Guidelines for Best Practice in the Use of Assessment and Development Centres

The Purpose of this Document

CEB is committed to promoting and maintaining quality services in the area of Assessment and Development Centres. This will enable our customers to recruit better people and develop them more effectively to increase productivity and organisational performance.

These guidelines, which are based on best current professional opinion (including that specified in the British Psychological Society’s Best Practice Guidelines on Assessment and Development Centres), are intended to provide a concise account of best practice and are supplied free of charge to clients.

This guidance includes information on the processes involved in the effective design, implementation and evaluation of these centres, together with a brief historical background to the evolution of assessment and development centre practice.
Why Should My Organisation Use an Assessment and/or Development Centre?

Many organisations recognise that selection and development procedures for their people are of paramount importance in order to achieve competitive advantage. Increasingly, they are turning to the Assessment Centre approach, which delivers many benefits, not only in the development and assessment work itself, but also in getting groups together.

A carefully constructed and well-run Assessment or Development Centre can provide a number of benefits to an organisation seeking to improve its approach to the selection and development of their employees, which in turn can identify and predict key behaviours in the workplace that transform people performance.

These benefits can include:
- Reduction in turnover and subsequent recruitment costs (as the most appropriate person is selected for the role)
- Identification of potential “high fliers” within an organisation
- Identification of individual strengths
- Identification of individual development needs
- Identification of “skills gaps” within the organisation
- Provision of a robust process for restructure
- Provision of solid information for Succession Planning
- Production of a detailed Talent Audit

These benefits are derived by:
- The generation of highly relevant and observable information
- Basing decisions on objective information
- Increased fairness as multiple assessors are used
- Giving the candidates an opportunity to preview the requirements of the role
- The generation of information on which to base development plans
- Enhancing the image of the organisation
- Benchmarking strengths and development needs against other organisations

What are Assessment and Development Centres?

The purpose of a Centre is to obtain the best possible indication of a person’s actual or potential competence to perform in the target job/level of responsibility.

Assessment and/or Development Centres focus on the systematic and objective identification of behaviours of an individual for the purposes of selection, placement, promotion, development, career management, succession planning and training.

Assessment Centres have grown in popularity since they were first introduced in industry by AT&T, which used Assessment Centres in its Management Progress Study that began in 1956. The use of these centres spread, particularly in the US and the UK, with Robertson & Makin (1986) estimating that just over a quarter of organisations employing more than 500 people used Assessment Centres.

Development Centres were first introduced in the 1980s, with much greater emphasis being placed upon collaborative assessment with participants, in some cases with no assessors being present at all. By the mid to late-1990s, a survey in the UK by Roffey Park Management Institute (1999) reported Assessment Centres being used by 62% of respondents and Development Centres being used by 43%.

The Assessment and Development Centre method is now regarded as one of the most accurate and valid assessment procedures and is used globally for both selection and development.
When are Assessment Centres Development Centres?

The answer to this question depends on the purpose of the programme, as discussed opposite. The “Assessment Centre” and the “Development Centre” can be viewed as being the two extreme poles of a continuum, with the AC being a programme seeking a “yes/no” answer and the DC a workshop which focuses totally on learning and development. This continuum, with some example stages, is shown below.

The Assessment and Development Centre Continuum

### Development
- **Development without assessment**
  - Diagnosis by other means than AC/DC
- **Development Centres**
  - No organisational targets/company objectives
  - 100% development objectives
  - Focus on skill/competence development
  - Addition of learning elements
  - Feedback during, not after Centre
  - Counselling and coaching
- **Career development Assessment Centre**
  - Targeted at levels and directions
  - Measurement of strengths/weaknesses against blueprints
  - Development accounts for 75% + of objectives
  - Full feedback and counselling
- **Assessment of potential Assessment Centres**
  - Targeted at higher levels
  - Calibration rather than pass/fail
  - 50/50 assessment/development objectives
  - Full feedback
- **Internal selection/promotion Assessment Centres**
  - Job specific
  - Yes/no decisions
  - Some feedback
  - Objective 75% + assessment
- **External recruitment Assessment Centres**
  - Usually 1 day only
  - External candidates
  - Yes/no decisions
  - Feedback given sometimes

### Assessment
- **Interviews/ability testing etc**
Key Components of an Assessment or Development Centre

It is difficult to provide an exact definition of an Assessment or Development Centre, since the content may differ widely depending on the objectives of the programme. In general however, an Assessment or Development Centre involves the standardised evaluation of behaviours and the following key factors should be included in the process:

1. Assessments are Behaviourally Based
   The primary purpose of a centre is the evaluation of the performance of participants against a pre-identified set of competencies or criteria. These competencies or criteria can be identified by carrying out a thorough job analysis of the role in question (whether the job is an existing one or a new position). These criteria should incorporate the participant’s knowledge, ability, personality and personal motivation. This will enable the identification of those behaviours that differentiate successful from less successful performance. It is also important at this stage to ensure the context in which the behaviours take place is understood, together with the level of complexity of the problems likely to be encountered by the jobholder.

2. Several Candidates or Participants are Observed Together
   This allows interaction between participants, both in the actual exercises and less formally, ensuring that the programme is more interactive as well as more economical. With the increasing advances in technology, these groups can not only be formed physically but also in the form of, for example, a “virtual Assessment Centre” – further details on the use of technology in Assessment and Development Centres is given in Section 8.

   Whilst there are no hard and fast rules on the numbers of participants to be involved in each centre, the practical considerations for the design of the centre usually require multiples of four or six participants.

3. Assessment Is Via a Combination of Methods
   A key factor in the design of a centre is the inclusion of at least two work sample simulations that replicate, so far as possible, the key challenges of the job in question. These simulation exercises will typically be used in combination with other assessment techniques to ensure comprehensive coverage of attributes and skills, and to increase reliability of measurement.
Two important factors to bear in mind when selecting appropriate assessment methods are:

- Do they capture the different situational contexts of the job
- Do they provide the opportunity for the accurate assessment of the range of skills and competencies required to perform the job?

Further information on the selection of appropriate assessment methods is given in Chapter 7.

When designing the centre programme, and selecting the assessment methods to use, it is important to ensure that there are at least two measures for every competency to be assessed.

4. Multiple Assessors/Observers

The involvement of a number of assessors increases both objectivity and impartiality. A key factor in the use of multiple assessors is that the timetable should be designed in such a way as to allow for their rotation so that, ideally, a range of assessors observes each participant.

The assessors can be taken from a range of personnel specialists, line managers and psychologists. All should be fully trained in the behavioural assessment process and in its application to the particular exercises being used on the centre.

5. Integration of Data

An integration session provides a fair and objective review of all the evidence gathered and aims to gain consensus among the assessors. The aim is to focus on the participant's overall performance against the competency model and to identify a pattern or profile of strengths and development needs for each individual.

When used for selection, no decision should be taken until all the evidence has been shared and a final rating agreed upon. From the Development Centre perspective, this session should be used to gather information to feed back to the participant on their strengths and potential development areas, and the participant may even be given some feedback during the centre.

Ideally, for both Assessment and Development Centres, no one assessor should have all the data on a single participant until the integration session.
6. Uses of Assessment and Development Centres

As has been mentioned briefly above, the traditional use of the Assessment Centre has been extended to include the following:

**Recruitment and promotion**
Where particular positions that need to be filled exist, both internal and external candidates can be assessed for suitability to those specific posts.

**Early identification of potential**
The underlying rationale here is the need for an organisation to optimise talent as soon as possible. High potential people also need to be motivated so that they remain with the organisation.

**Diagnosis of training and development needs**
Assessment and Development Centres offer the chance to establish individual training and development requirements, while providing candidates with a greater appreciation of their needs.

**Organisational planning**
Assessment Centres can be used to identify areas where widespread skill deficiencies exist within organisations, so that training can be developed in these areas. Results can also be integrated with human resource planning data to provide additional information concerning the number of people with particular skills needed to meet future needs.

**Restructuring**
Assessment and Development Centres can be used to assist the appointment of individuals into the new structure, identify individuals’ explicit strengths and development needs, key motivators and actions to meet needs. They can also be used to support career development planning for those appointed, and redeployment/career outplacement for those not.

**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. Coaching and counselling sessions can be integrated into the programme to develop people during the course of the Development Centre.
7. Essential Stages of Assessment/Development Centres

Our experience in this field suggests that the following stages are essential in the design of a rigorous Assessment or Development Centre. Many centres fail where organisations do not adhere to this approach.

Define organisational objectives
Gain commitment

Review/validate existing procedures
Job analysis

Define competencies

Select exercises
Develop Exercises

Design programme

Train assessors

Run pilot

Implement programme

Review and validation
Key Issues

Stage 1 – Pre-planning

Identify need

The initial trigger for the implementation of an Assessment or Development Centre should be the establishment of an organisational need for the process.

Clarify the objectives of the process

Having identified the need for the centre, it should be clarified at this early stage whether the process is for assessment, selection, promotion or development. Clear outcomes and success criteria of the process should also be defined.

Defining organisational policy statement

For an Assessment and/or Development Centre to be effective and have positive impact, it needs to be fully integrated into the organisation's human resource strategy. An organisational policy statement should be drawn up to provide information on the centre’s use, and should provide details on the following areas:

- **The purpose of the centre** - The policy document should include a clear statement giving the reasons why the organisation has chosen to make use of Assessment and/or Development Centres (for example, selection or identification of development needs) and how this process fits in with the overall strategy of the organisation. Any potential benefits, to both the organisation and the participants, could also be given at this stage.

- **How participants are to be selected** - The document should specify how participants are to be selected for the centre. This may be on the basis of self-selection (although this can be costly and time consuming and more centres may need to be run), structured interviews, minimum requirements or “cut-offs”, pre-screening interviews, aptitude testing, bio-data or job knowledge tests. It should also be made clear within the document whether participation on the centre is voluntary or compulsory and, if appropriate, whether alternatives to participation are an option.

- **Briefing of participants** - Within this section of the policy statement, details should be given as to the level of briefing to be given to participants. This will ensure all participants have been given the same level of information before they commence the centre.
  For Development Centres, briefings should also be included for managers of the participants. Research has shown that this is critical to the success of the centres and thus achieving behavioural change.

- **Standards for eligibility as an assessor** - One of the key factors that will impact on the effectiveness of an Assessment or Development Centre is the level of skill of the assessors.
  Clear guidance should be given within the policy document as to the level of training, frequency of participation, organisational level when compared to the participants and experience/qualifications of external consultants. (Assessor training will be covered further in Stage 2.)

- **Materials and assessment procedures to be used** - The policy document should clearly state the standards required for the design, development and validation of the materials and assessment procedures to be used on the centre.
- **Feedback procedure** - Clear guidance should be given on the feedback procedure for the centre, including when feedback will be available to the participant, the form it will take, e.g. written or face-to-face/telephone, the level of detail to be included, e.g. brief summary or comprehensive feedback, and who will provide the feedback.

- **Access to, and use of, information gathered on the centre** - Participants should be given a clear understanding of what happens to the information gathered on the centre, including who has access to the data within the organisation and for what purpose, where the information will be stored and for how long the information will remain valid. It is generally recommended that the data be used within two years of the date of the centre. The document should also specify if the information is to be used in combination with other data for selection and promotion decisions.

- **Diversity and Equal Opportunities** - The policy statement should give details of how the centre will be as fair and objective as possible to all participants, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity and age. Consideration should also be given here on assessing those with a disability. (See Section 10 for further details.)

- **Monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the Assessment/Development Centre process** - A final factor for inclusion in the policy document is a statement on the procedures the organisation will undertake to investigate how well the centre performed against its objectives – for example, to identify potential, to select the best candidates or to provide a fair and objective profile of relative strengths/limitations for each individual.

### Stage 2 – Design and Development

**Job analysis**

The starting point of any Assessment or Development Centre project is to get a clear and accurate specification of what the centre needs to measure.

As a general rule, competencies are the basis upon which an assessment process is structured and job analysis the approach to identify them.

Job analysis has been defined as a systematic procedure for obtaining detailed and objective information about a job that will be, or is currently being, performed. Whether the centre is to be for selection or development, there will be a particular job, or possibly group of jobs, at what may be termed the “target level”. It is important to have a highly detailed knowledge of the target level of job(s) in order to use the centre as a basis for accurately:

(i) selecting people who meet the requirements of the job; and/or
(ii) analysing the development needs of job “incumbents” at the target level.

Job analysis is the method used to determine the competencies that the centre will be designed around. A range of techniques can be used, either in isolation or in combination. Four broad categories of job analysis techniques are:

(i) diary/self descriptions
(ii) observations
(iii) interviews, e.g. critical incident technique, repertory grid and visionary
(iv) questionnaires and inventories
Job analysis not only provides the basis for the design of competencies, but also enables:
(i) weighting of importance of competencies across the procedure
(ii) weighting of importance of assessment methods across the centre
(iii) test and exercise choice
(iv) exercise design
(v) audit trail should the centre be questioned i.e. equal opportunities perspective

Competency design
Competencies are described as the cluster of observable behaviours and actions that can include personality, ability, interest, motivation etc. and can act as the anchor for the implementation and evaluation of Assessment and Development Centres.

Characteristics of good competencies:
- Behaviourally anchored
- Observable
- Reflect organisational culture
- Visionary/forward looking
- Discrete

The competency framework utilised by an organisation can either take the form of a generic, “off-the-shelf” competency model such as “The SHL Universal Competency Framework” or the competencies can be tailored to the specific organisation and derived from the job analysis process described overleaf.
Below is an example of Problem Solving and Analysis Competency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Indicators</th>
<th>Negative Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Quickly assimilates numerical and written data</td>
<td>▪ Takes a long time to assimilate new information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Sifts through information and selects that which is most relevant</td>
<td>▪ Fails to distinguish critical from non-critical information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Consults a combination of sources of data when analysing problems and effectively integrates this</td>
<td>▪ Relies on one source of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Critically probes information.</td>
<td>▪ Accepts information at face value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Identifies gaps in information and seeks additional information</td>
<td>▪ Fails to integrate data received from different sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Breaks down a problem into its main components; links cause and effect</td>
<td>▪ Does not use a systematic process to isolate a problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Design of a balanced assessment matrix

Once the key competencies to be assessed have been identified, the next step is to draw up a competency/exercise matrix, with the competencies to be assessed listed down the side and then the exercises to be used across the top. (See Section 5 for an example). By ticking the relevant boxes it is then easy to ensure that each competency is being assessed by at least two methods, and that no one exercise has too heavy a burden in terms of number of competencies to be assessed. It is recommended that no more than four competencies be assessed by each exercise. Strength of evidence can also be indicated on this matrix, with one tick representing secondary evidence and two ticks representing stronger (primary) evidence.

Below is an example of a matrix demonstrating how different assessment methods have been chosen to assess different competencies. (3 = Primary source of evidence, 33 = Secondary source of evidence)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CBI</th>
<th>Analysis Presentation</th>
<th>Role Play</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Ability Tests</th>
<th>Personality questionnaire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achieving results</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating and influencing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning and organising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving and analysis</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Selection and Development of Exercises

Having carried out a thorough job analysis and produced a set of clearly defined competencies, with behavioural indicators, it is then possible to select the appropriate exercises. The exercises and techniques chosen must provide reliable, objective and relevant behavioural information.

Key criteria to be considered are:
- The behavioural dimensions the exercise measures
- The difficulty level
- The content/scenario of the exercise
- Technical soundness, e.g. reliability, empirical validity
- Practical constraints, e.g. costs, time available for administration and exercise development, participant/assessor availability and work hours lost.

A wide range of techniques is available for use on these centres, for example:
- Group exercise
- Presentation
- Fact-finding exercise
- Role-play/Negotiation
- In-tray exercise/e-basket
- Competency based interview/Biographical interview
- Written analysis
- Psychometric assessment (to include assessment of cognitive, personality, motivational and interest profiles).

It is possible to purchase both “off-the-shelf” exercises or design/tailor exercises for a particular centre/organisation. A customised exercise is one developed especially for a particular user and therefore will be tailored to suit organisational needs. Customised exercises have the following advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages
- The skill being measured, as well as the level and content of the exercise, will be directly related to the job(s) in question. Therefore validity is enhanced
- The exercise is likely to seem fair and acceptable to most participants in that it reflects the content of the job
- The participants will not have been exposed to the particular exercise before

Disadvantages
- Customised exercises require time to design and trial before being available for use. The time required will depend on the type and complexity of exercise, but will typically range from 5 to 20 days
- The initial outlay in terms of cost can be greater
- Should the job or participant population for which the exercise was designed change, the exercise may become obsolete

Stages in Developing a Simulation Exercise - If the decision is taken to develop a customised exercise, the typical steps that must be followed are:
- Research into background information
- Designing and writing of exercises
- Trial run of draft exercises
- Artwork and production
- Drafting of administration, scoring and evaluation guidelines
- Finalisation of exercise and guidelines.
**Timetable Design**

Having identified the assessment methods to be used on the Assessment or Development Centre, a timetable would then need to be drawn up. Once again, a number of key considerations should be taken into account:

- Amount of time available for the centre
- Sufficient time for a general briefing of the participants
- Number of assessors available
- Ensuring the rotation of assessors and participants
- Number of rooms available and their proximity to each other
- Administration time for the exercises
- Write-up time for assessors
- Sufficient breaks for the participants but not lengthy gaps
- Personal action planning time if the purpose is developmental
- Time for the integration session.

Below is an example timetable demonstrating that different assessor observe different participants for different exercises.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>08.30 - 09.00</td>
<td>Briefing</td>
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<tr>
<td>09.00 - 09.15</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare presentation</td>
<td>Prepare presentation</td>
<td>Prepare presentation</td>
<td>Interview with assessor A</td>
<td>Interview with assessor B</td>
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<tr>
<td>09.15 - 09.30</td>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare presentation</td>
<td>Prepare presentation</td>
<td>Prepare presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>09.30 - 09.45</td>
<td>Prepare presentation</td>
<td>Prepare presentation</td>
<td>Prepare presentation</td>
<td>Interview with assessor A</td>
<td>Interview with assessor B</td>
<td>Interview with assessor C</td>
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<td>09.45 - 10.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.15 - 10.30</td>
<td>Present to assessor A</td>
<td>Present to assessor B</td>
<td>Present to assessor C</td>
<td>Prepare presentation</td>
<td>Prepare presentation</td>
<td>Prepare presentation</td>
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<td>10.30 - 10.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.15 - 11.30</td>
<td>Personality questionnaire</td>
<td>Personality questionnaire</td>
<td>Personality questionnaire</td>
<td>Present to assessor B</td>
<td>Present to assessor C</td>
<td>Present to assessor A</td>
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<tr>
<td>13.00 - 13.15</td>
<td>Group observed by assessor B</td>
<td>Group observed by assessor A</td>
<td>Group observed by assessor A</td>
<td>Group observed by assessor C</td>
<td>Group observed by assessor C</td>
<td>Group observed by assessor B</td>
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</table>

**Assessor Training**

A key factor in the overall success of the Assessment or Development Centre is the effectiveness of the assessors. The training should increase the objectivity and consistency of assessor ratings and this will be achieved by ensuring the following areas are covered:

- Familiarity with the assessment criteria and exercises, with particularly detailed knowledge of the exercises they will be assessing.
- Training in the ORCE process (Observe, Record, Classify and Evaluate)
- Training on the skills of giving feedback and report writing (if this is to be part of their role). This should include the use of examples of behaviour demonstrated by the participant on the centre. For a Development Centre, the feedback process will also include a development planning perspective and the observer should be prepared to explore potential developmental activities available to the participant.
- An opportunity to practice these skills as soon as possible after the training (ideally within two months)
- Refresher training if the assessor does not participate regularly.

This training should be supported by a comprehensive Assessor Manual, giving full details of the competencies to be assessed, timetable of the centre, assessment criteria (including behavioural indicators), rating forms, example reports and, for a Development Centre, examples of activities for action planning.

Stage 3 – Implementation

Pilot Run
To ensure the success of the first (and subsequent) “live” centres, it is important to ensure time is scheduled into the planning process for both a pilot run of the centre plus time to make any amendments (if necessary).

The trial run should be set up using real assessors and participants who are as like the real participants as possible. As much feedback should be collected as possible from the pilot run from both the participants and the assessors and their comments should be taken into consideration when reviewing the process.

Running the Assessment or Development Centre
To ensure the smooth running of the centre, the following factors should be taken into consideration:
- Ensure everyone concerned has been briefed appropriately. Open communication is the essence
- Adhere as closely to the timetable as possible
- Observations and comments on each exercise should be keep discrete until the integration session
- The integration session should be conducted immediately after all the exercises have been completed
- Sufficient time must be allowed for the integration to do justice to the amount of data collected
- The integration must be led by the evidence (observed behaviours) gathered over the event and not by ratings (numbers) or previous knowledge; reports and feedback of results must also be expressed in this manner
- An Assessment Centre should be followed promptly by feedback, as soon as decisions have been made
- At a Development Centre, feedback on exercises should be given either during the programme; or as soon after as possible. Action plans should be initiated by the individuals and shared with their line managers.
- Regular follow-ups should be made to ensure action plans have been carried out.
Stage 4 – Post Implementation

Integration Session

Once the centre has been run, it is important to ensure there is sufficient time available to carry out the integration session. There is significant research to show the effectiveness of Assessment/Development Centres is often compromised when this part of the process is rushed.

The outcome of this session will depend on the purpose of running the centre, but the underlying process should be the same. In essence, the aim of this session is to ensure that all the information gathered on each participant is brought together and discussed objectively. The discussion should be based on the behavioural evidence gathered throughout the centre. It is important to ensure weightings of particular competencies or exercises are also taken into consideration at this stage and any selection decisions and identification of strengths and development needs should be derived on the basis of this evidence.

If more than one centre is being undertaken, it is important to ensure that there is consistency of assessment – this can be achieved by creating clearly defined standards of performance against which to assess individuals. It can also prove to be useful for the Chair of the integration session to be present on each centre, as this can again increase consistency of assessment.

It is important to ensure sufficient time is available for these discussions. Integration into the late evening should be avoided if at all possible as tiredness could result in insufficient consideration being given to those discussed last. The discussion of the first participant can take over an hour, although the process typically becomes more efficient as the process continues.

As was mentioned above, the final output of this session will depend on the purpose of running the centre. For an Assessment Centre, the selection decision will typically be reduced to a single rating, either numerical or descriptive, with supporting behavioural evidence for each criterion produced to enable meaningful feedback to the candidates. For a Development Centre, the output is typically more detailed, with behavioural evidence being generated for each of the competencies being assessed. This evidence should then be used to focus the discussion for the development planning session.

Below is an example integration matrix for one participant. The numbers within the matrix represent ratings that have been given for that participant’s performance, in a particular exercise, for a given competency-based on the behavioural criteria. In this example a rating of 1 implies the participant has a strong development need, whereas a 5 implies the participant is very strong in that area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CBI</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Role Play</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Ability Tests</th>
<th>Personality questionnaire</th>
<th>Overall</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Achieving results</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating and influencing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
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<td>Planning and organising</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem solving and analysis</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Review and validation

Once an Assessment or Development Centre has been successfully implemented, it is vital to ensure the process is reviewed to ensure that standards are being maintained and that the different components are working in the intended way.

Analysis should be conducted on the following areas through qualitative content analysis, statistical analysis, attitude surveys and empirical validation studies:

- Quality of assessor evidence
- Balance of input from the individual exercises
- Use of rating scales
- Perception of participants of the fairness and relevance of the procedure
- Empirical validity of the centre.

In addition it is possible to benchmark participants ratings to those of other organisations. This provides an essential, external perspective.

8. Use of Technology

Advances in technology have increased the options for the delivery of assessment procedures. Organisations operating in a global field now have the opportunity, by making full use of technological advances, to reduce the necessity for requiring assessors and participants to meet up in one location. This cannot only save travel time but also the expenses involved in international travel.

To date, the use of virtual Assessment or Development Centres is still in its infancy, but the potential within this field is currently being explored. The key requirements for an organisation wishing to make use of this approach are:

- A reliable and efficient technology infrastructure
- Quiet and standardised environmental conditions for the participants
- Monitoring procedures to ensure the participant is who they say they are and that they are working alone.

The main area of concern with the use of technology within the traditional Assessment Centre design is the use of the group exercise. A number of options are potentially available along this route and it is down to the organisation to decide which option will best suit their needs. The alternatives include:

- Carrying out a group exercise by, for example, the use of a video-conferencing process
- Bringing the candidates together for only those exercises requiring face-to-face contact
- Consideration of alternative ways of assessing the behaviours traditionally assessed through the group exercise process.

Other areas in which technology is already being effectively utilised in this field include:

- Screening and sifting for candidates likely to succeed in interview or on an Assessment Centre
- Job analysis and competency profiling
- The administration and presentation of items in, for example, ability tests and personality questionnaires
- Computerised simulations, for example, an electronic in-basket
- The automated scoring of these measures (although this can be more problematic for assessment methods where non-standardised answers are generated, e.g. an in-tray)
- The recording of evidence directly on to a computer/palmtop
- The design of the Assessment or Development Centre timetable
- Report writing
- Assessment/Development Centre management and review (validation).
9. Ethical Considerations

As with any situation where an individual’s performance is to be assessed, there are a number of ethical considerations to be borne in mind:

- The individual should be provided with sufficient information, before attending the centre, to make a decision as to whether or not to attend. This should include:
  - a brief summary of the types of assessment procedures to be used
  - the make-up of the assessor pool
  - the possible outcomes of the centre
  - how the results will be used
  - where the results will be stored and who will have access to this information
  - the feedback procedure
  - practice tests or exercises (if applicable or available) a point of contact for further information.

- Ethical issues should also be taken into consideration when providing feedback to the participants:
  - If the results are to be stored, the Data Protection Act requires all candidates to be given meaningful feedback, if they request it
  - All participants on an Assessment or Development Centre should be offered feedback as part of the process, for a Development Centre this should be built in as part of the process
  - Ideally feedback should be face-to-face, although practical limitations may not always make this a viable option
  - It is recommended that feedback be provided within 4 weeks of the Assessment or Development Centre.
  - The materials should be kept in a secure place and access should only be granted to those authorised or trained to utilise them
  - The participant should be informed of the lifespan of the data. Typically, the information will remain relevant for between 18-24 months
  - Consent should be obtained from the participants if the organisation wants to make use of the data for any other purpose than that which had originally been stated.
10. Diversity and Equal Opportunities

The use of multiple techniques in an Assessment or Development Centre allows the weaknesses of any particular method to be compensated for by the strengths of another, increasing the overall validity and predictive value of the assessment. The multiple assessment approach also compensates for the lack of skill in certain areas, by allowing candidates to show strengths in other areas.

The following points should, however, be considered to ensure the centre is as fair and objective as possible:

- The possible inhibiting effect of being, for example, the only woman or individual from an ethnic minority group. The issue is particularly pertinent in interactive exercises such as a group discussion. The assessors may need to take this into account when evaluating the participant, but on the other hand, this could be a realistic situation. It is good practice to ensure that one of the assessors represents the minority group.

- The relevance of the issues and scenarios of the exercises for all candidates. This is usually covered by careful design of the exercises.

- The varying degree of experience that candidates have of participating in assessment programmes. This is usually covered by providing detailed briefing sessions or documents prior to the event.

- The ability of the observers to judge participants against objective and job-relevant criteria, without allowing their own biases and stereotypes to influence them. This is usually covered by appropriate training of assessors in the skills of observing and evaluating behaviours, as well as by enhancing awareness of personal biases.

- Any background circumstances which may affect a candidate’s performance on exercises, e.g. disabilities, first language. These factors should be taken account of when planning the assessment and interpreting the results.

- Equal opportunities data should be monitored and the relevance of the skills and procedures regularly reviewed.

- Advice on best practice in the use of psychometric tests and testing people with disabilities can be found in the booklets “Best Practice in the Management of Psychometric Tests”, “Guidelines for Testing People with Disabilities” and “Equal Opportunities Guidelines”, available from CEB.
11. Assessment or Development Centres on an International Basis

Multinational organisations are increasingly seeking to co-ordinate the assessment and development of staff across their international offices. The following are some points to consider in designing Assessment and Development Centres with participants from different countries:

- The objectives of the centre
- The acceptability of techniques and activities to different cultures, e.g. psychometric testing, feedback. The whole concept of objective assessment and assessment technology tends to be much less advanced in some countries than in others, with different types of methodology and exercises featuring more commonly in some countries than others
- A number of process issues should be taken into consideration, for example, timekeeping, forms of address, dress code, written and spoken agreements, and timetabling
- The applicability of content/scenarios of exercises; the exercises should be developed by multinational designers and the amount of verbal information should be minimised
- The language capability of the participants should be assessed in advance to ensure they would be able to participate to their full potential on the centre
- Careful consideration should be given to the pre-centre briefing and, if possible, a pre-centre language practice session should be conducted with the group of participants
- More preparation time can be given for exercises where candidates are not working in their first language and consideration should be given to allowing participants to complete some exercises, e.g. written in their own language. Psychometric tests should be completed in the participant’s first language
- Consideration of the language requirements for the role should be borne in mind when selecting the appropriate language in which to assess the individual
- Assessors representing the participant’s countries should be involved, both in terms of culture and language, at all stages of the process
- As with all Assessment or Development Centres, training of assessors is important, particularly in terms of cross-cultural sensitivity
- For a Development Centre, it may be possible to undertake the centre in, for example, English, but then provide feedback to the participant in their first language.

12. A Final Word

While there is strong evidence that multiple assessment procedures generally provide sound, objective data on which to base selection and development decisions, it is important to consider carefully the applicability of the process and, more importantly, the specific programme situation.

Information arising from an Assessment or Development Centre should always be interpreted in context by appropriately trained individuals, and treated as confidential information. Results are normally considered valid for a period of up to two years, but this would depend on the pace at which individuals, jobs and organisations change.

These guidelines should serve as a useful structure on which to base Assessment and Development Centre projects, and against which they can be evaluated. They are not, however, a substitute for formal training in the design and management of assessment and development programmes.
13. Our Services

CEB is committed to high standards in the area of Assessment and Development Centres, which constitutes a very large proportion of our work.

CEB can provide a professional contribution in the following areas:

- Job analysis to define competencies
- Conducting a feasibility study
- Overall design of Assessment and Development Centres
- Development workshops on an in-company basis
- Construction/supply of simulation exercises in many languages
- Training programmes for Assessment/Development Centre organisers and observers
- Providing specialist assessors/facilitators
- Feedback, action planning, coaching, mentoring and on-going development
- Support with restructuring
- Integration of 360° projects
- E-assessment and development technology
- Project management
- Advising on communications
- Review, monitoring and validation
- Diversity and equal opportunities issues
- Setting up and advising on projects with an international basis.

14. Why CEB?

- Through its SHL Talent Measurement Solutions, CEB develops, implements and sell objective assessments so that our customers can recruit better people and develop them more effectively.
- CEB is one of the largest providers of Assessment and Development Centre services in the world (40+ locations with a growing network of distributors and partners, 30+ languages), offering global design and local support.
- We offer a unique range (over 50) of robust, validated diagnostic Assessment and Development Centre exercises and tools, which are updated regularly, e.g. Multiple Assessment Series, Scenarios, Brainstorm, MQ, OPQ, 360, Fastrack.
- Over 25 years of successful Assessment and Development Centre assignments across senior to graduate levels within major corporations, private and public sector organisations, and medium and small sized businesses, both locally and internationally.
- We offer a responsive, flexible and tailored service with an innovative range of approaches such as “e-assessment”, and “Day in the Life” Assessment and Development Centres.
- All of our products and services are grounded in research and science. They identify and predict key behaviours in the workplace that transform people performance.
- We can support clients across the employee lifecycle from recruitment and selection through to development, transition, and succession.
References


