ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT CENTERS – A TOOL FOR IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL WORKFORCE.

1Ms. Neha R. Tiwari, 2Dr. Umesh R. Dangarwala
1Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce and Business Management, Faculty of Commerce, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda.
2Head, Department of Commerce and Business Management, Faculty of Commerce, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda.

Abstract: It is said that Assessment Centre is said as a location, not an event. Assessment/Development Centers have gained wide recognition as a systematic and rigorous means of identifying behaviour for the purposes of recruitment, selection, promotion and development within the workplace. Competencies are the core aspects of Assessment and Development Centers. Assessment Centers has been a great help to the organizations in recruiting, selecting, developing and assessing the employees. The organization is able to select the best and most competent employee by adopting the tools used in Assessment Centers. This paper highlights the various tools and techniques/exercises adopted by the various firms/organizations in executing Assessment and Development Centers. It incorporates the significance of using ADC techniques and its requirements in the organization. It also focuses on how ADC is conducted in various organizations.

Key words: ADC, Recent Trends in ADC, Tools & Exercises in ADC, Competencies

1.0 INTRODUCTION

What makes your best performers tick? How do you distinguish an applicant’s real potential from his surface behaviors? How do you realign a derailing executive? Psychometric assessments offer a window into an employee’s intrinsic capabilities, enabling you to make the best selection or development decisions. (www.hranexi.com)

An assessment centre is a comprehensive, standardized procedure in which multiple assessment techniques such as situational exercises and job simulation (business games, discussions, reports, and presentations) are used to evaluate employees for a variety of manpower decisions. (Juneja, 2007)

An assessment centre uses a range of evaluation techniques, including role plays, job simulation exercises, interviews and psychometric tests, to create detailed competency insights on participants. (www.hranexi.com).

It is also known as Multi-Method Assessments.

Feedback and results from the Assessment Centers are best used for:

1. Selection: Selecting candidates against the competencies and proficiency levels required for successful performance in specific roles
2. Promotion: Identifying the right candidates for promotion based on higher level competencies
3. Development: Creating long-term development plans that help participants leverage their strengths and address areas of improvement
4. Succession Planning: Identifying successors to be groomed into leadership positions
2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The first assessment centre in Asia was for selecting project leaders for the entrepreneurship development programme in Gujarat (Rao, 1975). Subsequently, efforts were made to introduce it in Larsen and Toubro (Pareek and Rao, 1975). L and T did a lot of work on job profiling but never got to the stage of developing an assessment centre for potential appraisal.

The original purpose of assessment centers (i.e., identification of managerial talent and decision-making for promotion, Bray & Grant, 1966; Thornton & Byham, 1982) is still predominant in public safety organizations.

Ganesh (2004) lists a number of Indian organizations having well defined assessment centres.

Assessment centers allow candidates to demonstrate more of their skills through a number of job relevant situations (Joiner, 1984).

Assessment Centre process was first used sometime between the two world wars. The Treaty of Versailles, which ended the First World War, prevented Germany from rearming and thus the traditional approach to the selection of officers, which was of observing their performance in war or in exercises was denied to them. German psychologists then devised this method which involved a combination of tests, simulations and exercises to identify the potential of officer candidates. (Juneja, 2007)

The British Army used this methodology in the early days of Second World War when they established the War Office Selection Boards (WOSBs), again for the selection of officer candidates. (Juneja, 2007)

It was brought into the private sector only in 1956 after AT&T used it for selection of high potentials for managerial positions. The term was used from the location which was used by AT&T in the United States to assess the management potential of hundreds of their staff. (Juneja, 2007)

“Selection techniques may be combined and applied together at events referred to as assessment centres. Such events may last one to three days during which a group of applicants for a post will undertake a variety of techniques… the general methods used would be group discussions, role plays and simulations, interviews and tests.” (Bratton J. and Gould J., 1999)

The results of the assessment center are of multiple use. On an individual level, the assessment center provides important information for the further personal and professional development of the candidate. (Ingo Heyn, 1999)

3.0 MEANING:

What are Assessment and Development Centers?

- Assessment Centre is a diagnostic tool to identify personnel behaviour for recruitment, selection & promotion.
• Development centre is the use of assessment centre tool to diagnose employee
development needs for effective job performance & career development.
• ADC comprises of simulation exercises & tools to measure defined behavioural
competencies of the participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Centres</th>
<th>Development Centres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selection External Recruitment</td>
<td>Identify Potential High-potential Succession Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Promotion</td>
<td>Diagnostic Define need against existing &amp; New Behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coach &amp; Develop Individual Development plan to address defined needs</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

With the Assessment Centre it is a case of a systematic procedure that permits a many-sided simultaneous judgement of several participants by several assessors under the leadership of a moderator and using various assessments methods.

All assessment centres attempt to assess how competent a person is at present, either in their current role or, more usually, compared to the demands of some future job.

All assessment centres focus on behaviour in two ways. Firstly, what is observed at an assessment centre is behaviour, since what someone says or does cannot be anything else. Secondly, behaviour is the start of the design process since what you are trying to do is assess the behaviours that are important to function well in the prospective job.

4.0 KEY FEATURES OF ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRES

Assessment/Development Centres have a number of key features. They are essentially multiple assessment processes, and there are various ways in which that is so: a group of candidates/participants takes part in a variety of exercises, observed by a team of trained assessors/observers, who evaluate each candidate/participant against a number of pre-determined, job-related behaviours. Decisions (for assessment or development) are then made by pooling shared data. These aspects are described below.

• Multiple candidates/participants

One of the key features of an Assessment/Development Centre is that a number of candidates/participants are brought together for the event (physically or via Information technology

• Combination of methods

The focal point of most Assessment/Development Centres is the use of simulations. The principle of their design is to replicate, so far as is possible, the key aspects of situations that an individual would encounter in the job for which they are being considered. To gain a full understanding of a person’s range of capabilities, it is usually the case that one simulation is insufficient to develop anything like a complete picture.

Some of the various type of simulations and other exercises are shown in the table overleaf.

• Team of assessors/observers
To break out of the difficulties that is associated with the one-on-one interview, used either as a means of selection or in some aspects of performance measurement, it is important to use a team of assessors/observers. Ideally each assessor/observer should be able to observe each participant in at least one of the various situations in which they are asked to perform, to aid objectivity.

The team of assessors/observers all need appropriate training in the behavioural assessment process and in its application to the particular exercises that are used. In addition, wherever possible the trained assessor/observer group should be selected to represent as diverse a pool as possible (in terms of ethnicity, gender and age specifically) – often supplemented by specialists, such as occupational psychologists.

- **Shared data**

Data about candidates/participants is shared between the assessors/observers at the end of the process. In the case of selection, no final decision is made until all the evidence is gathered from observations of candidates in all the various situations and combined into a final rating by consensus following a discussion among assessors or by statistical integration of ratings.

In the case of a development centre, there may be no final score, as the primary objective of the data sharing is to collect information together to feed back to participants on their comparative strengths and weaknesses. Indeed, in some development centres the data is shared with the participants as the centre progresses.

### 5.0 REQUIREMENTS OF ADC

With globalization, the market has become increasingly demanding and competitive. There is a demand for a range of goods and services.

To survive in this competitive environment, organizations need to align their strategic intent in line with the market requirements.

The strategic intent thus shapes the mission statement of the organization, the structure of the organization and the values it follows.

The organization then sets its performance goals according to its strategic intent.

To achieve these performance goals it has become imperative for organizations to have competent people.

ACs help organizations identify and develop these competent people and have thus become the need of the day.

### 6.0 OBJECTIVES OF ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRES

The AC is used to select staff for particular positions in order to establish their potential or as the basis for the drawing up of development plans.

- **AC as a selection instrument:** on the basis of a clearly defined profile, with the aid of several situative exercises, which confront participants with working and decision-making situations from professional everyday life, with the aim of recognising suitability for particular tasks and finding the most suitable applicant.
• AC for potential analysis: exercises are chosen with a view to possible future leadership or expert positions. The aim is to recognise leadership potential or the potential for other high-value jobs.
• AC for development plans: the drawing up of a strengths-weaknesses profile of the participants and the career plans and development measures are the result of this form of AC.

7.0 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF ASSESSMENT CENTRES:
Assessment centres must meet the following given criteria:
• Job Analysis – To understand job challenges and the competencies required for successful execution of the job.
• Predefine competencies - Modelling the competencies, which will be tested during the process.
• Behavioural classification - Behaviours displayed by participants must be classified into meaningful and relevant categories such as dimensions, attributes, characteristics, aptitudes, qualities, skills, abilities, competencies, and knowledge.
• Assessment techniques – These include a number of exercises to test the assesses of their potentials. Each competency is tested through at least 2 exercises for gathering adequate evidence for the presence of particular competence.
• Simulations – The exercises should simulate the job responsibilities as closely as possible to eliminate potential errors in selection.
• Observations – Accurate and unbiased observation is the most critical aspect of an AC.
• Observers – Multiple observers are used to eliminate subjectivity and biases from the process. They are given thorough training in the process prior to participating in the AC.
• Recording Behaviour – A systematic procedure of recording must be used by the assessors for future reference. The recording could be in the form of hand written note, behavioural checklist, audio-video recording etc.
• Reports – Each observer must make a detailed report of his observation before going for the discussion of integration of scores.
• Data Integration – The pooling of information from different assessors is done through statistical techniques.

8.0 USAGE OF ASSESSMENT CENTRES
Various organizations have used the data provided by ACs for a variety of purpose why are listed as below:
• Selection – ACs help organizations in getting the right people in.
• Career development – The identification of the competencies possessed by the individual helps organization decide his career plans.
• **Potential appraisal** – ACs help organizations identify if the person can handle the challenges offered in the next higher position.

• **Identification of high potential managers** – This creates a pool of managerial talents & multifunctional managers that would be available across the business group etc.

• **Succession Planning** – Identifying the right individual for critical positions such as CEO, CFO etc is very important for the success of the organization. ACs reduces the risk of such wrong identification.

• **Allocations of challenging assignments** – ACs provide the organization with the strengths and weaknesses of every participant. This helps the organization in deciding the candidates who would have the necessary abilities to undertake the proposed challenging assignments.

• **Management Development** – ACs provide ample opportunity to its participants to reflect on one’s capabilities and to improve by observing others perform in the AC

• **Identification of training needs** – Assessment centres provide candidates and organization with concrete data on the improvement areas, which can be utilized, for training

• **Identification of a global pool of talented managers** - Adjusting one in the global scenario is a critical requirement of some positions in the organization. ACs helps organizations to identify such managers

• **Strengths & Development areas**: Comprehensive overview of employee’s strengths & development areas using multiple methods than any single method

• **Objective Evaluation**: ADCs are more objective than interviews, which tend to be biased by the interviewer’s interpretations

• **Multiple Assessors & tools**: Allows employees to demonstrate a range of abilities in different situations and evaluates performance using varied ADC tools

• **Standardised**: ADCs are standardised, so every candidate has the same opportunities to demonstrate their skills
## 9.0 TYPICALLY EXERCISES/TOOLS USED IN ASSESSMENT CENTRES

Following are the most widely used exercises in ACs. Every exercise unveils presence/absence of certain competency in the participant. The competencies that are normally evaluated through these different exercises are mentioned in column three.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tools</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Competency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case study interview</td>
<td>Requires candidates to read a large set of information and then answer questions relating to the subject matter</td>
<td>Analytical skills, assimilation of information, prioritize of information, time-management, working under pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency -based interview</td>
<td>Includes personal history questions and problem-solving tasks and scenarios</td>
<td>Analytical skills, business acumen, communication, interpersonal skills, personal attributes, teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facti finding exercise</td>
<td>Includes research and retrieval of information on a given subject or interaction with the interviewer to obtain further information from them</td>
<td>Communication, Professional interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Exercise</td>
<td>Includes problem solving within a committee or a team</td>
<td>Personal assertiveness, teamwork, interpersonal effectiveness, drive for result</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-tray</td>
<td>includes prioritizing documents, drafting replies to letters, and delegating important tasks</td>
<td>Time-management, analytical skills, business acumen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving task</td>
<td>Includes building a structure with limited materials</td>
<td>Analytical skills, creativity, lateral thinking, resourcefulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>Involves 10 to 15 minutes presentation on predetermined topic</td>
<td>Assimilation of information, presentation delivery, working under pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychometric/Personality/Aptitude Tests</td>
<td>Includes a personality questionnaire and/or numerical, verbal, and diagrammatic reasoning tests</td>
<td>Agreeableness, behavioural interaction, conscientiousness, extroversion/introversion, personal assertiveness, teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-play exercise</td>
<td>Involves acting-out a business related situation</td>
<td>Approach to business situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written exercise</td>
<td>Involves acting-out a business related situation</td>
<td>Analytical skills, summarization, written communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“A key component of the assessment centre is the job simulation exercise, which is designed to be an accurate representation of performance in the job itself. The candidate is placed in a situation which they are likely to face if they are selected; examples include in-tray exercises and role-play interviews.” Beardwell I. and Holden L. (1997: 227)

10.0  COMPETENCIES USED IN ADC:

- Competencies are identified behaviours that encompass knowledge, skills & abilities that positively impact the employee and organizations performance
- Used to define a job & can be measured, enhanced & improved through coaching & learning opportunities
- Competencies are the elements the assessors evaluate during ADC
- Sample Competencies used in ADC

11.0  COMPETENCY MAPPING

Competency mapping is a way of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of a worker or organization. It's about identifying a person's job skills and strengths in areas like teamwork, leadership, and large organizations may use some form of this technique to understand how to best use each worker or how to combine the strengths of different employees to produce the highest quality work. Individuals may also find that this type of assessment can help them prepare for a career change or advance in a specific job field.

12.0  METHODOLOGY TO CONDUCT ASSESSMENT CENTRE:

12.1  PRE-PLANNING

- Identify need: Identify organization’s need for implementing ADC & establish commitment amongst relevant stakeholders for implementation
- Objectives: Establish clear objectives for the process.

12.2  DEVELOP

- Competencies: Identify organization or job specific competencies to evaluate participants
- ADC Techniques Devise: ADC techniques to measure competencies such as role plays, business games etc.
- Design ADC: Construct ADC by preparing formats for assessment, timetable & logistics
- Training: Identify & provide training to assessors, facilitators for smooth implementation

12.3  IMPLEMENT

Conduct Centre: Run ADC with participants
Feedback & Reports: Provide feedback & reports for each ADC participant
Facilitate in formulating Individual Development Plan
13.0 RECENT TRENDS IN ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRES

In recent trends, assessment and development centres have got a new outlook. Initially it was only meant for selection of top management people, but now the role has been expanded and the practicing of ADC has been noticed in various organizations for employees working in various positions.

Following are few companies who have adopted Assessment centres for different positions in their organizations:

**L’Oréal** opened a new logistics hub, and they knew that recruiting and integrating new Logistic Organisers would be essential for its success and sustained growth. They wanted to make sure they could identify the best applicants and also aid the development of all candidates; internal and external, whether they are recruited or not. L’Oreal implemented assessment centres as they saw them as a great way to maintain employee motivation and at the same time prepare for the future by identifying high potentials.

**Sage**, being a software publisher, technical skills are the main criterion when recruiting and developing their managers. The managers therefore are highly focused on the technical aspects of their jobs, and sometimes this means they neglect the managerial side of their role. This can impact on the motivation, commitment and performance of the teams working under them, so they needed to find a way to strengthen their managerial capabilities.

They wanted to ensure that all their managers are committed to the company vision, so they refined their recruitment process and set up coaching programs for existing staff. Assessment centres were the most relevant approach as they allowed managers to fully demonstrate their competencies and their potential to manage. Their assessment centres gave us a precise and reliable evaluation of the participants’ competencies.

**Asean Brown Boveri**

Assessment Development Centre is used in ABB for the selection of Management Trainee (Management Trainees are the fresh Engineering & B.E graduates who are recruited and selected for one year).

**Bombardier**

Canada-based Bombardier Inc’s India arm, Bombardier Transportation India Ltd (BTI), is looking at sourcing integrated coaches as well as components and systems from the country to projects abroad. Its uses ADC technique for Management Trainees as well as employees working at Middle and Top Level.

**Iceberg Model of Behavioural Drivers**, where multi-prong techniques are used to generate a complete assessment on each person – his outward behaviours and their underlying traits, motives, and values.

In this, an extensive research is conducted at client sites to contextualize the design of an assessment centre to their business environments. The assessment centres can be delivered in traditional as well as virtual settings.
**SAMPLE REPORT**

**Name of Participant:**

Age: 
Qualification: 
Years of Exp: 
LBU / Function: 
Location: 
Date of Assessment: 

**Summary of Competencies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No</th>
<th>Competencies</th>
<th>LGD*</th>
<th>Business Game</th>
<th>Presentation Exercise</th>
<th>BEI**</th>
<th>Individual Avg.</th>
<th>Group Avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Result orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Analytical Ability and Decision Making</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interpersonal skills and team work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Execution skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Initiative and Drive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Leaderless Group Discussion  **Behaviour Event Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Parameters</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Parameters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Did not demonstrate this competency No evidence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fair evidence of the competency. Showed this quite frequently (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0% demonstration of competency)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rarely exhibited this quality Low evidence. (20%)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>High evidence of the competency. Exhibited most of the time. (80%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Showed this occasionally (40%)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Extremely high evidence of the competency (nearly 100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Exhibited this competency adequately (50%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14.0 CONCLUSION:

Knowledge of the potential of applicants is particularly important when filling management positions. Selection methods such as interviews, test procedures and studying the applicant's documents are insufficient to filter the most suitable person for a leading position from a large number of candidates. Therefore, Assessment and Development Centres are of large help for Multi-Methods Assessments.

An organization can easily equip best and most competent candidate/employee by using the tools/techniques and exercises used in Assessment and Development Centres.

In this highly competitive world, with large number of potential candidates available, Assessment Centres help to get the best choice for the organizations.

The systematic methods conducted for assessment and development centres helps in finding the real potential of the candidates/employees and helps him/her to achieve his/her desired positions.

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