

## CASE STUDY: DYMOM ASIA CAPITAL

### WHAT IS TANGENT?

Tangent is a social initiative of The Majority Trust<sup>1</sup> that champions a new way of hiring in Singapore by encouraging employers to look beyond resumes and CVs; remove their unconscious biases in their hiring practices, and hire candidates based on their intrinsic qualities required for job success.

Tangent believes that employers end up throwing out much talent when they first shortlist job applicants based on CVs and resumes. Employers typically first shortlist job applicants based on their educational pedigrees and work experiences. Sadly some also filter out candidates based on race and gender.

However, CVs and resumes do not fully capture the personality and non-cognitive traits that employers prize – like perseverance, self-control, and social skills (see box below on Why personality and non-cognitive skills matter). Employers miss the chance to interview talented applicants when they shortlist using CVs and resumes, at the beginning of the recruitment process.

To help companies find the talent they really need, Tangent helps employers identify jobseekers who best fit the company, based on personal and

non-cognitive traits. Only at the interview stage should employers look at CVs.

In this way employers focus on whether a candidate has the intrinsic qualities required to succeed in a job, as opposed to whether she has the “right” educational pedigree or work experience.

Tangent does this by working with a psychometric assessment partner to roll out an online profiling platform – first to current company staff, then to job applicants. Existing staff are required to complete the assessment to establish a company or organisational profile. Tangent next takes the job applicants’ profiles, assesses how closely each one matches the company profile, and surfaces to the employer the exact matches for interviews.

As a social initiative, Tangent bears the costs of profiling. This allows employers to better appreciate the advantages of hiring based on personal traits and company fit, without having to worry about the costs to start with. In return, Tangent requests that employers make a donation to the initiative so that we can continue our mission with more companies.

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### Why personality and non-cognitive skills matter.

Personality traits and non-cognitive skills (also known as “soft” skills or social, emotional, and behavioural skills) are crucial for job performance. These are skills such as perseverance, conscientiousness, and self-control, as well as social skills and leadership ability. These skills have become more valuable over time, as shown by research by Nobel Laureate James Heckman, David Deming at Harvard, and others.<sup>2</sup>

However, employers find it difficult to identify talent with these skills. Recently a survey by Cengage (a US-based education and technology company) reported that soft skills were most in demand by employers (by at least 65 percent), while quantitative skills and computer and technical skills were less so (47 percent and 50 percent respectively). Even so, the majority of employers (73 percent) said it was very or somewhat difficult finding qualified candidates.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Majority Trust is a philanthropic organisation that seeks to work with partners to build a thriving and sustainable community for all in Singapore. Learn more about the Trust at <https://www.majority.sg/>

<sup>2</sup> Deming, David J, “The Growing Importance of Social Skills in the Labor Market,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. 2017;132 (4) :1593-1640; Heckman, James and Tim Kautz, “Hard Evidence on Soft Skills,” *Labour Economics*, 19(4), 2012, pp. 451-64; Almlund, Mathilde, Angela Duckworth, James Heckman, and Tim Kautz, “Personality Psychology and Economics,” in Eric Hanushek, Stephen Machin, and Ludger Woessmann, eds., *Handbook of the Economics of Education*, Vol. 4., Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Elsevier, 2011, pp. 1-181.

<sup>3</sup> “New Survey: Demand for “Uniquely Human Skills” Increases Even as Technology and Automation Replace Some Jobs.” Cengage. January 16, 2019. Accessed February 25, 2019. <https://news.cengage.com/upskilling/new-survey-demand-for-uniquely-human-skills-increases-even-as-technology-and-automation-replace-some-jobs/>.

## 2018 PILOT WITH DYMON ASIA CAPITAL

In 2018 Tangent piloted with Dymon Asia Capital, one of Asia's leading alternative investment firms. Dymon Asia Capital's Co-founder Danny Yong (see box below) wanted to pilot Tangent so that it could remain agile and innovative in the face of increasingly complex markets. Similar to many leading financial investment firms, Dymon's hires tend to come from select universities. However Danny was concerned that in the long run, as Dymon draws from the same talent pool as other leading industry players, it might not have enough diversity and contrarian thinking to find new opportunities and maintain its edge.

## RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN

To emphasise that Dymon wanted to recruit differently, Tangent assisted Dymon in designing an unconventional recruitment campaign (See Figure 1 below). There were 2 key features:

First, recruitment advertisements asked applicants to scan the attached QR code. The QR code directed them to the online psychometric assessment platform where they had to complete a 90-minute online assessment as part of their application. At no point were they asked to send in their CVs or resumes.

Second, instead of advertising in the Classifieds or Money section of the Straits Times, Tangent paid for advertising space in a News section of the Straits Times. Dymon did this in order to reach a larger audience, so as to uncover neglected or overlooked talent. Dymon also paid for advertising at bus stops near universities and polytechnics.



**THE STRAITS TIMES**

January 27, 2018



**BUS STOP: CLEAR CHANNEL**

The recruitment campaign achieved its objective of casting the net wide for applicants, allowing Dymon to discover talent who would otherwise never have applied. Launched 27 January 2018, the Dymon-Tangent recruitment campaign attracted almost 1,200 applicants; 860 completed the profiling. Among them:

- The oldest applicant was 72 years old, and the youngest 20
- Over 30% of applicants had little or no finance background
- 1 in 5 were non-Degree holders
- 1 in 4 were female
- 1 in 3 were mid-career

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## What Danny Yong thinks about Tangent

Danny Yong, Chief Investment Officer and Founding Partner of Dymon Asia Capital:

"There really is a lot of talent in the Singapore workforce. It's just that they keep getting lost in the resume pile, and often do not get surfaced to employers. We believe in the Tangent cause, to ensure opportunities are given to those who have the right fit for the job but may not have the academic credentials we are used to."

"Secondly, hiring practices need to be adjusted to ensure that the best people for the job are hired not simply based on prior experience or academic qualifications alone.

"The leaders of each organisation need to take an active role to catalyse change for hiring practices to become more flexible, and for management to be more open-minded. Otherwise, it is likely that the HR departments will continue to surface the 'safe' resumes and leave all the unconventional talents out in the cold.

"We believe in the Tangent cause, to ensure opportunities are given to those who have the right fit for the job, regardless of their academic credentials or work experience. Most aspects of any job, can be learnt on the job. But tenacity and street-smarts, are traits that may not be as easy to learn, or to teach."

## From Recruitment to Interviews

Dymon and Tangent next filtered the 860 applicants based on how well they fit the Dymon's organisational profile. Prior to the recruitment campaign, Dymon staff completed their profiles on the same platform. This allowed Tangent to build an overall Dymon company profile. Of the 860, Tangent identified a longlist of 88 applicants who most closely matched Dymon's profile.

To further filter applicants for the first interview, Tangent asked the 88 on the longlist to submit a brief video presentation. Tangent and Dymon then narrowed the longlist down to a shortlist of 40 applicants for the first round of interviews.

These 40 comprised many who, without Tangent, would most likely not have made it to the interview stage. They comprised a diverse group:

- The oldest was 50 years old, the youngest 22
- 9 were female (22.5%)
- 12 were non-degree holders (30%)
- 7 were mid-career (17.5%)
- 15 had no background in finance (37.5%)

In parallel, Tangent worked with leadership advisory firm Egon Zehnder to advise Dymon hiring managers on interview strategies and questions to help reveal applicants' intrinsic qualities.



**The first eight Tangent Apprentices with Dymon Asia Capital's Management**

**L to R standing:** Tangent Apprentices Gary Ng, Wesley Yao, Nicholas Ng, Sean Lee, Aaron Young, Man Yun Tan, and Taufik Yusoff

**L to R seated:** Dymon Asia Capital Chief of Staff Kenneth Kan, Dymon Asia Capital Chief Investment Officer and Founder Danny Yong; Tangent Apprentice Guan Leong Chua

## OUTCOMES

Of the 40, Dymon asked 14 back for a second round of interviews. After the second round of interviews, Dymon decided to hire 8 applicants. The 8 include an ex-National Sailor, a polytechnic graduate, an ITE graduate, and a Chemistry PhD in his 40s. Nearly all were new to the financial industry.

### Facilitating Training and Government Support

Tangent also worked with Dymon on training plans for the new hires, and facilitated Dymon's applications to Workforce Singapore's Place and Train scheme and to MAS's Finance Graduate Scheme. These enhanced Dymon's business case for proceeding with the hires. New hires went through a month-long intensive financial markets course to equip them with foundational industry knowledge, followed by two five-month on-the-job training attachments with Dymon business teams.

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*Ong Ye Kung*

*Minister for Education  
and MAS Board Member*

## CONCLUSION

The Tangent pilot with Dymon in 2018 was deemed a success, because Dymon tapped on a much larger pool of applicants than in previous recruitment exercises, revealing talent that it would have otherwise overlooked. If Dymon had recruited using CVs / resumes to shortlist candidates from the start, they would have thrown out several talented individuals who did not have the “right” academic credentials or industry experience. As Dymon Co-founder and Chief Investment Officer Danny Yong put it: “They are talent that really may not have made it in our traditional resume search but today, we see them here with us.”

Education Minister Ong Ye Kung also highlighted Tangent’s role in Dymon’s “enlightened approach to hiring”:

“ Tangent hopes to get firms to hire staff who may not possess the relevant experience or qualifications, but have the attributes to do well. Dymon Asia Capital has piloted Tangent and successfully hired 4 mid-careers executives. One of them is Aaron Young, a Tangent Apprentice currently undergoing a one-year training programme [...] Although he did not have any prior experience in the fund management sector, he has the core attributes to do well.<sup>4</sup>

Every company is unique, and the Tangent team works to understand the needs of each and implements the Tangent hiring process accordingly. Together we are all moving Singapore a bit closer to the day when everyone will be hired for who he/she is, not only what is on their CV.

<sup>4</sup> Keynote Address by Mr Ong Ye Kung, Minister for Education and MAS Board Member, at the Investment Management Association of Singapore (IMAS) Bloomberg Investment Conference 2019, 9 May 2019, Marina Bay Sands Expo and Convention Centre.