of the validity of assessment procedures tends to impact applicant impression of the organisation, which in turn affects applicants' desire to accept job offers.

Second, perceived validity of selection tools influences what experts call "procedural justice". Procedural justice captures how fair employees perceive an organisation's decisions to be. As employees tend to perceive a SJT as a fairer assessment tool, they are likely to perceive the employers that use them as being fairer to its employees.

Perceptions of organisational fairness and procedural justice can lead to lower litigation rates, lower turnover intentions, higher motivation levels and higher productivity.

## SUGGESTED USES OF SJTS

### AS SELECTION ASSESSMENT TOOLS

SJTs can be incorporated into a battery of tests used to screen-in applicants who will proceed on to more intensive selection rounds such as assessment centres or interviews. The easy-to-administer nature of SJTs make them suitable for initial screening rounds.

### GAUGE EFFECTIVENESS OF TRAINING PROGRAMS

SJTs can be used to check training program effectiveness on two levels: on the individual level to check for an employee's training progress, or on the intervention level to check for the overall effectiveness of a training program.

SJTs can be used for selection, training and coaching.

For individual employees' training progress, SJTs may be administered immediately before and after training. As SJTs capture a wide range of relevant job behaviours, they may serve as a good catch-all measure to capture the translation of specific training programs into more organic outcomes.

To check for the effectiveness of in-house training programmes, SJTs may be administered to a group of employees that have undergone training and another group that have not undergone training.

## COACHING PROGRAMMES

With a sufficiently wide bank of items, SJTs may also be used in coaching programmes to improve decision-making skills involved in difficult job-related situations. Such a program may be created by supplementing every course of action with a brief explanation of its effectiveness.

It should, however, be noted that SJTs have traditionally been used primarily for selection, and this form of usage is still not widespread. However, preliminary studies suggest that coaching done through SJTs may improve the underlying constructs that were tapped into by using the SJT.

## CONCLUSION

Through the usage of highly realistic scenarios, SJTs have the unique ability to tap into a good spread of different job-related knowledge, skills, abilities and other attributes of respondents. Academic research into SJTs have arrived at a consensus about their predictive capabilities on a range of different job outcomes such as task performance, job dedication and interpersonal factors. As a result, there has been increased interest from various sectors in supplementing pre-existing selection tools with a more realistic and easily-administered assessment tool such as the SJT.

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