



Fiero, Defamiliarisation and Flow

Overview

The retail sector is one of the UK's largest employers, it is fast-paced and has unique challenges. Consumer needs constantly evolve. Retail failures get a lot of negative attention (e.g. nationwide store closures by Toys R Us, Maplin and BHS). Roles in this sector can be difficult to fill. And, according to the Institute of Student Employers (ISE) Development Survey, it has amongst the highest attrition rates of any sector for graduate roles.

In this context, one of the UK's largest supermarkets decided to partner with Business Psychologists to address their challenges in recruiting future leaders. Morrisons, working with talent consultancy Amberjack, created a novel recruitment process for authentic assessment, applying concepts of Fiero, Defamiliarisation and Flow.

Challenge

WM Morrison Supermarkets PLC (trading as 'Morrisons'), serves millions of customers each week from hundreds of stores, as one of the largest supermarkets in the UK. They retained Business Psychologists to work with them to improve their future leader recruitment process, in a competitive graduate recruitment market with tech-savvy candidates.

Unlike their competitors, Morrisons do not just sell food, they make it. As one of the UK's biggest food producers, recruitment needed to reflect their "field to fork" operation and provide a realistic and authentic preview of what it's like to work at Morrisons. Crucial aspects of Morrisons culture (resilience, self-awareness, learning agility) also needed to be measured for better candidate fit, to impact attrition rates. Morrisons needed a market-leading, exciting and innovative process that would better position their unique proposition.

The company also needed to ensure internal stakeholders trusted the process. Related to which, they needed to assess candidates' potential to be successful, rather than experience alone, given their age profile.

Morrisons partnered with Amberjack with the objective of increasing the right candidates' interest in Morrisons, and better predicting which candidates would be successful in their roles. And all of this had to be underpinned by principles of Business Psychology, rigour and best practice.

In considering the approach to be taken, evidence from a number of sources was considered including:

- Amberjack's "Future Talent Insights" research; analysis of predictive effectiveness of selection tools in relation to assessment criteria
- Amberjack's high potential (HiPo) Framework
- Amberjack's experience
- Morrisons' business insight: stakeholder's interviews extracting issues and objectives
- Academic research, which highlighted important characteristics for effective behavioural assessment solutions:

- consistent and clear
- job relevance
- providing candidates opportunity to show what they know
- treating candidates with respect

The Practitioners cited reference to: Hausknecht, et al., 2004, Truxillo, Bodner, Bertolino, Bauer & Yonce, 2009, Anderson, Salgado & Hülshager, 2010.

Approach

Stakeholder management and buy-in was crucial for the Practitioners to elicit the business insight needed for transformation. Success was to be measured through reduced attrition, fill rates, conversions and stakeholder face validity.

Solution Design

Workshops and Job Analysis (at the Visionary, Subject Matter Expert (SME) and Incumbent levels) were critical to build up a bank of realistic job simulations, as well as develop a detailed behaviourally anchored assessment framework fundamentally reflective of Morrisons' Ways of Working.

A bespoke process and assessment exercises were designed incorporating the following principles:

- Fiero: a neuroscientific concept, Fiero drives engagement and loyalty and is triggered by stretching challenges that allows one to showcase capability
- Flow: as defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, a state within which one can assess innate strengths, reducing contamination from socially desirable or learned behaviours
- Defamiliarisation: a tool for creating a sense of 'Flow,' defamiliarisation exercises put candidates in unfamiliar situations without clear rules allowing an authentic assessment of resilience and agility
- Assessment of 'High Potential,' using Amberjack's High Potential Framework which has as core principles:
 - Learning Agility
 - Self-Awareness
 - Resilience
 - Motivational Drive
- Reflection: both through reflective interviews and through a decompression session after the defamiliarisation exercise, allowing the Practitioners to assess candidates' self-awareness and discuss relative strengths when in a disarmed state
- Immersion and Realistic Job Preview (RJP): attrition on the Morrisons Future Leader programmes seemed to be largely driven by candidates not understanding the roles applied for. It was therefore critical that all assessments were reflective of reality
- Face Validity: essential to building internal trust, as candidates performing well in previous assessments often had not been offered employment because stakeholders had not seen their capabilities demonstrated in a context they felt was valid

While the assessment framework formed the basis of all assessment processes, the content was tailored to reflect the reality of the different roles available. The end-to-end solution was delivered on Amberjack's immersive, interactive and video-driven technology platforms.

The Recruitment Process

The process started with an SJT offering an initial RJP. It then moved to a video interview that consisted of future-focused scenario-based questions, which brought to life the reality of the schemes' demands (e.g. nightshifts in cold warehouses, not knowing what your next rotation will be, etc.).

The culmination was the Assessment Centres, which were held at function specific locations: for example, manufacturing plants. The Practitioners developed bespoke materials for each function and delivered a true day-in-the-life experience using exercises reflective of the realities of the job.

The Logistics and Manufacturing defamiliarisation exercise was arguably the single most transformative assessment designed. Candidates had no information about what was going to happen, and the exercise was not part of the event schedule. They were asked to deliver a briefing to warehouse colleagues using fragments of information about a situation where machinery was 'breaking down,' impacting deliveries. This exercise was delivered in a real warehouse setting with real Morrisons employees heckling and playing the part of disgruntled colleagues. It lasted eight minutes. It tested resilience, an essential element of the High Potential framework, in an unexpected, authentic and realistic way. Candidates relied on their natural behaviour, in 'flow,' to manage the unscripted situation. They also needed to demonstrate their agility, another key element of the High Potential framework, by responding rapidly to new information and circumstances, as well as coping with ambiguity and incomplete information. Regardless of how they performed, candidates emerged energised as a result of having been in a state of 'Flow' and from the Fiero that comes from overcoming such an unexpected challenge. Afterwards, the decompression session allowed them to reflect on how they performed. Assessors were therefore able to evaluate self-awareness and motivational drive, the other essential elements of the Amberjack High Potential framework.

Stakeholders were involved in co-development of all processes, tools and exercises. The Practitioners believe that all stakeholders bought into the approach because it was inclusive. Regular feedback, detailed planning and milestones provided clarity at all times.

Outcome

Delivery Process

The company's recruitment became more about self-selection from beginning to end. The mobile and immersive process was automated, incorporating strong elements of interactivity, problem solving, tests of skill and challenges specific to Morrisons. Candidates were assessed against ways of working, behaviours and roles using Amberjack's HiPo framework and pioneering approach to interviewing; future-focused scenario-based questions. This delivered more emphasis on role-fit and future potential, rather than past-experience, and its effectiveness was evident by the improvement in attrition.

In total, 3,600 hours were spent on planning, system set up and implementation of this solution. It was scalable which meant that it was up and running within a matter of weeks.

Learning derived specifically applied to co-designing the solution with Morrisons stakeholders. The Practitioners reported that the feedback was overwhelming from the recruitment team, senior business leaders, future leaders on the programmes, and others.



They recognised that a process was needed to capture information so that it could be used effectively. This issue was identified quickly and addressed, so it did not cause any delays and resulted in more efficient analysis.

In total Morrisons made 112 hires from over 10,800 applications across 12 different programmes. The new recruitment process was designed to be consumer-centric and to meet the aspirational needs of young future leaders. The results achieved were expressed in qualitative and quantitative ways.

Candidate Feedback

“Overall, it’s been an excellent process. There have been a wide variety of tasks and the process has been easy to follow. My favourite activity was the unexpected activity at the Assessment Centre [Defamiliarisation Exercise]. It was modern and innovative, not something I’ve ever done before. The unexpected exercise was challenging and made you think on your feet but also very interesting to be put in a possible real-life situation.” - *Julien Vetterhoeffer, Logistics Graduate Scheme*

“I’ve found the recruitment process very well organised. Everyone I’ve spoken to has been approachable and friendly, helping me as much as they can. The most enjoyable part for me was the unexpected exercise during the Assessment Centre, it brought to life real situations that could happen in a day to day role at Morrisons.” - *Ben Barker, Graduate Scheme*

Return on Investment

In total 1,800 candidates attended the 60 Assessment Centres, with conversion rates increasing to 43% from 30%. Holding Assessment Centres at function specific locations also seemed to improve authenticity. The level of confidence in recruitment as expressed by stakeholders means the transformation made by the Practitioners and inclusive process built by them was the sole driver in contributing to the outstanding success achieved.

The new process reportedly delivered a 10% reduction in like-for-like costs year-on-year, and graduate roles were filled eight months earlier. Attrition was lowered to under 5% against 17% from the previous cohort, compared to the industry average of 10.4% and a sector average of 18% (ISE Development Survey 2017). Candidates also claimed to find the new process fast; on average 17% quicker than industry benchmarks.

Stakeholder Feedback

“At Morrisons we like to be innovative, and our new Future Leaders Assessment process is truly innovative from beginning to end. If I had to name my favourite element of the process it must be the unexpected activity at the Assessment Centre, just the reaction of the candidates and involving some of our own people, our team managers and our colleagues from the shop floor, role playing along with the candidates has been fantastic. We can really trust the assessments we make, and candidates really know what they’re signing up for!” - *Adele Holtom, People Specialist – Training Wakefield Logistics Scheme Lead.*

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