



Assessment and Development Centres

What is an Assessment Centre?

Assessment Centres are typically used for selection purposes, and involve a number of different assessment methodologies that are combined to ensure a thorough, multifaceted behavioural assessment of candidates. This can include psychometric testing, group activities, paired activities, and individual activities. Such an approach gives candidates the opportunity to shine in different situations, particularly if they feel more comfortable working in pairs than in a team environment. The Assessment Centre approach is often used in high volume recruitment, such as the recruitment of graduates.

Candidates are typically asked to work together to find a creative solution to a job relevant problem, or to reach a consensus on a work-related scenario. Activities can include individual work simulations such as problem solving challenges or inbox exercises, one on one role plays including customer interactions, team activities, or strategic presentations.

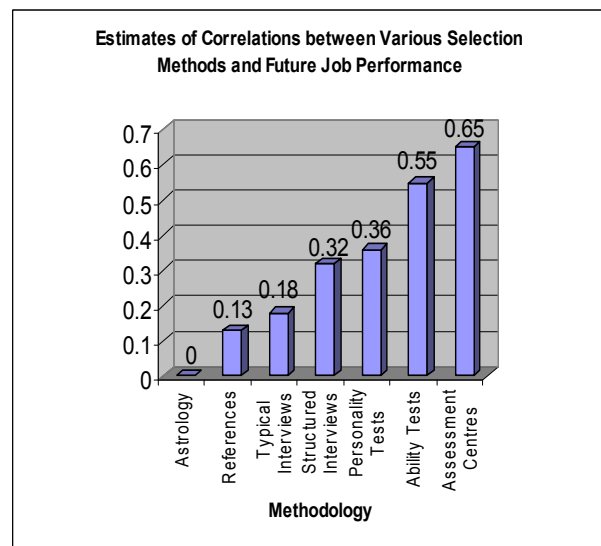
What are the Benefits of using Assessment Centres?

Assessment Centres allow for the objective evaluation of behaviours that are aligned to job relevant competencies. Each candidate is assessed by multiple assessors, who integrate their ratings to reach a consensus about the candidate's overall performance. It is critical to have trained psychologists included as assessors to keep the process as objective as possible. However it is equally as important to have employees of the recruiting organisation involved, as they provide expert information on the job roles and the organisational environment. It is recommended that employees who are involved in the Assessment Centres as assessors are trained by psychologists to ensure that the process remains impartial, so the organisation can obtain a realistic

measure of each candidate to ascertain that they are able to select the best candidate for the job.

Research has demonstrated that candidates tend to perceive that Assessment Centres are truly measuring job relevant competencies. This contributes to the reputation and desirability of the organisation among potential employees. According to Garavan (1997), such factors can affect the extent to which organisations are able to attract and retain their employees. Research had also indicated that an individual's choice of organisation is related to their perception of the recruitment and selection process undertaken by that organisation, and in particular the care they take in implementing this process and how fair they perceive the process to be (Garavan, 1997).

Assessment Centres have also demonstrated high predictive validity, meaning that an individual's scores from an Assessment Centre are strongly related to their future job performance. This is demonstrated in the graph below.



What are Development Centres?

Development Centres are typically employed for the assessment of high potential managers within an organisation and usually involve a candidate undertaking a number of activities designed to simulate a typical day in their work life. Whereas

Assessment Centres are used for selection purposes, Development Centres aim to facilitate the development of current employees. Activities can involve meetings with internal or external stakeholders, such as a direct report or a customer, and analysis exercises where the candidate is required to present a recommendation on a given business problem. This methodology allows for behaviours to be impartially observed and for gaps between actual performance and potential performance to be identified. Once these gaps are identified, organisations can focus on ways to develop particular skills in their employees to improve the organisation's overall effectiveness.

Vloeberghs and Berghman (2003) suggested there are three main critical factors required for a Development Centre to be effective. These include the way participants are involved before and during the Development Centre, involving factors such as informing participants of the purposes of the Centre, the competencies that will be tested, the method to be used, and also explicitly involving them in feedback. The attention paid to the development planning component of the Development Centre, as well as the mentoring and coaching support that is available to the participant also contribute to the effectiveness of the Development Centre. For the Centre to really have an impact, it should be perceived as one part of the employee development process, and it is critical that the organisation follows through with and supports the ensuing development plans for employees.

What are the benefits of using Development Centres?

There are many benefits associated with the use of Development Centres. The Industrial Society's (1996) survey indicated that the main benefits of Development Centres included identifying areas for development, providing a more objective, in-depth evaluation of strengths and areas for development, identifying potential, encouraging ownership of development priorities, and then tailoring those to business priorities, as well as increasing employees' commitment and motivation. Participants also benefit from one-to-one

feedback, and organisations can maximise their employees' performance.

In the current "War for Talent," there is increasing pressure on organisations to retain their talented employees and develop succession plans to ensure the success of their organisation into the future. Research has demonstrated that employees are more likely to stay with employers that they perceive support and value them. One of the most beneficial ways organisations can demonstrate their support of their employees is through investing in their training and development. Taking such an approach allows organisations to get the best out of their employees and increase their competitive advantage (Garavan, 1997). Cost-benefit analyses indicate that if Development Centres are well-designed and run, the return for organisations in terms of the increase in participant performance demonstrate excellent returns.

Organisations are only as good as the people who run them, and the importance of the human factor in your organisation cannot be underestimated.

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