



**Graduate Selection:
Psychological Assessment and
Assessment Centres**

**Australian Association of Graduate
Employers (AAGE) – White Paper**

What do graduate employers want?

In response to the rapid growth in information and communication technologies and a shift in the nature of the work environment, graduate employers are increasingly looking for individuals who feel comfortable working interdependently, as members of teams within the organisation (Kwiatkowski, 2003). Organisations are often seeking graduates who are not only able to perform the key requirements of the role but who are politically astute, able to operate within a information-rich environment and who can form structured networking relationships both within, and outside of, the organisation (Kwiatkowski, 2003). In order to capture the range of knowledge, skills and abilities expected of graduates in the selection process, organisations are likely to require more sophisticated selection tools which can more effectively differentiate between candidates. Increasingly, graduate employers are recognising the potential for psychometric assessment and assessment centres to provide additional insight into the capabilities of applicants to their graduate programs.

Psychometric Assessment

Psychometric assessment refers to those tests that measure an individual's knowledge, skills, abilities or personal characteristics. Psychometric assessments can play an important role

in the selection process by providing additional information about a candidate's potential to perform in the job. Psychologists typically recommend the use of a combination of cognitive ability testing and personality assessment.

A number of psychometric assessments are now available online, allowing for assessments to be conducted in shorter time-frames and facilitating the selection of candidates for similar roles across countries in multi-national organisations.

Psychometric assessments compare favourably to traditional selections measures. Of the most commonly used selection methods, including job interviews, biographical information and job experience, cognitive ability tests have been shown to be the best predictor of on the job performance (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Cognitive ability tests are particularly useful when used in conjunction with work sample tests, such as an in-box task, or with structured interviews (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Personality questionnaires have also been shown to be a good predictor of a candidate's on the job performance, particularly those which include a measure of conscientiousness; that is, a measure of a candidate's tendency to attend to details and complete set tasks (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).

While there are a number of psychometric assessments available on the market, measures need to be carefully selected to ensure that they are reliable and valid. Psychometric assessments that have been rigorously constructed will identify real differences between individuals and will allow appropriate inferences to be drawn about a candidate's likely on the job performance (Gatewood & Field, 2001). The use of psychometric assessments which do not have a sound scientific

basis can result in ill-informed selection decisions. Psylutions psychologists are skilled in the selection of reliable and valid psychometric assessments which are appropriate for assessing the relevant competencies for graduate roles.

Assessment Centres

Assessment centres consist of a series of structured assessment techniques which are designed to assess an applicant on a number of job-related dimensions (Garavan, 1997). The structured assessment techniques incorporated into assessment centres are often dynamic and engaging, requiring applicants to work collaboratively with other team members to complete a given task in a short period of time. As part of an assessment centre, applicants may be asked to develop a creative solution to an industry problem, to work through an ethical dilemma or to reach a consensus regarding a work-related scenario. As a result, assessment centres tend to have good face validity; that is, applicants feel there is a strong link between the activities of the assessment centre and the key requirements of the role (Macan et al., 1994). Garavan (1997) argues that face validity is a particularly important issue in graduate recruitment, as negative impressions of the selection process can influence an organisation's reputation and its ability to attract top graduates. Integrating an assessment centre into the graduate selection process can increase the face validity of the selection process as a whole. Assessment centres have also been found to be useful in predicting job-related outcomes and are particularly useful when used in conjunction with cognitive ability tests as part of the selection process (Gaugler et al., 1987; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).

An applicant's performance in an assessment centre is usually evaluated on a number of dimensions, each of

which is clearly linked to the key characteristics of the role. During the course of the assessment centre, candidates are evaluated on each of these dimensions by multiple raters, who are required to reach a consensus about that candidate's overall performance. One of the concerns associated with the use of assessment centres is the extent to which there is equivalence of ratings across dimensions, across exercises and across raters (Kaufmann et al., 1993). Woehr and Arthur (2003) suggest that these concerns are primarily the result of poor assessment centre design and methodologies. Lievens (1998) suggests that these can be overcome by carefully defining each dimension, allocating a key role to psychologists as members of the assessor team and employing systematic procedures for observing, evaluating and integrating ratings. Based on the results of a study of the validity of a graduate assessment centre, Garavan (1997) recommends that assessment-centre designers carefully construct exercises and clearly specify the dimensions to ensure they are congruent with the performance requirements of the job. Psylutions Psychologists are experienced in the design and facilitation of best practice assessment centres.

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