DEMYSTIFYING
case interviews

Quartz+Strategy Consultants

Quartz Strategy Consultants

Demystifying Case Interviews

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Demystifying Case Interviews
© 2007 Quartz Strategy Consultants & Ventus Publishing ApS
ISBN 978-7681-227-8

Any proceeds to the authors in relation to this publication are donated to charity

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Contents

Preface

1. Why do consulting firms use case interviews?
1.1 What do recruiters look for?
1.2 What types of case interviews will I face?
1.3 And besides … case interviews are not the whole story

2. How do I prepare for and approach case interviews?
2.1 Prepare for interview
2.1.1 Review methods and frameworks
2.1.2 Renew your tables and practice mental arithmetic
2.1.3 Practice cases with fellow students
2.2. How to crack cases

3. Getting down to cases
3.1 A real-life case example
3.2 Examples of cases, solutions and approaches
3.2.1 Business case
3.2.2 Estimation case
3.2.4 Interpersonal case
3.2.5 Brainteasers

Appendix A: Frameworks

Appendix B: Sources of additional information

About Quartz Strategy Consultants

Please click the advert

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Preface

Many candidates are nervous about case interviews. The specific case cannot be prepared for in advance – you don't know what the case will be – so many candidates feel they are more challenging than traditional job interviews.

Yet case interviews are increasingly used to recruit master candidates. Consultancies led the way in using them, but more and more companies are adding case interviews to the recruiting process.

Why? Because more and more candidates are doing project-related work, and because the case interview is an effective tool for judging a candidate's ability to approach and solve real-life issues.

This book aims to demystify case interviews and give you guidelines and advice about how to prepare for them.

The authors have extensive experience in using case interviews for recruiting – and have a rich understanding of how candidates perceive case interviews. So we feel fully equipped to sort out the myths and realities of case interviews as seen from a candidate perspective.

We hope to help you become comfortable with case interviews, so that they can help show your true potential.

We hope that you will find this book accessible and helpful in preparing for case interviews.

Download free books at BookBooN.com

1. Why do consulting firms use case interviews?

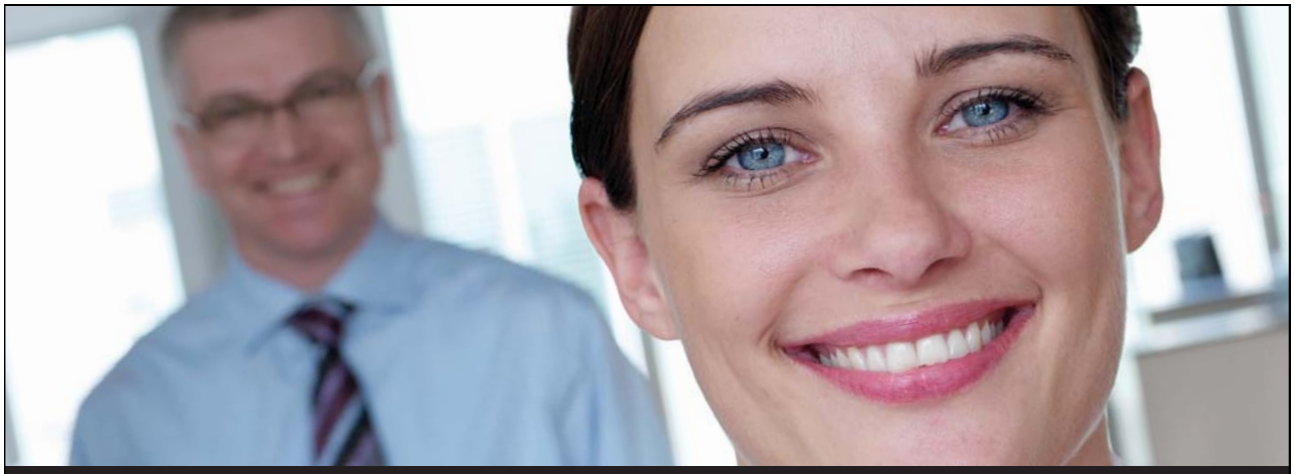
Consultants solve problems. Case questions are the best way to simulate the kind of problems we work with. They are a fast, concrete way to test the skills of a candidate.
The case interview tells us:

- Whether you are comfortable with problem solving – our core business. We put high demands on our candidates, so "real-life" case cracking is a good way for us to simulate a working situation.

- Whether you have the required skills. Skills are difficult to measure in an "ordinary" dialogue with new graduates. Case cracking requires a complex set of skills that are not a "given", even for candidates with high grades and outstanding CVs.

The case interview is also a chance for you to get a better feel for what we do and to test your gut feeling about the job. If you don't like case interviews, you may not like consulting, either.

Please click the advert



We have ambitions. Also for you.

SimCorp is a global leader in financial software. At SimCorp, you will be part of a large network of competent and skilled colleagues who all aspire to reach common goals with dedication and team spirit. We invest in our employees to ensure that you can meet your ambitions on a personal as well as on a professional level. SimCorp employs the best qualified people within economics, finance and IT, and the majority of our colleagues have a university or business degree within these fields.

Ambitious? Look for opportunities at www.simcorp.com/careers

SimCorp www.simcorp.com

Download free books at BookBooN.com

1.1 What do recruiters look for?

The case interview tests certain skills. These skills are common to almost all consultancies, though they may be described and weighted slightly differently. During case interviews, recruiters are trying to answer three questions:

- Can this candidate solve problems for our clients?

  What matters in consulting are your problem-solving skills: your ability to combine skills such as logical reasoning, creativity, quantitative skills, business acumen and commercial judgement, pragmatism and the ability to structure problem solving. Show the recruiter that you can insightfully think through the problem, reach a reasoned conclusion supported by evidence and clearly synthesize the discussion.

- Can this candidate work with our clients?

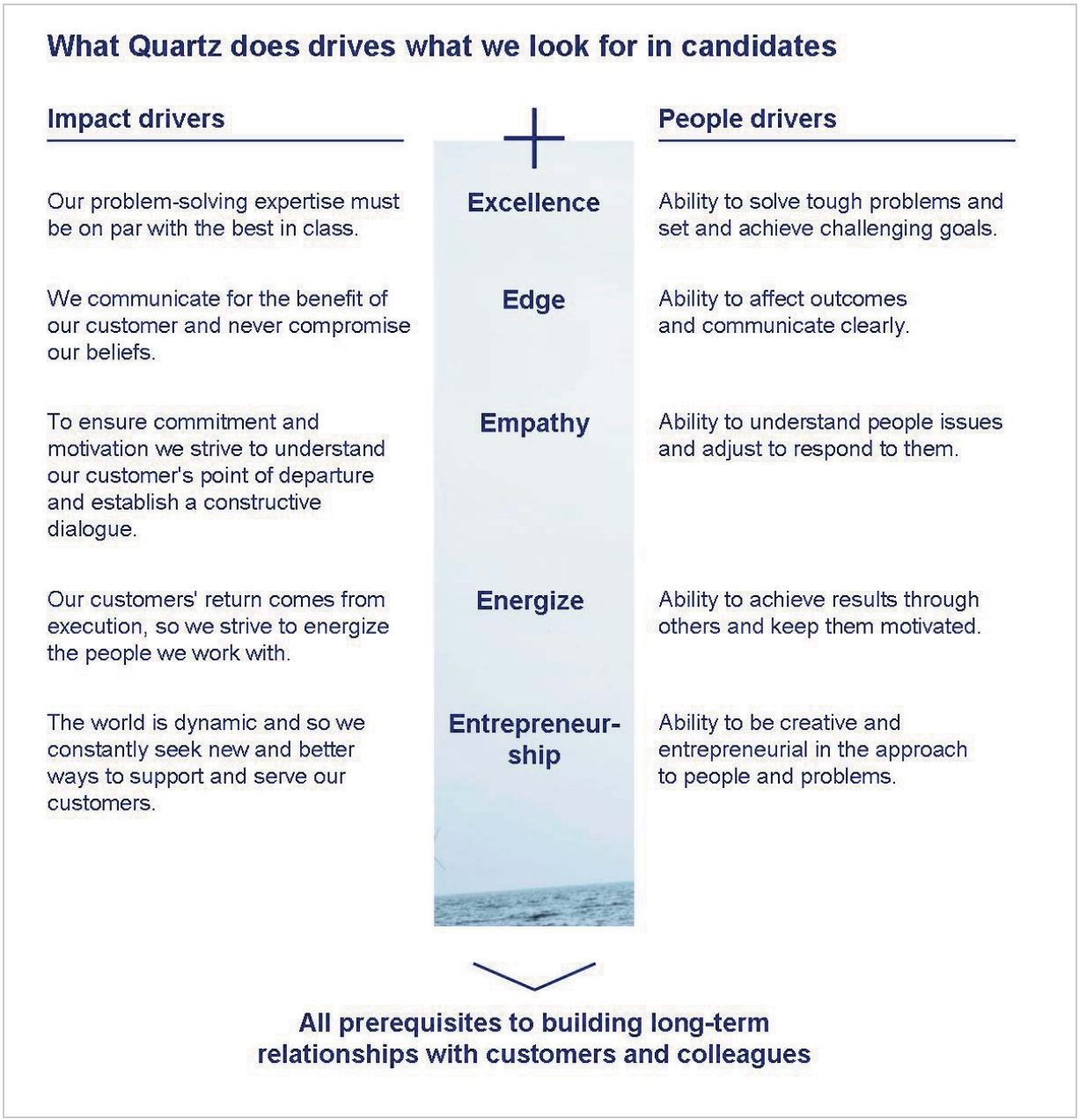
  Problem-solving skills alone do not make a consultant. The consulting industry also greatly values communication and presentation skills. Be ready to present arguments that support your points, but be ready to discard them, too. Show that you are tactful and friendly, and that you can present your thoughts in clear, concise language. Remember to connect with the recruiter and establish a positive rapport. He is the client in this instance. Don't be afraid to show that you are human: smile, be pleasant and maintain eye contact. A welcoming and attentive attitude goes a long way.

- Will this candidate burn for my clients' problems?

  You may not believe it, but case interviews can and should be fun. If you seem ill at ease, or seem to be struggling up hill, the interviewer will probably infer you won't enjoy serving the firm's clients. Show interest in the case and empathy for the client. And do so with enthusiasm and energy.

The skills we use to create results for our clients are directly related to those we look for in a candidate.

Download free books at BookBooN.com



The less experience a candidate has the more he is tested on the Excellence and Edge dimensions, whereas the last three Es (Empathy, Energize and Entrepreneurship) are tested less explicitly through the interview and across interviewers. These people drivers are what we seek in future employees and the interview aims at revealing to what extent a candidate meets these requirements. And if he does not meet them, does he have the potential and are we – as the employer – able to release the potential through formal and on-the-job training and not least through the demands and motivation that our culture imposes on a new employee.

The challenge of the interviewer is therefore on the basis of conversation, discussion and, of course, case questions to put the candidate in the future tense.

Download free books at BookBooN.com

1.2 What types of case interviews will I face?

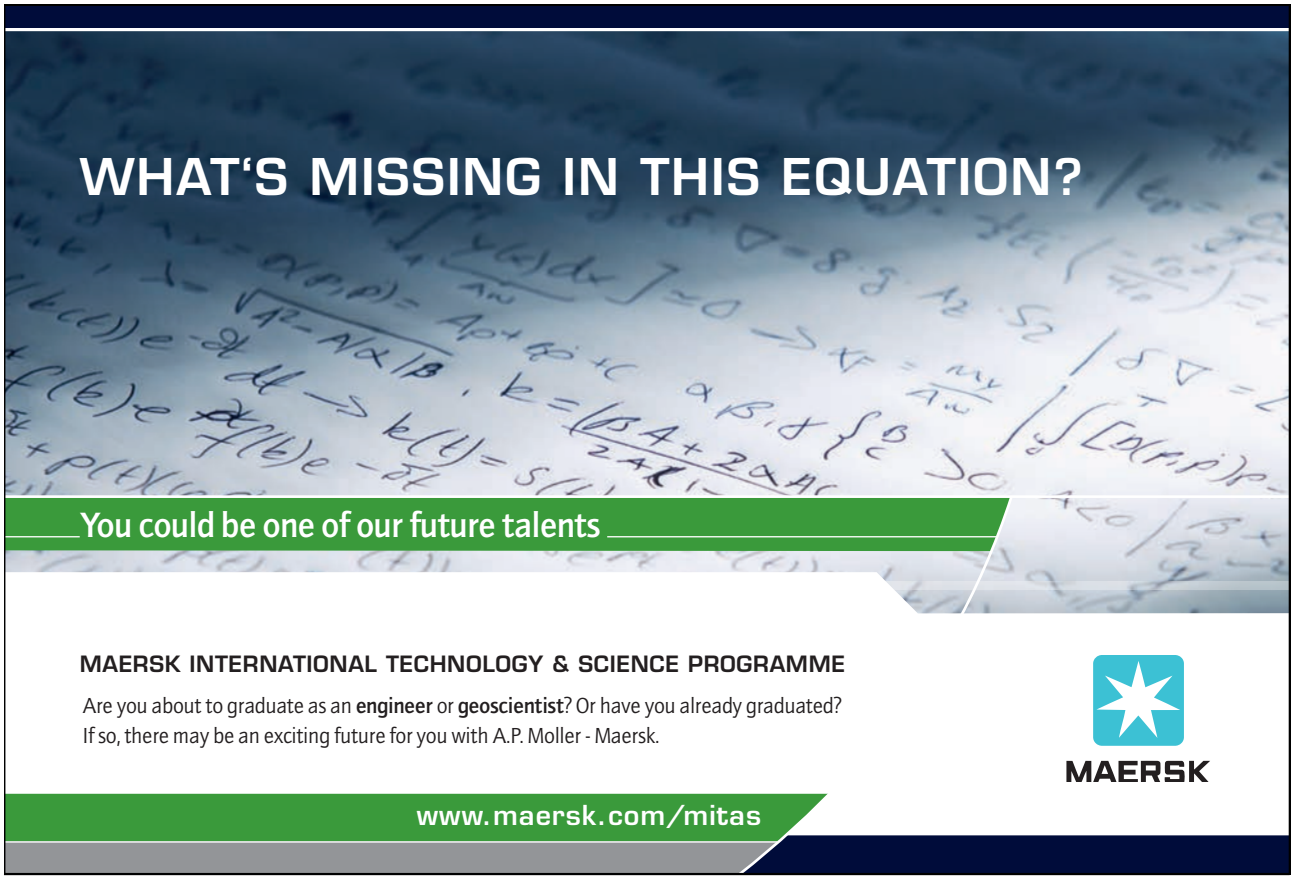
Cases fall into three types: business, estimation, and interpersonal.

- Business case: Here, the interviewer describes the business situation of an industry or a firm and asks for your analysis. The case may be based on general strategic issues, or it may focus on specific questions, such as how to make distribution more effective, or what to focus on in new product development.

- Estimation case: In an estimation case, you must estimate a quantity that you could not possibly know in advance, or show you can apply a known framework to solving such an issue. For example, you might be asked to estimate the number of meals being served in London at any given time, or the number of roads leading to Nairobi.

- Interpersonal case: In an interpersonal case, your actual or expected behaviour in a specific situation is discussed. The situation could either be an example you have described earlier in the interview (for example, an example of a difficult team setting) or a situation described by the interviewer.

Please click the advert



Download free books at BookBooN.com

"There are not only great differences in the types of cases I encountered in my job search, but also in the way they were presented. In most cases, it happened quietly and calmly in dialogue. But in one case, I was hard pressed by the interviewer and was tested on structure and reactions in a high-pressure situation."

Henrik, Consultant

Business and estimation cases are the most common in consulting interviews. Usually, hybrids are used: a business case often includes an estimation case, and an estimation case may become a fully-fledged business case. A casual question about your previous employment can turn into a case. Or, during a process case, you may be asked to complete a small estimation case.

Each case type tests your ability to present and communicate, along with other qualifications.

- Business cases are usually designed to test your level of business understanding and your ability to handle numerical and multiple pieces of information. They also test how well you identify, structure and prioritise important issues based on logic and, possibly, a relevant framework.

- Estimation cases mainly test how well you logically work through a mathematical problem, make reasonable and well-founded assumptions and perform basic calculations comfortably and accurately. Remember that many consultants are hired every year who have had few quantitatively-oriented courses: we are simply looking for reasonable familiarity with basic mathematical and estimation problems.

- Interpersonal cases are often used to gain an impression of how you will behave in a work setting – either on the team or in a client situation. The case is sometimes used for getting additional input on how well you would fit into the company culture. The case is typically constructed to allow a discussion about how you work with internal and external parties (colleagues and customers) based on a description of a specific situation and a question about how you would react.

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Cases are based on real customer issues and give you insight into what we do

	Areas of expertise	Case question examples
Strategy	• Growth strategy including M&A • Corporate/portfolio strategy • Business unit strategy • Product/channel strategy • Strategic due diligence	• What should company X consider before expanding into a new market? • What needs to be considered when evaluating your product portfolio in order to optimize it?
Organization	• Organizational design • Roles and responsibilities including KPIs and modus • Restructuring • Post-merger integration	• How to structure a group of experts working mainly on projects? • How to determine the best balance between central and decentral support functions after a merger of two companies?
Processes	• Design of value chain and core processes • Go-to-market effectiveness and efficiency • Optimisation and restructuring including AVA and Lean	• What are the core processes in an ordinary finance department? • What could be areas for improved efficiency in a call centre?

The cases you will meet in an interview are usually related to the work and responsibility you are expected to handle at entry level. However, there are also the 'odd one out' cases such as brainteasers. They are usually short questions that test your logical sense or your ability to think "out of the box."

But remember! Cases can go anywhere. Because there usually is no one right answer, cases can take you down unexpected or unknown roads. The important thing is not the result you reach, but the path you choose to go there and the way you interact with the interviewer in the process.

Download free books at BookBooN.com

1.3 And besides… case interviews are not the whole story

The decision of whether you are a suitable employee for the company depends on the overall opinion the interviewers form of your skills and your personality. A good case presentation is part – but only part – of this picture.

In the recruiting process, you will probably meet several interviewers over several days. Moreover, you may be asked to take several tests aimed at revealing your skills, your personality and your fit with the firm culture. And don't be intimidated by interviews with senior partners of the firm. These are not meant to put pressure on you, but give you an idea of how important these interviews are to the firm.

Below is an overview of the recruiting process at Quartz.

Please click the advert

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Recruitment process at Quartz

	Screening applications	First interview	Second interview	Third interview
Activities	• Circulating applications	• Test: numerical reasoning (no calculator) • Interview 1, including case • Interview 2, including case	• Test: personal profile • Interview 1, including case • Interview 2, including case • Feedback on personal profile	• 1 interview, often with case
Respon-sibility	• HR Manager • 2-3 Senior Consultants/ Managers	• Senior Consultants • Managers	• (Senior) Managers • Principals or Directors • HR Manager	• Director
Criteria	• Line of study, grades (average and thesis) • Relevant work experience • Achievements in extracurricular activites (e.g. organizations, sports or stays abroad) • The content of the motivation and the application	*Excellence* • Structure, analysis, conclusion • Business understanding • Numerical reasoning *Edge* • Appearance and personality • Communication and impact	• All items from first round of interview • Empathy • Energy • Entrepreneur-ship	• Personality and cultural fit (5Es) • Case solving

Remember that recruiters are looking for extraordinary minds and personalities. If you are a top-performing astrophysicist, you may well make an excellent consultant if you have the talent and personality to learn and apply your knowledge quickly.

Download free books at BookBooN.com

2. How do I prepare for and approach case interviews?

The recruiting process with a consulting firm often contains several interviews and types of interaction with the firm. Even before the recruiting process, you may have acquainted yourself with the firm or some of its employees through student marketing events, the press or other sources.

The earlier you know you want to work in consulting, the better your chance to choose courses and write papers that are pertinent to the industry.

Preparation is critical in any job interview – case-based or not. Rehearsing your CV, education and extracurricular activities, and researching the company, its offerings and recruiting process, are just as important as preparing for and rehearsing case cracking.

"The first time I went to case interviews, I didn't know what they were about. I thought the aim was to show I knew my frameworks. After the first interview, I got deeper into what it was all about and practiced thinking in a structured way about the problem and practiced my tables so that I was faster at calculating mentally. And it was a great help to practice with fellow students, using cases we found on the Internet."

Bo, Consultant

Please click the advert

Download free books at BookBooN.com

2.1 Prepare for the interview

Below, we discuss several steps you can take to prepare for the case interview. Depending on how familiar you are with the content below, you may want to begin preparing far in advance of the interview.

2.1.1 Review methods and frameworks

A number of methods and frameworks are useful for structuring your thinking. Many of these models and concepts are right out of your marketing and economics classes. Frameworks have the benefit of providing a logical approach to your story when analysing a problem.

Some things to keep in mind:

- Never assume there is a framework that will solve every type of case. Be pragmatic.
  No framework is 100% applicable to a real-life situation. The interviewer wants to see you adapt your knowledge to the real world.

- Never say, "I'll be applying Porter's five forces" or "I'll do a SWOT on company A." That indicates no creative or analytical thought. If the interviewer feels your approach leans too heavily on a textbook framework, he will often introduce facts or questions to force you to follow your own methodology.

- The recruiter knows your background well enough to know what frameworks you are expected to know. He will evaluate your approach accordingly. Economics students, for example, will not necessarily know much about organization theory; engineers may know little of marketing. But don't be surprised if you are presented with a case relating to areas or frameworks that you are not familiar with.

In appendix 1, we suggest knowledge areas and frameworks that may be useful in a case interview.

2.1.2 Review your tables and practice mental arithmetic

Can you do "mental arithmetic" or do calculations on a whiteboard without getting lost in the numbers? Do you have a sense of proportion? Are the results reasonable compared to what you would expect?

It may be a long time since you were asked to do arithmetic without a calculator. However, in a case interview you probably won't be allowed a calculator – only pen, paper and, perhaps, a whiteboard. So review your "tables." Revisit basic mathematical disciplines such as fractions, calculating percentages, currency translation and gleaning information from graphically displayed data.

Download free books at BookBooN.com

We don't expect you to be a mathematician or a financial expert (unless you are!), but we expect you to be at ease with numbers and have a sense of the proportions you are working with. At client meetings, you should be able to mentally calculate "5% market share of 720,000" or "effect of a 3% change in the exchange rate on product price" without using a calculator.

2.1.3 Practice cases with fellow students

Many consulting firms offer tips, tricks and practice cases. Review their websites to gain an idea of what sort of questions you can expect and how you are expected to approach the case. Some firms even offer interactive cases you can try. But remember: online cases have little to do with real case cracking: you are under no time pressure, you cannot demonstrate your communication and presentation skills, and the feedback is generic.

In fact, although it may sound awkward, role-play is the best way to practice case interviews. Team up with a fellow student – or a consultant, if you know one – and take turns playing the roles of the interviewer and recruit.

Please click the advert

wanted: ambitious people

At NNE Pharmaplan we need ambitious people to help us achieve the challenging goals which have been laid down for the company.

Kim Visby is an example of one of our many ambitious co-workers. Besides being a manager in the Manufacturing IT department, Kim performs triathlon at a professional level.

'NNE Pharmaplan offers me freedom with responsibility as well as the opportunity to plan my own time. This enables me to perform triathlon at a competitive level, something I would not have the possibility of doing otherwise.'

'By balancing my work and personal life, I obtain the energy to perform my best, both at work and in triathlon.'

If you are ambitious and want to join our world of opportunities, go to **nnepharmaplan.com**

NNE Pharmaplan is the world's leading engineering and consultancy company focused exclusively on the pharma and biotech industries. NNE Pharmaplan is a company in the Novo Group.

nne pharmaplan®

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Here's how it works:

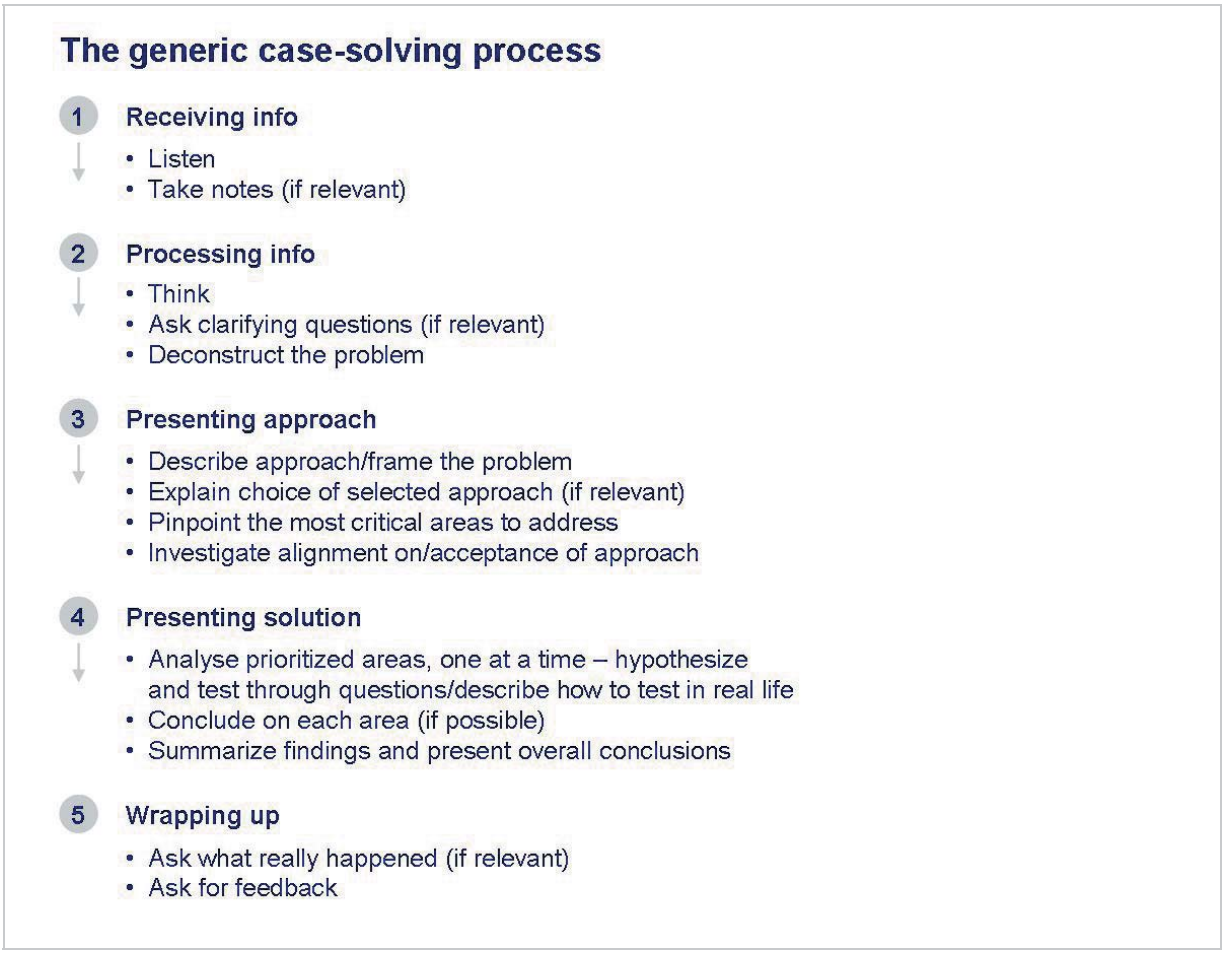
- The "interviewer" should thoroughly read the case question before starting the interview. That helps him or her make up facts and ask additional questions along the way.
- When adding facts or additional questions, the “interviewer" should make sure the new material is consistent with what has been revealed so far.
- At the end, the "interviewer" provides the "recruit" with candid feedback about what went well and what could be improved about the case solution, body language, whether the recruit listened well, repeated himself, etc.
- If you are several persons practicing together, the observers should also be prepared to provide feedback about what worked and what didn't.
- Switch sides and try again!

You can find practice cases on the Internet (see Appendix B). If you want to make up your own, you'll find inspiration in the business press. Or use a situation from a previous job that intrigues you and could be fun.

2.2. How to crack cases

Case content varies, but the case cracking process is standard for most cases. The standard approach and supporting hints are shown below:

Download free books at BookBooN.com



Keep the hints in mind and use them when appropriate – but don't overdo them:

- Listen: Avoid the temptation to answer half way through the question. Patience and the ability to collect input is an important consulting skill. Further, you tend to get information that will help you come up with a good answer.

- Think: It is OK to take a minute to structure your thoughts. Tell the interviewer you want to take a minute if you feel he may interpret your pause as uncertainty or unwillingness to answer.

- Ask relevant questions: If a few clarifying questions can help you solve the case, ask them. But don't play "20 questions" or ask questions to stall for time.

- Deconstruct the question: Break the problem into parts that can be supported by evidence (even though you may not have this evidence). Even though you may choose not go into detail with every component, you will gain a better sense of what you are leaving out of the analysis.

Download free books at BookBooN.com

- Frame the problem: Establish the big picture before you jump to details. Explain how you will approach the problem at a high level.

- State and test your hypotheses: If the problem is complex, identify the most critical issues and explain your priorities. Then address each element, identify possible problems and likely answers, and show how you would test your hypothesis. You can do this either by asking questions of the interviewer or, if this doesn't elicit information, describe what you would do to test it in an actual project.

- Summarize and conclude: Ending on a good note is always important. You will improve your performance if you can summarize the major findings and related conclusions at the end of the case. Doing so demonstrates overview, and you have a chance to show you are able to use the information you have gotten during the case to fine tune your conclusion

- Wrap up: Ask for feedback and be prepared to reflect on your own performance.

Cases differ, so the process will be different each time. Don't be too wedded to your case-solving approach – consulting is about being pragmatic and being able to adjust your thinking to new situations.

"It's a little uncomfortable when you get stuck, but just remember to ask – in the real world, you can always "call a friend." The interviewer is, in this case, just a colleague who you can spar with."

Michelle, Consultant

Please click the advert

FOSS

Sharp Minds - Bright Ideas!

Employees at FOSS Analytical A/S are living proof of the company value - First - using new inventions to make dedicated solutions for our customers. With sharp minds and cross functional teamwork, we constantly strive to develop new unique products - Would you like to join our team?

FOSS works diligently with innovation and development as basis for its growth. It is reflected in the fact that more than 200 of the 1200 employees in FOSS work with Research & Development in Scandinavia and USA. Engineers at FOSS work in production, development and marketing, within a wide range of different fields, i.e. Chemistry, Electronics, Mechanics, Software, Optics, Microbiology, Chemometrics.

We offer
A challenging job in an international and innovative company that is leading in its field. You will get the opportunity to work with the most advanced technology together with highly skilled colleagues.

Read more about FOSS at www.foss.dk - or go directly to our student site www.foss.dk/sharpminds where you can learn more about your possibilities of working together with us on projects, your thesis etc.

The Family owned FOSS group is the world leader as supplier of dedicated, high-tech analytical solutions which measure and control the quality and production of agricultural, food, pharmaceutical and chemical products. Main activities are initiated from Denmark, Sweden and USA with headquarters domiciled in Hillerød, DK. The products are marketed globally by 23 sales companies and an extensive net of distributors. In line with the corevalue to be 'First', the company intends to expand its market position.

Dedicated Analytical Solutions
FOSS
Slangerupgade 69
3400 Hillerød
Tel. +45 70103370
www.foss.dk

Download free books at BookBooN.com

What can we expect?

- Candidate shows strong performance on the decided criteria
- Candidate drives problem solving; does not need guidance all the way through
- Candidate constantly uses interviewer as sparring partner in connection with problem-solving method, pre-requisites, etc.
- Candidate "owns" problem solving by using blackboard or sketching intermediate results/illustrations on paper
- Candidate demonstrates general knowledge of and interest in business and society ("Who is A. P. Møller?")
- Candidate listens and asks questions if he/she has not understood the assignment

What can we not expect?

- Candidate can start without a brief pause to think about task
- Candidate is familiar with all financial and business frameworks (dependent on study)
- Candidate can finish case without hints and advice along the way
- Candidate not to be a little nervous
- Candidate already knows about the business or company in question

Download free books at BookBooN.com

3. Getting down to cases

This chapter takes you through a 'real-life' case. Afterwards, we offer our observations about the candidate's performance. Finally, we give you some examples of case questions for practice purposes.

3.1 A real-life case interview

The following example describes what a case interview could be like. It illustrates both good performance and areas for improvement. After the case, we summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the solution.

Case example: Entering a new market

You are working on a project for a Scandinavian company selling paper-based calendars. You are asked for your perspective on three questions:

- The company faces some significant challenges. What do you think are the major strategic challenges?
- The company is considering entering the Danish market. What must be considered before deciding whether or not to enter the Danish market?
- How big is the Danish calendar market?

Quartz: I have a case I would like you to solve for me. You are working on a project for a small Scandinavian company selling annual paper-based calendars. The company faces some significant challenges. Your team, therefore, is developing a proposal for a six-week strategy project. What major strategic challenges do you believe this company is facing?

Candidate: Challenges could be related either to demand or supply. Do we know anything about the character of the challenges?

Quartz: We know that they are in the middle of outsourcing their production to low-cost countries, so the challenges we have been asked to help with are related to the demand side.

Candidate: On the demand side, I believe one of the most likely challenges is limited growth, or maybe even declining demand, as consumers switch to mobile calendars or the calendar on their computer. There could also be some changes in the type of calendar people prefer – for example, many students use free calendars, today.

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Quartz: Why would free calendars be a threat?

Candidate: I was thinking that free calendars are a threat if they replace ordinary calendars. I assumed that the company has significant sales to this segment today with higher priced products – but I guess I would have to test this before concluding that it is a threat and not an opportunity.

Quartz: I follow you on that one. Let us move on to a new issue. The company is considering entering the Danish market. What do they need to consider before entering?

Candidate: Do we know why they are considering the Danish market in particular?

Quartz: They are looking at all Nordic markets outside their home market.

Candidate: Before entering the Danish market, they need to know the market potential – that is, the size of the market and the growth rate. It is also important to understand whether it is a profitable market.

Quartz: When we have analysed the Danish market and found out that it seems to be a reasonably good market compared to our home market, what should be our next step?

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Candidate: To build a sales organization in Denmark

Quartz: Okay, that could be relevant. But I wonder if we are missing a major point before reaching the decision to set up a sales organization?

Candidate: Hmmm, I'm not sure...?

Quartz: I believe we are missing the evaluation of the competitive situation and the company's ability to compete in this market…

Candidate: Yes, we need to compare our prices with the price on the Danish market and make sure we are competitive.

Quartz: Anything else we should consider?

Candidate: I can't really think of anything...

Quartz: Normally we would investigate a few elements more before we can draw conclusions about the company's ability to compete in the Danish market. The relevant parameters in this case would be the demand for the products we can offer (for example compatible formats), access to sales channels and our ability to service the customers (for example retail) compared to competitors (selection, quantities, delivery time, etc.).

[A follow-up discussion on this part of the case then takes place before moving on to a new part of the case.]

Quartz: You mentioned that the market potential is important. What is your best estimate of the Danish market for paper-based calendars?

Candidate: In order to determine the market size I would split the market into three groups:

1. Student calendars
2. Calendars for business people
3. Calendars for households/private use

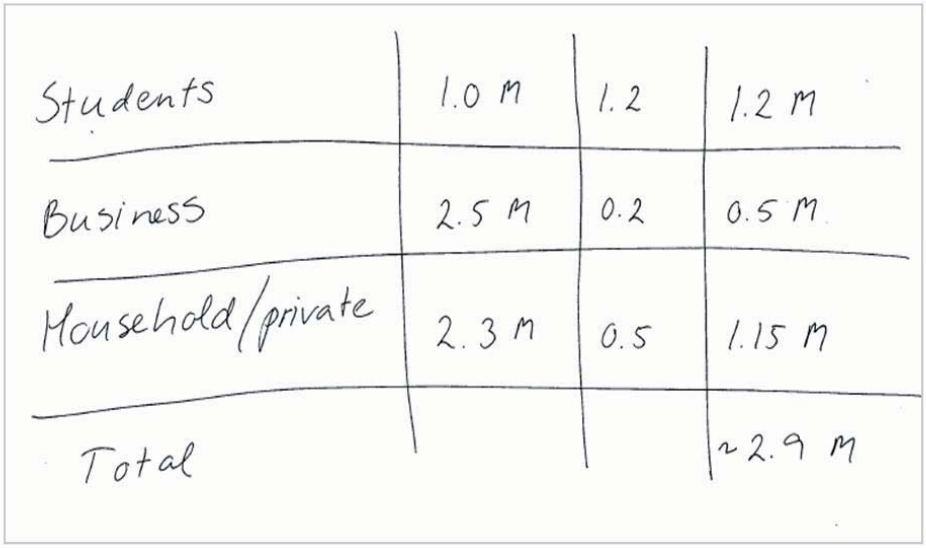
I would define the student group as people from 10 to 25-26 years of age. Hence, the group is approximately 20% of the population, assuming a fairly equal distribution of the population in different age groups from 0-80 years. That group amounts to about 1 million people. I'm disregarding that some students do not study past secondary school, but I will include this in the demand per person in this segment. Almost all students have at least one calendar, and many have two due to the free calendars or half-year calendars. So I would assume an annual demand of 1.2 calendars per person in this group. That's 1.2 million calendars for the student group.

Download free books at BookBooN.com

The business group includes people in the work force. If we assume these are people between from 25 to 65 years of age that would be 50% of the population – 2.5 million people. Of this group, fewer people have work-related calendars, I believe. 20% coverage would give a demand of 0.5 million calendars per year in this segment. I don't think it is higher than this given the increased use of electronic calendars.

Finally, there are calendars for private use. As far as I remember, there are something like 2.3 million households in Denmark, and I would imagine that at least one person in every second household has a calendar for private use. This gives a demand of about 1.15 million calendars for private use.

Blackboard notes



This gives us 1.2 million calendars in the student segment, half a million in the business segment and 1.15 million in the household/private use segment. In total, it's a market of approximately 2.9 million calendars in Denmark.

Quartz: Thank you. I think we will stop the case here.

At this point, your interviewer will usually provide feedback on your performance. If not, it is a good idea to ask for it – it gives you a better feel of your performance compared to the other candidates. And it gives you some good hints about what to be aware of in future interviews.

The example above illustrates a generally good answer, with both positive observations and areas for improvement.

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Positive observations	Areas to improve
• Shows good business understanding in most parts of the case • Uses questions well – especially in the first part of the case • Able to listen • Willing to enter dialogue • Clear statement of assumptions – especially in the market-sizing part of the case • Appropriate use of blackboard • Able to summarize and conclude – especially good in the market-sizing part of the case	• Could benefit from pausing to consider and structure thoughts before answering – especially in the first part of the case • Suggested market analysis was too narrow. The company's ability to compete in the Danish market needed to be assessed in much more detail • Discussed only volume in market-sizing example. Could have extended to discuss size in terms of both volume and value since different average prices could be expected in the segments

The next section describes additional case examples.

Please click the advert

wanted: ambitious people

At NNE Pharmaplan we need ambitious people to help us achieve the challenging goals which have been laid down for the company.

Kim Visby is an example of one of our many ambitious co-workers. Besides being a manager in the Manufacturing IT department, Kim performs triathlon at a professional level.

'NNE Pharmaplan offers me freedom with responsibility as well as the opportunity to plan my own time. This enables me to perform triathlon at a competitive level, something I would not have the possibility of doing otherwise.'

'By balancing my work and personal life, I obtain the energy to perform my best, both at work and in triathlon.'

If you are ambitious and want to join our world of opportunities, go to **nnepharmaplan.com**

NNE Pharmaplan is the world's leading engineering and consultancy company focused exclusively on the pharma and biotech industries. NNE Pharmaplan is a company in the Novo Group.

nne pharmaplan®

Download free books at BookBooN.com

3.2 Examples of cases, solutions and approaches

Within business cases, you may encounter anything from short five-minute cases to hour-long cases. As mentioned before, cases typically fall into four groups:

1. Business cases
2. Estimation cases
3. Interpersonal cases
4. Brain teasers

We provide some examples below, with hints for possible solutions. We also include some case questions with no hints that you can practice with.

3.2.1 Business case

Strategy sample question

Company X is thinking of entering the office stationery market. What do they need to know to decide whether to go ahead or search for other expansion opportunities?

Hints for a possible solution:

- Analyse market attractiveness and competitive strengths of Company X – to compare with other business opportunities
  - Market attractiveness could include size, growth, profitability, etc.
  - Competitive strengths assessment could include customer/sales channel access, value proposition, business model, etc.
- Estimate business case and NPV or maybe just the payback period for potential investments (for example, expected market share and, hence, volume over time, price and costs (based on required resources), effects on existing product portfolio).

Organization sample question

How do you decide how to organize a group of experts who are spending part of their time on temporary project teams for several divisions and part of their time on basic research?

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Hints for a possible solution:

- Ask questions to get a high-level understanding of the current structure.
- List options available (functional, divisions, matrix, etc.). Be practical: adjust the list to the information you receive; don't provide the theoretical list.
- Discuss/argue for selection of the key decision criteria (for example, time spent on different types of projects, importance of the activities to the company at large, importance of a high level of competency development, etc.).
- Discuss pros and cons for each structure based on the selected key decision criteria.
- Identify the preferred structure and discuss how to overcome/minimise the drawbacks.

Additional business case examples

Question: Company X gains market share, but profits are falling. What could be the problem?

Question: Company X considers outsourcing production to save labour costs. Your team has been asked to develop a recommendation. What are the key elements you need to analyse before making a recommendation?

Question: What is the break-even market share for a product when a) the market size is of 300,000 units, b) the company can sell the product for DKK 30, and c) the operational costs are DKK 1 million in fixed costs plus DKK 10 in variable cost per unit?

Question: Company X suffers from low on-time delivery performance and is starting to lose customers on this account. How do they solve the problem?

Question: How do you explain to a non-business minded person why interest rates are negatively correlated with bond prices?

3.2.2 Estimation case

Sample question

How big is the wine market in France?

Hints for a possible solution:

- Segment market – for example according to demographics.
- Argue for the average consumption per unit in each segment.
- Calculate market based on segment size and average consumption.

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Additional estimation case examples

Question: What is the market for children's sneakers in Europe?

Question: How many ties are sold each year in Denmark?

Question: How much office space do you need if your company employs 150 people – they all work permanently in the office and each need a desk?

Question: What is the demand for airline tickets between Aarhus and Copenhagen?

3.2.3 Interpersonal case

Sample question

You have had a meeting with a controller at the company you are working for, and you have agreed that he would send key data on Wednesday. It is now Thursday morning, and you have not received the data. What do you do?

Please click the advert

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Hints for a possible solution:

- Ask for more background information (the history with this client and the controller in particular).
- List options available – adjusted to the information you have received (for example, be patient and wait, call him, contact by mail, contact by mail with copy to project sponsor, etc.).
- Argue for your preferred option and its potential drawbacks.

Additional interpersonal case examples

Question: You are on a project with a tight deadline, and you are responsible for the presentation this coming Monday. You have a chance of getting an extra resource on the team for the next four days. Do you accept the offer? And – if so – how do you plan to use him/her?

Question: Tell me about a "bad" team experience. What went wrong and why? What would you have done differently (if anything) if facing a similar situation today?

3.2.4 Brainteasers

Sample question

Ten men are in the same room. Seven wear a tie, four have black shoes, six wear glasses. You are able to combine the outfits as you want. How many of the ten men have **at least** two of these three characteristics if you are to minimize the number?

Solution:

- Four. At least three men wear both tie and glasses, so these three will be chosen to wear black shoes. You will have one pair of black shoes left over, which you will give either to either a man wearing a tie or a man wearing glasses; as a result, this person will also have at least two of the characteristics.

Additional brainteasers

Question: What is the chance of picking out two identically coloured socks on the first attempt if you have three blue socks and three red socks in a box, and you are not allowed to look into the box?

Question: Why are some apples sweet and some sour?

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Appendix A – Frameworks

Expectations for familiarity with business frameworks

Frameworks are useful for structuring cases, but, as discussed earlier, should not be used too rigidly. Moreover, depending on your academic background, interviewers will have different expectations as to your knowledge of and familiarity with frameworks.

Business School graduates are expected to have a strong knowledge of frameworks and how they are used to structuring and solving different business problems. Don't expect to get by on just the frameworks specific to your degree. We value curiosity and so expect you to be familiar with more than just the frameworks from your academic area.

Candidates with non-business school backgrounds are not expected to have the same knowledge of business frameworks. However, when applying for a job in management consulting, it may be wise to show interest in the type of work we do. Therefore, we advise non-business school graduates to familiarize themselves with a few business frameworks (not the complete list below). Don't boil the ocean when preparing, but consider taking a trip to the library or using the Internet to gain a basic understanding of a few frameworks that are used to address business issues.

Please click the advert

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Examples of general "frameworks" or knowledge areas

- Company – how a company works
- Financial structure (profit or loss account, balance sheet, cash flow)
- Market – what defines/characterizes "a market"
- Organizational structure alternatives

Examples of specific frameworks taught at business schools

- 4-Ps/4-Cs frameworks (framework for addressing marketing parameters)
- 7-S framework (framework for describing organizational dimensions)
- Porter's five forces (framework for describing factors affecting industry competitiveness)
- Porter's generic strategies (description of archetypical strategies)
- ROCE tree (decomposition of a company's Return On Capital Employed)
- Product life cycle (description of typical phases from product launch and until termination)
- SWOT (assessment of a company's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)
- The Ansoff matrix (addressing priorities according to existing/new products and markets)
- The BCG matrix (addressing the product portfolio according to market share and market growth)
- The McKinsey GE matrix (addressing the product portfolio according to market attractiveness and competitiveness)
- Value chain (a framework for describing the main elements of a company's/industry's value creation)

Frameworks

QuickMBA
Online resource for business administration. Provides introduction to common frameworks within business strategy

www.quickmba.com

Franteractive
Another resource for widely used business strategy frameworks.

www.franteractive.net
Value based management
Contains a broad range of frameworks and theories within all aspects of management.

www.valuebasedmanagement.net

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Appendix B – Sources of further information

Case inspiration

The Vault
International career site with extensive information about the consulting industry. Lots of free information.

www.thevault.com

CaseQuestions.com
As the name indicates, a site dedicated to case solving. Find lots of information and hints. Also offers (not for free) an advanced interactive case training tool.

www.casequestions.com

Inside Consulting
Provides information, advice and news on the consulting industry. Also on case interviews.

www.insideconsulting.com

Please click the advert

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Consulting case
Practical tips from a former Bain manager. One free case sample and possible purchase of "Crack the Case", a case interview guide

www.consultingcase.com

Ace The Case
Samples and e-books consisting of case questions and worked solutions.

www.acethecase.com

WetFeet
Career adviser offering company profiles, company salary data, industry profiles and practice consulting cases. Link to several career tools, including e-books on interview cases, creation of resume, etc.

www.wetfeet.com

Job Interview
Interview adviser providing guides/downloads and links to several free interview cases within specific industries and job types.

www.job-interview.net

Careers in consulting
Overview of the industry, practice areas, salary levels, recommended books, etc. in management consulting.

www.careers-in-business.com/consulting

Books

"How to crack a case study interview", by Tony Restell

"Ace your Case" (Vol. I, II, III, IV), by WetFeet

"The Wharton MBA Case Interview Study Guide" (Vol. I, II), by Wharton MBA Consulting Club

"Ace the Case", by Acethecase.com

Download free books at BookBooN.com

About Quartz Strategy Consultants

Quartz Strategy Consultants

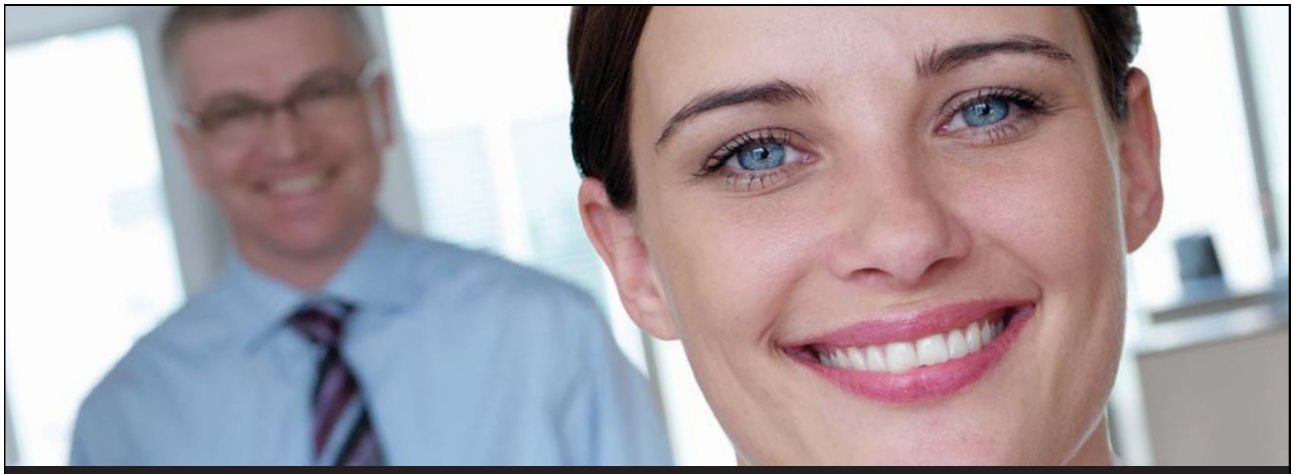
We want to be known as an attractive and dynamic alternative to the US-based strategy firms throughout the Nordic region

We create value for our customers through clarity, and our overall value proposition is "more for less"

Quartz is an independent company owned by the employees

Meet us at www.quartz.dk

Please click the advert



We have ambitions. Also for you.

SimCorp is a global leader in financial software. At SimCorp, you will be part of a large network of competent and skilled colleagues who all aspire to reach common goals with dedication and team spirit. We invest in our employees to ensure that you can meet your ambitions on a personal as well as on a professional level. SimCorp employs the best qualified people within economics, finance and IT, and the majority of our colleagues have a university or business degree within these fields.

Ambitious? Look for opportunities at www.simcorp.com/careers

SimCorp www.simcorp.com

Download free books at BookBooN.com

Job i staten – en karriere der gør en forskel

Vil du gøre en forskel?

Det gør mere end170.000 medarbejdere fordelt på mere end 2000 forskellige arbejdspladser i staten hver dag. Fælles for job i staten er, at arbejdet gør en forskel for udviklingen af vores samfund.

Både banearbejderen og lektoren. Skovarbejderen og organisationskonsulenten. Konservatoren på Nationalmuseet og den fuldmægtige i departementet. Alle gør de en forskel i netop deres job.

En verden i konstant forandring!
Vi lever i et samfund, der hele tiden forandrer sig. Derfor er staten som arbejdsplads i konstant udvikling. Som ansat i staten kommer du derfor også til at løse en lang række udfordrende og relevante opgaver. Du medvirker til at løse disse opgaver bedst muligt og til gavn for borgerne.

Der forventes integritet og nytænkning…
For at kunne skabe værdi for borgerne skal du som medarbejder både besidde en faglig og personlig integritet. Derudover skal du være serviceorienteret, nytænkende og ansvarsfuld. Kun gennem disse egenskaber kan vi sikre retssikkerhed og kvalitet i opgaveløsningen.

I staten kommer du til at arbejde sammen med mange forskellige mennesker, fordi vi tror på at gennem mangfoldighed, dialog og samarbejde, der løser vi opgaverne bedst.

Hvis du har lysten og evnerne til at gøre en forskel, så har vi mulighederne til dig.

På **www.job-i-staten.dk** opslås alle ledige stillinger, også studenterstillinger, så der er rig mulighed for at finde netop det job, der gør en forskel for dig.

Job i staten – en karriere der gør en forskel

Gør en forskel for din karriere!

Et job i staten gør ikke kun en forskel for samfundet, men også i forhold til dig og din karriere. Staten som arbejdsplads fokuserer nemlig på dig som medarbejder.

Vil du udvikle dine kompetencer?
Med et job i staten er der gode muligheder for løbende at udvikle dine kompetencer. Både gennem udfordrende arbejdsopgaver, sparring med kolleger og sidemandsoplæring, men også via et stort udbud af kurser og uddannelse.

For at sikre et strategisk og systematisk fokus på kompetenceudvikling vil du som medarbejder, sammen med din nærmeste leder, årligt have en snak om dine ønsker og forventninger til det følgende års udvikling. Du er på den måde med til at bestemme retningen for dit arbejdsliv i samspil med din nærmeste leder.

Dit talent og karriere som udgangspunkt!
I staten er holdningen at alle medarbejdere – i kraft af deres personlighed – har mulighed for at præstere noget særligt indenfor et bestemt felt. Derfor vil du også som medarbejder i staten opleve, at der er fokus på at udvikle dine talenter og din karriere.

Karriereudvikling består af fokus på, at du som medarbejder udvikler dig i overensstemmelse med egne ønsker og prioriteringer. Der er mange måder at fremme karriereudvikling på i staten. Et eksempel er muligheden for rokering mellem statens arbejdspladser en anden, at deltage i et af statens karriereprogrammer.

Fokus på individuelle behov og ønsker
Som arbejdsgiver anerkender vi i staten, at det ikke kun er arbejdslivet, der betyder noget for medarbejderne. Derfor eksisterer der attraktive orlovsregler, fleksibel arbejdstid, fokus på forskelle i livsfaser samt blik for at kompetente medarbejdere skal anerkendes og honoreres.

Med et job i staten har du altså mulighed for en udfordrende karriere som gør en forskel – både for dig selv og for samfundet som helhed.

På **www.personalestyrelsen.dk** kan du læse mere om at arbejde i staten. Du kan bl.a. få mere viden om den generelle personalepolitik og de karriereprogrammer, kurser og uddannelser, der udbydes i staten.