

Assessment Centre as Tools for Competency Development

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The evolution of assessment centre can be traced back to World War II when it was used by the Armed Forces in the form of war Office Selection Board. Soon thereafter, the Civil Services in Britain used it. However, its first industrial application was in the United States by the telephone company AT& T in 1955 and ever since, it has been proliferated all over the US. Estimates indicated that there are 3000 centres in the US whereas in UK recent survey indicated that more than half of the medium sized and large companies have assessment centre exercises.

The assessment centres have gained momentum and have mushroomed in Canada and Australia during the last decade. In India it was introduced in by Mr. Pareek and Rao and at present large number of companies are having it in one form or the other using American, British or indigenous models. The companies running assessment centre are: Ranbaxy, WiproLtd, TISCO, Mahindra & Mahindra, Glaxo SmithKline, GE, ABB, Siemens, Gujarat Heavy Chemicals Ltd, Tata Administrative Services Nortel and many more are in the process of implementing the same.

Assessment Centre: An Introduction

Assessment centre are battery of assessment and situational exercises, which are competency based and are used extensively in various countries for recruitment, appraisals, promotions and human resources development and organisational development. Assessment centre might appear to a be a place but it is not, it is actually an approach or a process .It helps organisations in identifying the most suitable potential candidate for employment and promotion. It focuses on performance against pre determined selection criteria and had the advantage of providing objective information about a range of competencies to the organisation o=for making the right decision. The methodology used in it helps to reduce subjectivity in judgement to which most traditional means of selection are generally prone.

A number of studies about the effectiveness of selection techniques yield that no single method of assessment can achieve a high validity rating whereas a combination of different techniques produce the best results of all. These studies thus throw light on the nature of assessment centre process and on the use of assessment centre, which have developed across the globe over the past decade.

It is therefore, necessary to decide as to what to include in the assessment battery and this largely determines the centre's duration. A typical assessment centre usually involves 1-2 days. It includes a sufficient range of exercises involving challenges tasks in realistic setting, with focus on assessing behaviour in simulated work setting. A balance between individuals and group activities is kept considering the nature of job, target level performance in question for which assessment is to be a carried out.

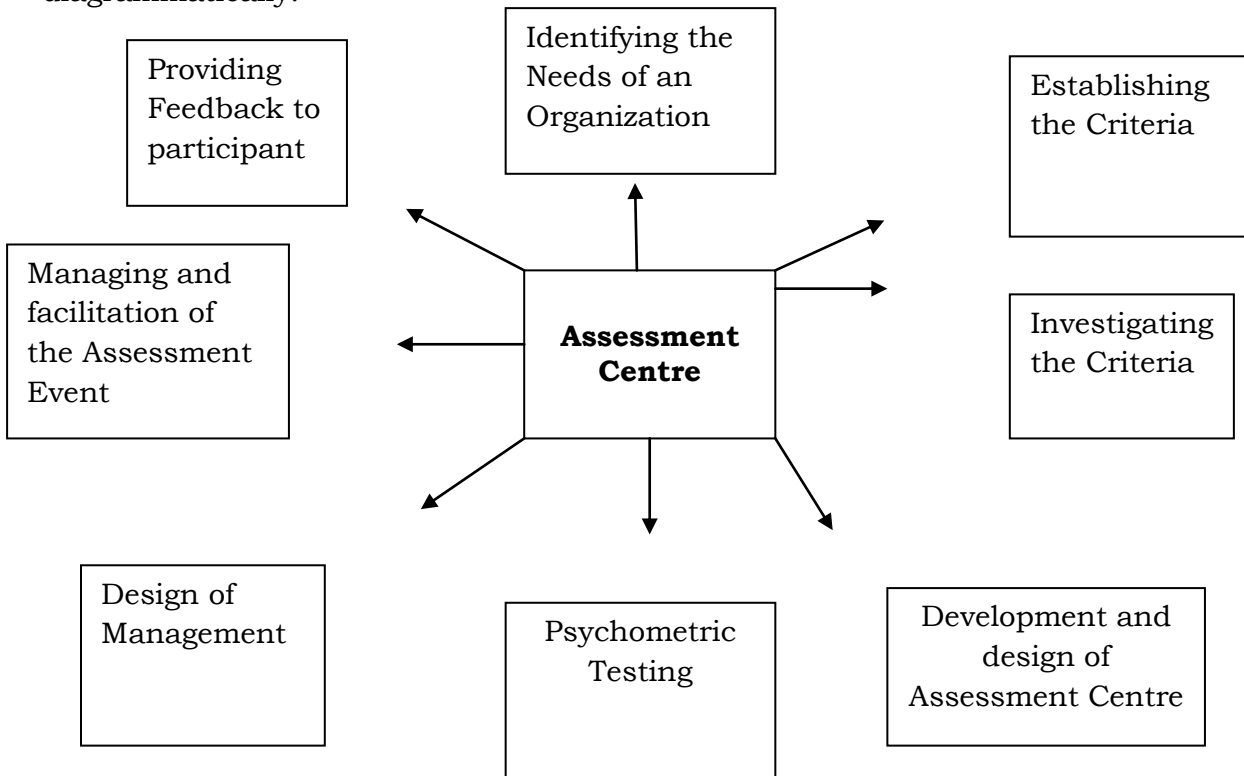
Factors in the Assessment Process

In planning the assessment process, three factors merit consideration:

- a) List of competencies or other qualities to be assessed and the procedure for scoring and rating.
- b) The weightage to be assigned to each element and exercise,

c) The various forms of 'assessments for a competency to ensure consistency of judgements and prevention of any bias

The various steps involved in Assessment/Development Centre have been presented diagrammatically.



Having identified the need for having an assessment centre and also establishment criteria of competencies, weights need to be assigned for various parameters. One can even give equal weight to all. The exercises that are used in the assessment centre include:

- In basket exercises
- Leaderless group discussion
- An assigned leader exercise
- Presentation on a relevant topic relating to the job
- Written report
- Role play exercise
- The assessor prepare formats for objective recording of data
- Psychometric Testing

As assessment centre evaluations are competency based assessment of a candidate's performance, a discussion about competencies will not be out of place here.

Assessment Centre: Future Perspective

Assessment centres have been found to add value to the organisation and are proliferating the world over. Despite being time-consuming and expensive the 'Assessment Centre' is presently the strongest predictor of future job performance if designed and implemented properly. It presents a comprehensive picture of each participant's professional skills required in a job and thereby helps him gain self-knowledge. Experiences of organisations indicate that having gone through assessment centre participants feel that they have been fairly assessed. When it is employed for recruitment; candidates give a positive feedback which sends out a favourable image about the organisation's professionalism.

When it is used for development, participants develop valuable insights into their strengths and areas of improvement.

Considering the trends, assessments and development centre have a bright future as in the globally competition environment, the competitive edge of the organisation will depend on the competency edge of its people.

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