

Development & Assessment Centres Unravelled

What are Development & Assessment Centres?

At their simplest both involve participants taking part in a range of job simulations which contain essential components of the job. However, the content may vary considerably depending on the objectives of the **Centre**.

Often a variety of techniques are used to ensure comprehensive coverage of the skill, qualities and attributes against which performance is recorded. Assessment Centres are also commonly referred to as '**Selection Centres**' because of their emphasis on selecting people for the right jobs.

Similarities between Centres

- ◆ Both used **trained observers** to provide evidence of performance against a range of activities
- ◆ Both use a number of predetermined **job related behaviours** against a set of competencies
- ◆ Both use a range of exercises **to elicit** job related behaviours
- ◆ Both provide **objective assessment** against criteria/dimensions

The benefits of running a Centre

The growth in popularity of **Assessment and Development Centres** is mainly due to the quality and depth of information that can be provided from assessment and observation. They are widely regarded as one of the most accurate and valid procedures for **Selection** and **Development**. Some of the benefits include:

- ◆ Provide organisations with the **opportunity** to see how an **individual performs** in a work situation
- ◆ Participants gain insights into their **own performance** and areas for development, thereby helping them to improve their performance
- ◆ In the case of **Assessment Centres**, participants gain a **positive perspective** of the organisation
- ◆ In the case of **Development Centres**, participants gain feedback and an opportunity for **self-assessment**
- ◆ Both provide the organisation with a vehicle to **attract, develop and retain** good quality employees
- ◆ **Assessment Centres** ensure **accurate placement** of employees
- ◆ **Development Centres** create opportunities for **motivating and developing** staff

Process for setting up a Centre

Development and Assessment Centres need to be an integral part of a **Human Resource Strategy** and it is important that the context of their use is fully understood by all involved.

In order to ensure a rigorous design of the **Development or Assessment Centre** the following stages should be included:

1. **Identify and Agree** the rationale for the Centre
2. **Gain agreement** - identify **Senior Management Champions** and communicate the concept
3. Define **criteria** against **competencies**
4. **Select Exercises**
5. **Design Exercises**
6. **Design Programme**
7. Select and train **Assessors/Observers** - could also be involved in the selection and design of exercises
8. **Pilot Programme**
9. Make any adjustment to design from the pilot
10. **Implement** the programme

Uses of Development & Assessment Centres

Surveys have shown a dramatic increase in the use **Development and Assessment Centre** technology, with almost twofold increase in over 5 years.

Although they were originally designed for selection purposes and aiding promotion decisions, their application has spread to many other areas such as:

• **Early Identification of Management Potential**

The underlying rationale here is the need for organisations to ensure that the best candidates available undertake key management training programmes. It is worth a significant investment to do this well. At the same time, organisations also need to optimise the talent they have, as soon as possible.

• **Diagnosis of Training & Development Needs**

Development Centres offer the change to start focussing on individual training and development requirements and will enable the design of management programmes to be geared toward the candidates' needs. At the same time it provides candidates with a greater appreciation of their own needs. In this way, candidates can experience appropriate training and development activities.

• **Organisational Planning**

Development Centres can be used to identify areas

where widespread skill deficiencies are likely to exist so that training can be developed in these areas. Results can also be integrated with human resources planning data to provide additional information concerning the number of people with particular skills being recruited or developed to meet future needs.

- **Development**

Development Centres can be used as a tool for team building and the development of skills that will be called on in the future. Where all candidates of a Development Centre are current employees and the focus is on their development rather than gathering data for a specific decision.

- **Recruitment**

Assessment Centres can be used to ensure a more objective selection of candidates for roles in the organisation. Typically, Assessment Centre activities are structured around the competencies required for individuals to perform the job well. Assessment Centres involve a range of activities including Competency based interview, role play, simulations and group activities.

In summary . . .

Development and Assessment Centres are valuable activities to improve the performance of any organisation.

Development & Assessment Centres unravelled by Jan Brause

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