

Assessment Methods:

Development Centres

Benefits of using development centres

Development centres can deliver a range of important benefits:

- Are effective in predicting future job performance because they simulate real work situations
- Activities are designed to give a realistic perspective of a future role
- All candidates are measured objectively against the same capabilities
- Coaching and development activities are tailored according to performance at the centre and individual needs to maximise value
- Feedback is much more detailed and increases self-awareness and can be used by candidates to accelerate and plan for their future development needs
- Are easily adapted to different roles, capabilities and organisational requirements
- Can be effective in the early identification of high potential talent and leadership development needs
- Can be very useful to support organisational planning, targeted training and development, and team-building.

What are development centres? How do they differ from assessment centres?

The term 'development centre' refers to a process. The key difference between development centres and assessment centres is in their purpose. A development centre is used to assess a candidate's capabilities for their next career role (future looking) and is focused on personal and professional development,

whereas the assessment centre is used to assess whether a candidate currently displays the capabilities required for a particular role they have applied for. Development and assessment centres both use a multi-method tailored assessment approach to determine whether a candidate displays a range of capabilities at a pre-determined level. The duration and format will vary depending on the capabilities being assessed. Exercises typically run from ½ day to over 2 days and the exercises can be administered over a series of days rather than in



one sitting. A less time intensive approach is a less 'tiring' experience for candidates.

The development centre process provides an opportunity for organisations to assess how employees would perform in a potential role or type of role based on how they perform in various assessments which simulate and mirror the role and organisational setting. An agency may use development centres for identifying future talent potential and leaders, or training and development needs. Development centres can also be used to support culture change in an organisation by exposing candidates to the need to respond to familiar situations with new types of behaviour.

How does a development centre work?

Assessors will consult with agency subject matter experts on the design of appropriate assessment activities.

Development centres are highly structured in their design, application and procedures and are administered by qualified and experienced assessors who ensure objectivity and consistency in the process. Agency staff can also be invited to observe the development centre process. Each development centre is specifically adapted for the particular role or role family, to assess the candidate's strengths and areas for development against the set of capabilities and levels being assessed. At the end of the process, assessors typically provide a coaching session and provide feedback to help candidates build a picture of the required capability standards along with ideas for maintaining and/or improving themselves in identified areas. Candidates acquire a range of insights, feedback and ideas from the development centre that they can practise and develop in their career.

What are the different types of activities performed at a development centre?

Group activities:

- A group may be asked to resolve a presented issue.
- Leaderless group discussion about an issue.

Group activities commonly measure capabilities such as communicating effectively, people management, working collaboratively, thinking and solving problems.

Case studies:

- Project managers may be asked to plan for the release of a new system or program.
- People managers may be asked to review and provide advice on the transition of an employee returning to work after a period of personal leave.

Case studies may measure the ability to analyse complex data and issues; seek solutions; project plan; and present findings.

In-tray exercises:

- Candidates are asked to assume a particular role as an employee of a fictitious organisation and work through a pile of correspondence in the "in-tray".
- Candidates may interact with role-players taking on the role of team members or customers.

In-tray exercises are commonly used to measure capabilities such as plan and prioritise, written communication, think and solve problems, demonstrate accountability (depending on the role).



Technical skills/knowledge assessments:

- Candidates who are being assessed for development into specialised roles may be required to complete technical knowledge assessments.
- For example, Accounts Clerks may be asked to complete tests measuring accuracy against speed.

These types of exercises can be used to measure different occupational specific capabilities.

Role plays:

- Candidates may be asked to assume a fictitious role and handle a particular work situation.
- Managers may be asked to provide feedback to a sales representative staff member, after viewing a videotape of the sales representative's call with a client, or meet with a same level manager in another section, to gain their agreement on a service delivery strategy.

This type of exercise can be designed to assess a large range of capabilities, including: communicating effectively, commitment to customer service, influencing and negotiation, decision making, people management, thinking and problem solving.

Presentations:

- Candidates may be asked to develop and present on a particular topic. Candidates may be asked to develop the content as 'pre-work' or to develop it as part of the activity at the assessment centre.

Presentations can be useful in assessing relationship and result capabilities, as well as technical knowledge as required.

Assessment and development centres use the same or similar assessment activities (e.g. role play can be administered in both centres). The centres differ in their purpose, how candidates are assessed on activities, the nature of the information that is collected and the feedback provided to candidates. Care should be taken to ensure that all candidates are informed of and understand the nature and purpose of the assessment or development centre and how their information will be used.



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