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Who is this book for?

This book is aimed at all candidates taking European institution competitions who wish to prepare in the best possible way for the situational judgment test.

1. A GENERAL COMPETENCIES TEST

The situational judgment test assesses your behaviour and decision-making capabilities in a working environment. It consists of 20 multiple-choice questions (MCQs). Each question describes a scenario based on a work situation and gives a set of 4 possible actions you might take in response. You must choose the action you believe is most effective AND the one you believe is least effective.

The situational judgment test is a test of general competencies. It doesn't assess your professional competence in a particular field (such as law or economics). You must answer each question working only from the information given in the scenario and from what is expected of you in terms of competencies. These are set out in the Guide to open competitions¹. They are: analysis and problem solving, delivering quality and results, prioritising and organising, resilience and working with others.

As with all admission tests, the situational judgment test is difficult. To be successful, you must:

- master the competencies required by EPSO;
- be familiar with the values of European institutions;
- be capable of sorting actions according to different criteria;
- train yourself to take the test.

2. GIVING YOURSELF EVERY CHANCE OF SUCCESS

This book will give you every opportunity to be successful in the situational judgment test.

¹ "Guide to open competitions", Official Journal of the European Union, 2012/C 270 A/01.

Part I explains how the admission tests are organised. It also helps you to familiarise yourself with the way the tests are set out on computer (how to validate an answer, how to flag up the questions where you're not sure about the answer, etc.).

Part II addresses the specificities of the situational judgment test (question presentation, answer evaluation, time management, etc.). It also gives detailed information about the competencies required by EPSO and the values of the European institutions on which you must rely when answering the questions.

Part III is devoted to the different strategies you can use. It shows you how to classify actions according to different criteria: degree of problem resolution, degree of priority, life positions and similarity of actions.

Part IV consists of 6 tests each containing 20 questions. Each test assesses the five EPSO competencies.

The questions provided here are similar to those set in the competitions run by EPSO since 2010.

They are designed for all categories of competition².

The answers to the tests are given in Part V. You will find all the detailed explanations in Part VI.

Good luck with your preparations!

² In EPSO's situational judgment tests, there are no differences between assistant (AST) and administrator (AD) questions.

CHAPTER 3 - TEST PRESENTATION

1. TEST PRINCIPLES

The situational judgment test consists of 20 multiple-choice questions designed to assess your behaviour and your decision-making capability in a working environment. Each question describes a scenario based on a work situation and gives four possible actions you might take in response. You must choose:

- the most effective action
- AND the least effective action.

You therefore have to select two options from the four options offered. The other two actions, which are not chosen, are intermediary actions. They are described as neutral by EPSO.

2. EXAMPLE

Here is an example question. Take your time answering it. The answers and explanations are given at the end of this chapter.

Q1.

You have just been transferred to one of your company's foreign subsidiaries. You haven't yet mastered the country's language. So, you don't always understand what you are being asked to do and this leads you to make mistakes.

	Most efficient	Least efficient
a) You ask those talking to you to make the effort to speak in English, at least for a time.		
b) You ask to take an intensive course to perfect your knowledge of the language.		
c) You patiently put up with the problem in the knowledge that your language level will improve with time.		
d) You systematically rephrase each request to be sure you have understood it correctly.		

3. DEFINITIONS

What is an effective action?

Each question raises a problem. An effective action is an action that resolves this problem by drawing on a non-specific professional competency (ie unrelated to the job) in line with the values of the European institutions. These competencies are listed by EPSO. We shall analyse them in greater detail in the chapters that follow:

Analysis and problem solving	Identify the critical facts in complex issues and develop creative and practical solutions.
Delivering quality and results	Take personal responsibility and initiative for delivering work to a high standard of quality within set procedures.
Prioritising and organising	Prioritise the most important tasks, work flexibly and organise own workload efficiently.
Resilience	Remain effective under a heavy workload, handle organisational frustrations positively and adapt to a changing work environment.
Working with others	Work cooperatively with others in teams and across organisational boundaries and respect differences between people.

The most (or least) effective action is the one that resolves (or doesn't resolve) the problem while also exhibiting one of the five competencies required. The effectiveness criterion is relative. When we speak of the most (or least) effective action, it is in relation to the other actions, and not in absolute terms. Thus, the most effective action may be the best or the least bad of the four. Intermediary actions are described as neutral by EPSO.

A neutral action doesn't mean an ineffective action. A neutral action may be effective or ineffective. All one can say is that a neutral action is situated between the most effective action and the least effective action.

The test therefore consists of ranking actions from the most effective to the least effective. In chapters 7 to 11, we shall see how to go about this.

4. WHY A SITUATIONAL JUDGMENT TEST?

The situational judgment test has been part of the admission tests since 2010. It was introduced to assess the five competencies described above. It aims to select candidates according to their behaviour and their aptitude to make the right decisions in a work situation. It is therefore complementary to the logic tests used in the same preselection phase of the competition.

A number of studies¹⁰ have shown the relevance of this type of test in candidate selection procedures:

- it is a good tool for predicting a candidate's performance in his/her future post;
- it is fair inasmuch as the results do not depend on criteria such as the candidate's age, gender or ethnicity;
- it is perceived by candidates as a fair and equitable means of assessment;
- it is easy to administer.

5. TIME MANAGEMENT

You must answer 20 questions in 30 minutes. This is an average of 1 minute 30 seconds per question. Speed of thought is therefore an important factor in this test. However, you cannot time yourself on each question: this would waste time and increase stress.

Ideally, you should be able to answer 20 questions in 25 minutes. This would then give you 5 minutes at the end of the test to review any questions you have flagged up. The following table shows the best way of managing your time.

Time remaining	You must have answered
20 : 00	8 questions
10 : 00	16 questions
05 : 00	20 questions

¹⁰ We refer in particular to the study made by SHL, the company that designed the situational judgment questions used by EPSO.

6. SOLUTION

Action d) is the most effective.

It is the most effective solution in the short term. It is the only one that enables you to reduce the risk of error significantly.

Action c) is the least effective.

This passive attitude will still result in you making errors. Therefore, it doesn't resolve the problem raised by the question.

Action a) is neutral.

This action is effective at reducing your risk of making errors. However, you are transferring the problem to others. It is up to you to make an effort first. Action a) is therefore less effective than d).

Action b) is neutral.

This solution is adequate but is only effective in the long term. Meanwhile, the risk of error is still present. Therefore, this action does not solve the problem that exists right now.

In this question, the competency required is "Delivering quality and results".