

## ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT CENTERS

### OVERVIEW

The assessment center method is a procedure used by human resource management (HRM) to evaluate and develop personnel in terms of attributes or abilities relevant to organizational effectiveness. Even though all assessment centers share common features, the process can be adapted in many ways to achieve different objectives. The theme of this service is that each assessment center must be tailor-made to fit particular HRM purposes. The typical use of assessment centers is for three human resource purposes which are:

1. Deciding whom to select or promote.
2. Diagnosing strengths and weaknesses in work-related skills as a prelude to development.
3. Developing job-relevant skills.

We help the human resource manager designing the assessment center with a specific purpose in mind and then advise on making choices to build an assessment center that adequately serves that purpose. Throughout the whole project, alternative ways of setting up each element of the assessment center are discussed with the stakeholders, and a rationale for deciding what procedures to follow is provided. Our recommendations for assessment center practice are based on theory and research relevant to each element of an assessment center, as well as the experience of our assessment center practitioners.

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## TOOLS

The assessment / development centers use six measuring tools to assess the candidate's worth for job selection or a next move. The six tools are as follows:

1. **Psychometric Testing:** Psychometric tests are an objective way for assessors to measure the potential of candidates to perform well in a job role. The power of psychometric testing is that there is a strong correlation between test scores and job performance, i.e. if the candidates score highly in a psychometric test, the chances are that they are going to perform well in the job. As an employer, their predictive qualities make psychometric tests very attractive.
2. **Case Study:** Case study exercises are useful predictors of future job performance, as they closely resemble the work completed on the job. As a result, assessors will weigh case study exercise performance heavily when rating candidates. Similarly, if a presentation exercise based on the case study is required, the quality of the case study will directly affect the presentation exercise rating. Similarly, a case study exercise may continue into a role-play exercise, in which candidates may adapt a fictional role and argue their case in a hypothetical situation. It is also possible that the case study may be conducted as part of a small group, with assessors evaluating their ability to work in a team, alongside their individual contributions.
3. **Group Play/Discussion:** Candidates will be assessed in groups of 8-16, and provided with a workplace relevant problem, or scenario requiring the entire team to work together and solve this issue. The task will be relevant to the industry being assessed for, and candidates may or may not be working with candidates applying for the same position. Throughout the duration of the test, all candidates will be observed, and their behaviors and performance will be noted by professional assessors.
4. **Competency-based interview:** Competency based interviews (sometimes referred to as situational or behavioral interviews) are increasingly superseding other interview formats within the selection and assessment scene. Competency based interviews differ from semi structured/informal interviews by being highly structured, often with a static and inflexible list of questions which candidates shall be asked. However, competency-based interviews also differ from other structured interviews by being tailored specifically to the competency framework of the role applied for. Generally speaking, candidates will be asked a list of questions regarding their previous experience and possibly asked questions regarding how they would act in hypothetical situations. Interviewers may also have a set list of probing questions, which will help explore the candidates experience in more depth.

Competency based questions will be standardized, to ensure that all candidates receive similar or identical questions, ensuring reliability. Research has shown that structured, competency-based interviewing is the most effective method of selection interview, outperforming less structured interviewing in their predictive power. Furthermore, competency-based interviewing has been shown to compliment assessment center exercises and psychometric tests, increasing the overall validity of the selection process when used in combination. Competency based interviews will usually last for one hour, and telephone interviews may also be conducted as competency-based interviews.

5. **Role Play:** Role-play exercises are among the most popular assessment tools used at the assessment center. Role play exercises are very common in both succession planning and recruitment scheme selection and are particularly useful when assessing candidates for client facing positions such as consulting, sales and law. Although many group exercises may incorporate aspects of role-play, typical role play exercises are conducted one to one, with one or two of our professional certified assessors. Candidate's performance will be observed throughout the exercise and their performance will be assessed, noting the candidate's strengths and weaknesses. The content and context of role play exercises will vary considerably depending on the role and the organizational setting, however typically candidates will be role-playing the position in which they have applied or expected to be promoted to and will need to act out a common workplace scenario/problem. For a sales role, candidates will likely need to convince a prospective customer/client to purchase their product/service or handle a complaint. For a consulting role, the candidate may undertake the role of the consultant, and the assessor will play the role of a client, or a prospective client.
6. **In-Tray:** The basic idea of in-tray exercises is to place the candidates in a realistic although simulated work situation, and to assess their workplace behavior and attitudes in that context. Therefore, when they are given an in-tray exercise, it's usual to be asked to treat it as a role-play. They'll be asked to imagine that they are employees of a fictitious company, and to work through the contents of their in-tray in that role. They will be told to imagine that it's their first day in their job as a stock controller and be handed a stack of documents and tasks to prioritize and act. They will be given this role even if they are applying for a job that has nothing to do with stock control; similarly, they might be asked to imagine themselves as teachers or as lawyers, even if they're applying for quite different jobs. Another common scenario is that they've just returned from annual leave to find a pile of correspondence in their fictional in-tray. The point is that the skills and attitudes being assessed will be relevant to the job they are applying or will be promoted for; the types of issues and problems they're asked to consider will be similar to those involved in that role.

## METHODOLOGY:

An assessment center is a process in which several different competencies of potential or existing employees are evaluated by more than one assessor using multiple techniques. These techniques include paper-and-pencil inventories, interview” and role plays and simulations. The results of the assessment center process can be used for employee selection or development.

Our methodology depends on 5 essential stages as depicted in the diagram on right side of this page:

- Organizational and Work Setting
- Job and Person Analysis
- Integration and Interpretation
- Reporting the Results
- Follow-Up and Program Evaluation

This deliberate process ensures the alignment between the human capital and the organizational DNA and creates the context which better describes the organizational performance in a deep essence and a profound purpose.

## BENEFITS:

Provides a detailed insight into the ability, psychology, alignment of values, and motives of candidates.

- Improves accuracy as they allow a broader range of selection methods to be used during the process.
- Facilitates an assessment of existing performance.
- Helps to predict future job performance.
- Predicts on the job performance effectively because it simulates real work situations.
- Gives candidates a much more realistic perspective on the role and company.
- Measures all candidates objectively to the same criteria.
- Reduces cost of hire because the “hit rate” is higher.
- Makes candidates feel more satisfied that even if they are not successful, they have been given a “fair go”.
- Provides much more detailed and relevant feedback to the task and can even be used to assist in designing training.

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