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How to Assess with Success: Using Assessment Centers in your Practice



“In a recent survey by *Employment Review* magazine more than nine out of ten employers using assessment centres believe they are a ‘very effective’ or ‘fairly effective’ means of selecting staff.”

Find out why more than half of HR practitioners from over 90 organizations believe the cost of assessment centers are justified!₁

Why should I care?

According to Psychometric Success, you are most likely going to encounter an assessment center at the critical points of your career₁. This includes anything from applying to your first “real job” upon graduation to applying to an internal opening within a company you may already be employed with. Facing an assessment center at some point in your life seems inevitable, and at first they can seem quite daunting. So why can’t employers stick to the standard interviewing and ask candidates what we all know and love? “Tell me about yourself.” “What’s your biggest weakness?”

More and more employers are seeking what they call a “whole person” view of a candidate₂. This means they are looking beyond just the classic resume and intellectual abilities, but also looking at performance, personality and cultural fit, and motivation₂. They want to see what you can and will do in certain situations that replicate real workplace scenarios. This is a way for both employers *and* candidates to discover if there is good person-organization fit. Think of assessment centers as your way to shine, as your way of really *showing* employers what you are capable of.

Okay, so what exactly IS an assessment center?

Assessment centers are essentially a process in which candidates participate in a variety of different tasks while simultaneously being observed and evaluated by multiple assessors. Although there is not a single “right” way to conduct an assessment center, according to the *Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations*, there are however ten essential elements required of every assessment center₃. These include:

- Systematic analysis to determine job-relevant behavioral constructs
- Behavioral classification
- Multiple assessment center components
- Linkages between behavioral constructs and assessment center components
- Multiple simulation exercises
- Multiple assessors
- Assessor training
- Recording and scoring of behaviors
- Data integration
- Standardization

So you now have a broad idea of what an assessment center consists of. But that doesn't necessarily explain what you as the candidate has to actually *do*. As stated in the Guidelines, an assessment center consists of multiple simulation exercises. You will be asked to participate in different exercises consisting of varying levels of complexity, technology, equipment, interdependence, ambiguity, etc. These exercises can include any of the following₄:

- Written case/analysis
- Interview simulation/role play
- Oral presentation
- Leaderless group discussion
- In-basket/box
- Oral fact finding
- Business game

In the United States, the most popular are the role play, the oral presentation, and the in-basket exercises₄. In role play exercises, the participant speaks with a role player--who is someone that is specifically trained to play the part of a subordinate or other organizational figure--regarding a specific problem or request. Oral presentations provide the participants an opportunity to give presentations to a specific audience. In an in-basket, participants are provided with materials (such as e-mails, memos, voicemails) regarding business-related issues such as personnel, finance, and company crises and must choose how to respond.

Why should I use an assessment center?

Interviewing is an effective enough means of figuring out who to hire, so why bother incorporating an assessment center into the process? Here are a few reasons why companies may benefit from one:

They can serve a purpose beyond selection

Assessment centers can also be used for development and diagnostic reasons. Facilitating simulation exercises, such as the ones mentioned above, can help to pinpoint strengths and weaknesses of employees and target areas of opportunity in a diagnostic assessment center. Developmental assessment centers take this a step further, where active learning takes place before, during, and after the assessment center exercises. Employees are scored on competency areas and provided feedback on how and where to improve₄.

They provide an extensive amount of information about workers

Assessment centers seek to understand how employees will behave and perform under certain circumstances and situations. Unlike other methods of assessment, like a structured interview or a personality questionnaire, assessment centers are comprehensive in their nature through their various exercises and thus provide a profile of employees' level of competency in many areas through exercises that simulate the actual workplace₄.

They can be highly flexible to fit your company's own needs and culture

Even off-the-shelf assessment centers can be tailored to fit the needs of the organization and accommodates for both external candidates, such as potential employees, as well as internal candidates for developmental or promotional needs. Certain competencies may be more present in some companies overall than others, and a specifically tailored assessment center can accommodate this. A tailored assessment center can provide high-fidelity exercises that coincide with the company's major goals and values₄.

They have great ROI

A well-designed assessment center will reap many benefits. Assessment centers have been shown to predict on-the-job performance and can help reduce the costs of recruitment. Because assessment centers are so comprehensive and able to be closely tied to actual job tasks and requirements, they are likelier to help companies pick the right people₄.

We'd love to help!

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