european
school of
administration

2026

Exercises: Selection and Recruitment

A practical overview for managers

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Exercise 1

Icebreaker Activity

- In pairs: recall your most successful hire
- What made that recruitment work?
- Share one insight with the group

Exercise 2 : How Does Your Behaviour in Selection Reflect EU values?

Here are four small-group review questions that directly prompt reflection on *how selection-panel behaviour demonstrates EU values*:

1. Respect & Impartiality
In what ways do our questioning, tone, and interactions show respect for every candidate and ensure impartial treatment?

2. Transparency & Fairness
How do we make our decision-making process clear and consistent so that each candidate has an equal opportunity to demonstrate their competencies?

3. Diversity & Inclusion
How do we ensure that our behaviour—verbal and non-verbal—supports diversity, avoids bias, and creates an inclusive interview environment?

4. Accountability & Professionalism
How do we take responsibility for our conduct during selection and ensure it reflects the ethical standards expected of EU institutions?

Exercise 3: Ground Rule Chart

Reflect on and draft a Ground Rule chart that will support a respectful and meaningful flow of discussion across the panel: before, during and after the interview

Before Interview	During Interview	After Interview

Exercise 4: Vacancy Notices

Exercise: Vacancy Notices – Focus on Quality

In small groups:

As a manager you may feel constrained in terms of your impact on the quality of VNs BUT…

What makes a VN more qualitative?

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Exercise 5 – Developing Criteria for Competency Evaluation
Competency: Self-Management

Competency Definition: Self-management

Organises own work, sets goals, manages time effectively, and demonstrates self-motivation and a sense of responsibility. Demonstrates resilience in the face of stress and setbacks. Responds to and implements change with a positive attitude, remaining effective under a changing or fluctuating workload. Shows flexibility and adaptability.

Step 1 – Identify Key Behavioural Indicators

Working in small groups, participants brainstorm and agree on **observable behaviours (at work)** that indicate effective self-management.

Example indicators:

Step 2 – Break The Definition Down

Develop specific, observable actions that could be demonstrated in an interview example.

- Example prompts:

    o *"What would a highly self-managed candidate say or do?"*

    o *"What would a poor example of self-management sound like?"*

    o *"What would we expect an average performer to describe?"*

- On a flipchart or template, groups create a **three-level performance description** for each key behaviour:

    ✓ **Level 5 – Excellent:** What does outstanding self-management look like?

    ✓ **Level 3 – Satisfactory:** What's acceptable or average performance?

    ✓ **Level 1 – Weak:** What behaviours show poor self-management?

Step 3 – Create and Apply the Structured Evaluation Grid (Expanded)

1. **Each group** has a blank evaluation grid (below).

Self-Management

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- Organises own work effectively.
- Takes responsibility for own results and demonstrates commitment to achieve their goals.
- Responds calmly to obstacles and is able to distance themselves from frustration and negativity.
- Applies strategies to help prevent stress and setbacks (e.g. asking for help or support when necessary).
- Is adaptable concerning changing work conditions and responds to fluctuating circumstances in a positive manner.

Weak:			Satisfactory:				Excellent:		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Evidence from the Interview:

Exercise 6: Developing Strong Questions

Self Management Competency - Exercise

• Organises own work effectively.

• Takes responsibility for own results and demonstrates commitment to achieve their goals.

• Responds calmly to obstacles and is able to distance themselves from frustration and negativity.

• Applies strategies to help prevent stress and setbacks (e.g. asking for help or support when necessary).

• Is adaptable concerning changing work conditions and responds to fluctuating circumstances in a positive manner.

Develop interview questions that would help the panel investigate a candidate's likely levels of competency in the two highlighted 'anchor' areas.

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Exercise 7: Tricky Candidates

1. The Over-Talker

Gives long, unfocused answers; difficult to redirect without appearing rude.

2. The Under-Communicator

Provides very short or vague responses; hard to assess competencies.

3. The Scripted Candidate

Reads rehearsed answers; sounds polished but lacks authenticity or depth.

4. The Technical/Connection Disrupter

Blames poor audio/video for not answering fully; creates stop-start dynamics.

5. The Defensive Candidate

Becomes evasive or argumentative when probed; challenging to keep on track.

In small groups:

Consider two of the previous examples

- **What might we do to cope with them professionally?**

Exercise 8: Apply the Evaluation Grid to a Case Study

Step 1: You are now going to act as a selection panel.

Use your evaluation grid to score a candidate's performance on the *Self-Management* competency, based on the evidence in this mock interview transcript/video.

- Focus on *what the candidate actually said or did*, not assumptions or personality.

- Use only the behavioural indicators and scoring anchors defined in their grid.

- Avoid 'gut feelings' or overall impressions.

Step 2. Individual Scoring

Each participant:

- Reviews the transcript/video silently.

- Highlights or underlines behavioural evidence.

- Fills in the "Evidence from the Interview" column in their grid, noting short quotes or summaries.

- Assigns a score (1–10) for each indicator.

Step 3. Group Comparison and Justification (15 min)

Once everyone has scored individually:

a. Participants **share their ratings aloud** for each behavioural indicator.

b. For each score, the rater must **justify it using evidence** — "I gave a 4 because the candidate proactively adjusted their plan after a policy change and still met deadlines."

c. Record differences on a flipchart (e.g. some scored 2, others 4).

d. Discuss:

  o Why did ratings differ?
  o Were participants interpreting the indicators differently?
  o Did some focus on positive tone rather than concrete actions?
  o Did everyone apply the same standard for 'excellent' vs 'adequate'?

Mock Interview Transcript

Competency: Self-Management

(Candidate: "Anna M." – applying for a Policy/Programme Officer role)

Interviewer:

"Tell us about a time when you had to plan and prioritise multiple tasks to meet tight deadlines. How did you manage your workload?"

Candidate:

Last spring, I was responsible for coordinating a policy consultation on digital inclusion while also preparing our unit's annual report. Both had immovable deadlines and competing resource needs. Initially, I felt overwhelmed because data collection for the consultation was taking longer than expected. I began by listing all major deliverables and breaking them into smaller, manageable actions. Then I plotted everything on a timeline in Excel, marking dependencies and potential bottlenecks. Seeing it visually helped me spot a critical overlap between the report's editing phase and the final consultation synthesis, so I brought that to my manager's attention early.

We agreed to shift the consultation's internal validation meeting by one week, which eased the pressure. I delegated certain repetitive data-entry tasks to a trainee and set up shared folders so everyone could update their sections in real time. I also introduced a quick daily check-in with the core team to review priorities and flag risks. That simple 10-minute routine made a big difference — it kept everyone aligned and allowed us to reallocate work quickly when someone was overloaded. As a result, both projects were delivered on time, and my manager later asked me to present my planning approach at our internal coordination meeting.

Looking back, I realised I tend to over-plan at times. I spent too long perfecting templates instead of starting the analysis earlier. If I faced a similar situation again, I'd allow more flexibility in my planning process and set clearer "good enough" standards for internal drafts. Still, I think the experience showed I can manage complex priorities independently and communicate proactively with my manager when adjustments are needed.

Interviewer:

"Describe a situation where you faced significant pressure or setbacks at work. How did you maintain your effectiveness?"

Candidate:

One example that stands out is from last year, when our Directorate had to produce a policy briefing for a Council working group within five days — far shorter than usual. Two colleagues

were on leave, so I had to coordinate inputs from five different DGs on my own. At first, I felt anxious because the topic, cybersecurity, wasn't my primary area. I spent the first evening reviewing existing material and identifying overlaps between DG contributions to avoid duplication. I also made a checklist of what had to be ready each day and tracked progress visually on a whiteboard.

Midway through, one DG sent their input two days late, throwing the schedule off. I could feel the tension building in the team, so I organised a short huddle to reassign tasks and reassure colleagues that we'd manage. Personally, I used a simple technique — I stepped away for five minutes, took deep breaths, and reminded myself of the purpose of the work. That helped me stay calm and avoid spreading stress to others. I worked late one night but refused to skip meals or breaks because I know that backfires. We submitted the briefing on time, and our Director later highlighted our calm under pressure in a staff meeting.

In hindsight, I realised I might have been too reluctant to ask for help initially. I wanted to prove I could handle it independently, but it would have been wiser to inform my Head of Unit earlier about the late input risk. Since then, I've learned to communicate earlier about potential bottlenecks — that's part of managing stress effectively, not a sign of weakness.

Interviewer:

"As a follow up question – what shows that you are comfortable adapting quickly to a significant change at work or in priorities?"

Candidate:

Well, when our unit reorganised last year, my portfolio changed completely — I moved from coordinating digital inclusion to managing energy-efficiency projects. Initially, I was uneasy because I lacked technical background in that area. I decided to approach it methodically: within the first week, I mapped all new stakeholders, reviewed key policy documents, and scheduled short "learning coffees" with internal experts. I also took an online course offered by the Commission's learning portal. Setting small learning goals each week helped me build confidence and keep momentum.

At the same time, our reporting system changed from Excel to a new platform that was rolled out with little training. Many colleagues were frustrated, and there were complaints about errors. I volunteered to test the system and compile a user guide for the team. That experience taught me that adapting to change isn't just about personal adjustment — it's about helping others through it. After two months, our team's error rate dropped by nearly half, and I became the informal "go-to" person for the tool.

However, I also noticed that during those first few weeks, my time management slipped. Because I was learning the new subject area and system simultaneously, I occasionally stayed late to catch up. After realising that wasn't sustainable, I scheduled protected time each morning for deep work and used the Pomodoro technique to stay focused. That small adjustment helped me restore balance. I think this example shows that while I initially felt uncertain, I now handle change with more structure and positivity than before.

Exercise 9: Action Planning

Group discussion: How will you apply learning in your next recruitment?

Individual action planning: 'One concrete step I'll take…'