Eversheds: Introducing Leading Edge Assessment to Maximise Return on Investment in Graduates

Leading law firms invest considerable sums in recruiting and training graduates and there is fierce competition to attract the very best candidates who will become the partners of the future.

So it was surprising when extensive research carried out by *the Change Team* in the late 1990s revealed that the majority of the major players were failing to use best practice assessment techniques. Instead of using competency-based interviews and assessment centres in their recruitment processes, most were relying solely on traditional, unstructured interviews, which other industry sectors and professions had long since abandoned as unreliable.

One of the few exceptions we identified was Eversheds, where Geraldine Smith, then Training and Graduate Recruitment Manager,

had already introduced an Assessment Centre approach, requiring candidates to take part in practical exercises.

However, after we had compared Eversheds' selection process with best practice in other industries, Geraldine was keen to enhance their process still further in order to stay ahead.

We worked closely with Eversheds to redesign the graduate assessment process, making it more reliable and targeted at the future needs of the firm. This included:

■ Overhauling the graduate Competencies to ensure they would describe the partners of the future

■ Designing a competency-based Structured Interview to be used by the recruitment panel

■ Advising on Realistic Work Simulation exercises to be included in the assessment centre

■ Designing State-of-the-Art Interview Training and delivering this to groups of partners in various locations around the UK over several years.

The benefits were tremendous. Partners carrying out interviews with shortlisted candidates found the structured interview process rigorous, logical

and user-friendly. Although requiring more thorough preparation and therefore taking longer than traditional interviews, partners felt that the process was preferable as it produced more reliable findings.

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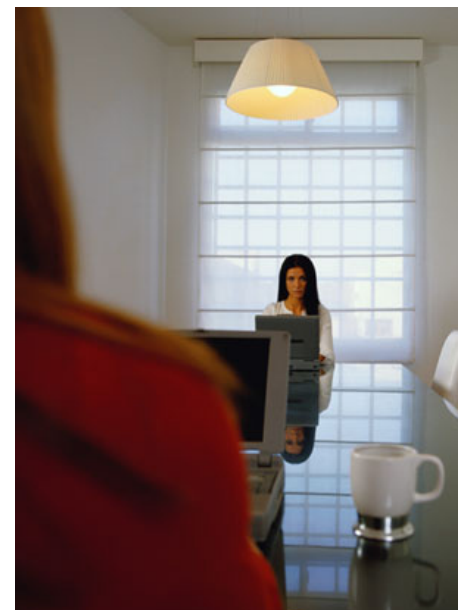
Feedback from candidates was that the process was both challenging and fair. The majority of candidates felt they had been given the opportunity to demonstrate their qualities and skills throughout the assessment day.   It also meant

Eversheds were able to give specific feedback to unsuccessful candidates as to why their applications were not being progressed.

A review of the quality of candidates, 6 years on, showed that over 90% of graduates recruited have fulfilled their potential and become very effective solicitors. In addition, the more rigorous interview process has allowed Eversheds to assess candidates' long term commitment to the firm, and this has been evidenced by improved retention rates not only on qualification, but further down the career path. Many of the candidates recruited in the mid 1990s are now successful Associates with the firm.

Having enjoyed these benefits, Eversheds subsequently invited *the Change Team* to work with them on enhancing their selection interviewing for qualified, fee earning lawyers and found that partners responded very positively to the structured interviewing approach. It allowed them to question candidates in far more depth about their previous work experience and

responsibility, and reduce the number of expensive recruitment mistakes.

Geraldine Smith, now Head of HR for Leeds and Manchester comments:

"*the Change Team* were a pleasure to work with. They took great care to

ensure that training sessions were pitched at the right level for the audience and they were challenging in their approach, which our delegates respected. Their occupational psychology background, combined with a wide knowledge of other business environments meant we achieved a rigorous yet practical result."