

Danske Bank

Benchmarking the ability and personality profiles of graduate trainees

Danske Bank is Denmark's leading provider of retail and wholesale banking services and one of the largest financial institutions in Europe. Each year the company assesses among 1200 -1500 applicants for 100 - 200 positions on a two-year training programme. This programme provides all successful participants with a recognised professional banking qualification.

To successfully complete the training programme, individuals must first achieve high standards in a number of exams. Whenever an individual fails the exams, the company has to invest significant time and money re-training the person until they pass. The personal impact of failure on the performance of the trainees can be also significant, so there are real incentives for the company to ensure that as many trainees as possible qualify at the first opportunity.

Danske Bank had recently become concerned that the average failure rate was too high. In Spring 2000, the company contacted Cubiks for advice on how it could improve its selection processes and accurately identify individuals with a certain variety of profiles who have the qualities needed to succeed.

Analysing the reasons for success and failure

Before gaining a place on the banking training programme, the potential graduate trainees must first pass their final educational/academic exams. To pass these exams, individuals need to attain a certain grade, which reflects their ability in a range of core subjects and not just one focus area. This grade is recognised as an objective national standard.

Given this is the case, Danske Bank was eager to understand why some trainees perform so much better in its banking exams than others. Cubiks suggested that it undertake a series of benchmarking trials to analyse the abilities and personalities of a particular group of trainees.

The results would indicate if there were any significant similarities between the more and least successful candidates and provide vital information for future recruitment strategies. In addition, it was hoped that the results would point out how the company's culture may be modified to improve individual effectiveness.

Client comment

 Danske Bank

"At Danske Bank we are keen to strengthen our reputation for having the most competent brand in the market, so it is vital that we are able to find the most talented individuals for our graduate training programmes. Cubiks has provided us with an extensive range of valuable insights that will guide our thinking as we move forward."

Mr Lars Mørch,
Head of HR Development, Danske Bank

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Focusing on ability

As a first step, Cubiks asked all of the Danske Bank trainees who had taken the final exams of their banking training programme in June 2000 to complete two tests from its Reasoning for Business assessment series.

The first test - *Managerial and Graduate: Numerical* - is designed to determine how well an individual can work with numbers and involves questions based on data presented in a variety of forms including graphs, diagrams and statistical tables. The second test - *Managerial and Graduate: Verbal* - examines an individual's ability to comprehend written information, and to understand and analyse the logic of written arguments. Neither test requires the individual to have any prior knowledge of the subject matter beforehand.

Once the trainees had completed these tests, Cubiks compared their scores with the results they achieved in two of their final banking exams - *Financial Calculations and Financial Markets*.

Once the results had been analysed, it became immediately clear that there was a very strong relationship between the results of the Cubiks tests and the Danske Bank exams. The candidates who had performed well in their final banking exams also displayed high numerical and verbal reasoning skills. Correspondingly, the unsuccessful banking trainees did not register high scores on the reasoning tests.

Assessing personality

Next, Cubiks asked each of the trainees from the group to complete its PAPI-N personality questionnaire. PAPI (Personality and preference inventory) is a simple, yet scientifically proven process that explores an individual's behaviour and preferred working styles.

The individual responses to the personality questionnaire were then analysed to identify any significant personality differences between the most successful and least successful trainees.

It soon emerged that there were seven areas of real interest, each of which concerned 'needs', the deeper inherent tendencies of an individual's behaviour.

In particular, the most successful trainees saw themselves as:

- Having a low need for rules and supervision
- Having a high need to achieve and be noticed
- Having a preference for being forceful and controlling others
- Placing little emphasis on the importance of supporting others
- Placing little emphasis on relating closely to colleagues.

“The results will help the company to identify personal development and coaching needs and at a wider level, help the company prepare for organisational change by ensuring that it employs staff with a diverse range of personality and ability profiles”

Mr Lars Mørch,
Head of HR Development, Danske Bank

Qualitative interviews confirm findings

These responses were then also confirmed by a series of qualitative interviews with the trainees.

The most successful individuals:

- Felt comfortable knowing that they were being measured against specific objectives
- Were very clear about their future career plans
- Were inclined to consider difficult issues as opportunities rather than problems.

The least successful candidates were:

- Much less proactive
- Didn't actively seek out new work or challenging projects
- Were not goal-focused in their approach
- Needed the support of colleagues
- Relied on receiving feedback from superiors.

Acting on the results

The project has provided Danske Bank with an extensive range of insights that will form the basis of the company's future recruitment and development strategy. The results of the analysis have clearly demonstrated the reliability and accuracy of the assessments used and the project as a whole has shown Danske Bank that by building assessment tools into its graduate recruitment process, it can gain vital additional information to support a selection or rejection decision.

In addition, the results will help the company to identify personal development and coaching needs and at a wider level, help the company prepare for organisational change by ensuring that it employs staff with a diverse range of personality and ability profiles.

Following this success, Danske Bank and Cubiks are now extending the scope of the project and will soon begin tracking the progress of a group of new trainees who will be assessed at regular intervals throughout the course.

Cubiks

Ranger House, Walnut Tree Close, Guildford,
Surrey, GU1 4US

T +44 1483 544 200

F +44 1483 544 230

E info@cubiks.com

www.cubiks.com

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