Design, Implementation and Evaluation of

Assessment and Development Centres

Best Practice Guidelines

Psychological Testing Centre
www.psychtesting.org.uk

Contents

1.   Development of Guidance

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2.   Overview

1. Introduction

Assessment/development centres 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.

Good assessment/development centres provide the following benefits:

- Highly relevant/observable and comprehensive information.
- Effective decision-making, including workforce planning.
- Added fairness from multiple judgements (versus single judgements).
- An enhanced image of the organisation among participants.
- An effective preview of the role or job level.
- Developmental payoffs to candidates/participants arising from self-insight obtained.
- Developmental payoffs to assessors/observers arising from involvement in the process.
- A legally defensible selection system.
- A method of assessment that predicts work performance.

2. Aim and Intended Audience of Guidelines

These guidelines aim to provide up-to-date, best practice guidance, to human resource managers, occupational psychologists and other specialists, to help establish the effective design, implementation and evaluation of assessment and development centres. A key reference used to assist in the design of these guidelines was the United States *Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations* (2000).

Note on terminology

The guidelines encompass both **assessment centres** and **development centres**. Whilst the purpose and design of assessment centres will differ from development centres, their constituent features have broad similarity.

3. What are Assessment/Development Centres?

1. Key Features of Assessment/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 predetermined, 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 – see later section on the impact of 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 individuals 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 types of simulations and other exercises are shown in the table below.

Team of assessors/observers

To break out of the difficulties that are 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

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.

2. Criteria for Defining Assessment/Development Centres

It is difficult to be adamant about exactly what constitutes an assessment centre and even more so when it comes to the variety of different designs that are regarded as a development centre. However, the following criteria (or standards) can be seen to qualify an event as an assessment/development centre:

- There should be job analysis that defines a set of competencies to be measured and clearly demonstrates the link between them and effective performance in the target job.
- To ensure that a competency is measured in a reliable fashion across the centre it is usual to duplicate measurement of each competency (through different exercises).
- There are usually at least two simulations, amongst the material that confronts candidates/participants.
- There should be clear separation of the component parts into discrete exercises.
- There are assessors/observers who are trained in the Observe, Record, Classify and Evaluate (**ORCE**) process, and its application in the particular simulations that are used.
- Assessors/observers complete their evaluations independently, including any report form before the integration (or **wash-up**) session.
- There should be a full integration session involving assessors/observers to summarise and evaluate the behavioural evidence obtained.
- Feedback should be offered to candidates/participants to support development.
- There should be a clear written and published statement of the intent of the centre, how data will be stored, by whom and rights of access to that data by any individual.
- There should be a statement of the limits of the relevance of the centre overall and/or the limits for a particular exercise.

3. Related Processes

A number of assessment/development events share some characteristics with assessment/development centres. These include events where no simulations are used, only interviews, or there is only a single assessor. These guidelines are likely to contain much that is relevant for these processes but it is important to consider each case individually. The assessment/development centre process is designed to maximise objectivity and accuracy. Processes which deviate from it are often less effective and more prone to error as a result.

4. Distinguishing between Assessment and Development Centres

Whilst many organisations use hybrid models it is helpful to clarify the factors that distinguish between assessment and development centres:

- Assessment centres are constructed principally for selection, recruitment, fast tracking and promotion – development centres principally reflect developmental objectives relating to identification of potential and training needs.
- Development centres, unlike most assessment centres, are not pass/fail events.
- Development centres are likely to be longer and higher cost – especially considering feedback and subsequent developmental activities
- Ownership of assessment centre data rests principally with the organisation – the development centre participant has more ownership/access.
- Feedback and development always occurs during or at the conclusion of development centres – the assessment centre does not include development activities, but the results may be used to initiate them subsequently.

5. When Assessment and Development Centres may not be the Correct Organisational Option

An assessment or development centre may not necessarily offer the organisation the most appropriate response to recruitment, selection, promotion or development issues. Such occasions could potentially (though not always) include:

- When an alternative approach clearly offers a cost effective and valid approach.
- When seeking to select more junior staff or staff on a short-term contract.
- When there is insufficient time to undertake all necessary stages of a centre implementation (see next section).
- When there is little or no managerial commitment to the centre process or outcomes.

4. Implementing an Assessment/ Development Centre

Overview of the Stages for Implementing an Assessment/Development Centre

There are a number of stages to implementing assessment/development centres, as shown. These areas are developed further within these guidelines.

Stage 1: Pre-planning	
Identify need	Establish an organisational (or departmental/functional) need for implementing the process.
Commitment	Establish a commitment amongst relevant stakeholders (e.g. board members, managers, potential participants/assessors) for implementation of the process.
Objectives	Establish clear objectives for the process – e.g. assessment, selection, promotion or development.
Establish policy	Initiate an organisational policy for the assessment/development centres.
Stage 2: Development of Process	
Nominate designer	The designer should have appropriate training and competence for this role.
Conduct job analysis	Using rigorous job analysis techniques, formulate a clear set of competencies/behavioural indicators.
Identify simulations	Using the job analysis outcomes, and further investigation, identify and devise appropriate exercises that simulate key elements of the target job/organisational level.
Design process	Construct the centre integrating a number of exercises to measure the range of defined competencies.
Design format	Prepare the format, timetable and logistics for the centre process.
Training	Design and implement the training to be provided to assessors/ observers, facilitators, role players involved in the process.
Stage 3: Implementation	
Pilot/refinement	If possible, pilot centre, on a relevant pool of individuals, to ensure the components operate effectively, fairly and the process as a whole operates according to the timetable.
Run centres	Run the centre with candidates/participants, including on-going quality checking.

5. Impact of Information Technology

1. Overview

Technology, the Internet and other advances are challenging the way that assessment/development centres are performed.

Key applications of information technology are to manage the *administrative burden of designing and running* these events, to *automate the presentation of items* to the candidate/participant and to *automate the scoring* once the candidate/participant has responded. In using technology in the assessment/development centre process the following should be considered:

● Whether computers are used to ease the administrative burden or as a medium for the delivery of exercises the same quality and ethical criteria must apply to the process and content as for traditional methods.

● In using computers to administer exercises a better replication of the 21st Century work environment may be attained and enhanced **face validity**, but it is important that the system does not place demands on candidates which affect their ability to demonstrate their competence, e.g. a requirement for knowledge of the functioning of a specific piece of software.

● Automated scoring mechanisms have advantages in terms of speed and reliability, so far as routine, frequently occurring or mainly predictable responses are concerned. However, it is important to validate the effectiveness of any automated scoring procedures and particularly confirm their ability to deal appropriately with unusual but valid responses.

● Scoring support systems also exist which leave the assessor to assign scores but provide assistance such as displaying the appropriate elements of the candidate's response, scoring guidelines, example scores or adding up the behaviour check list items ticked. These can aid assessors but should not be used in place of training.

The following sections explore the use of technology in more depth.

2. Specific Issues on Using Information Technology
Job analysis

There are a number of computer enhanced job analysis, competency profiling and competency definition systems available commercially.

They have potential advantages over more conventional, interview-based job analysis techniques:

- They can support a balanced view of the job and help avoid omissions by providing a well researched and comprehensive set of behaviours or other elements on which to base the job analysis.
- They may make prioritisation of the competencies more effective. The computer can be instructed to force the respondent to choose which competencies are essential, rather than merely desirable.
- They enable electronic data collection, and this reduces the administrative burden of wide scale sampling to large numbers of respondents.
- They save the data in electronic format, which is easier to store and recover.
- However effective the technology, the quality of the job analysis results will depend largely on the respondents' degree of understanding of the job.

Simulations – computer administration

Computers are increasingly used in their multi-media capacity to *schedule, present and administer the simulations*. A number of exercises lend themselves in the modern era to being administered by computer. It may make them more face valid to candidates and also reduce the administrative burden for the organisation. As with all such interventions, the psychometric content of the exercises must be maintained irrespective of the medium in which they are presented. They should always be:

- Relevant to the content of the jobs;
- Simple to understand;
- Fair to all groups;
- Able to predict future performance.

Recording candidate/participant evidence

Assessors/observers may benefit from using technology in their own, conventional assessment process. Behavioural checklists and note pads on palmtop computers may save a significant amount of redrafting in the assessment and integration process.

Assessment of candidate/participant responses

Computers have the capability to be extremely good at some aspects of the assessment process in terms of evaluating candidate/participant responses, as long as:

- The candidate/participant's responses are entered in a way that the computer can interpret.

- There are only a certain number of options available to the candidate/participant, all of which can realistically be predetermined in advance. Where judgement is involved the programming load increases dramatically and many of the advantages are lost.

Report writing

Report writing from assessment/development centres for feedback or decision-making purposes is an extremely time consuming and resource hungry activity. Computer-based expert systems, behavioural statement checklists and other labour saving devices are all ways of reducing the task to manageable proportions. As with other aspects of the process, care must be taken to ensure that such short cuts do not miss out on the rich details that make development centres especially work so well. Ideally the reports should be used in combination with one-to-one feedback discussion and should be validated with both typical and unusual score profiles to ensure their output is appropriate.

3. 'Virtual' Assessment/Development Centres

The virtual assessment/development centre in which candidates/participants operate remotely through technology is still in its infancy. At its core is the concept that for many of the components of an assessment/development centre, there is no particular requirement for all candidates/participants to be in a single location. All that is really required is for them to have:

- Good technology infrastructure that allows them to communicate with the assessors/observers and perhaps each other in a seamless manner, in real-time.
- Quiet, standardised environmental conditions.
- Relevant levels of security (are the people working alone etc.).
- Good logistical organisation and a willingness to be flexible in the hours that the centre runs.

With these components one can interview, conduct most simulations, score and provide feedback to candidates remotely.

4. Potential problems with New Technology

Balanced against the benefits described above are potential problems:

- Candidates/participants may prefer more face to face interaction.
- The 'social process' of each side assessing each other would be lessened through technology.
- An impersonal image of the organisation could be conveyed.
- Some processes (such as group exercises) do not lend themselves readily to technology.
- The 'psychometric' properties of some elements may need further investigation.

6. Training Issues In Assessment/ Development Centres

1. Training Focus – Roles to be Considered

A *number of roles* need to be considered in terms of training requirements for assessment/development centres. The key roles are as follows:

- Assessors/observers;
- Facilitators;
- Role players;
- Designers.

These are not necessarily distinct in practice, for example an assessor/ observer may also function as a role player, but separate training is required for each role undertaken.

Assessors/observers

Assessors/observers are those charged with evaluating the behaviour demonstrated in the exercises. Training of assessors/observers needs to take account of the following:

- Assessment/development centre principles;
- Specific materials to be used;
- Practical work;
- Skills decay;
- Feedback;
- The organisational context in which the centre is to operate;
- Equal opportunities issues in assessment;
- Confidentiality.

Assessors/observers need an understanding of the *basic principles* that underlie assessment/development centres as well as the mechanics of centre operations and current policy and standards. A clear focus of their training should be familiarisation with the exercises and materials to be used and the relevant competencies for the particular assessment/ development centres with which they are to operate. Should they work in a different centre they will require *further training* if it contains new exercises or activities not previously addressed. (If the exercises are very similar then briefing in the form of a 'walk through' of the new materials may be sufficient).

Assessor/observer training will typically last at least two days and be largely interactive. Some of this time may, however, be fulfilled by pre-work e.g. completing an in-tray or analysis exercise in advance. If possible, assessors/observers should carry out their role in an assessment/development centre within two months of their training or else undertake refresher training. Any assessor/observer who has not assessed for a year should also undertake refresher training.

Facilitators

Facilitators have the task of managing the centre process operationally i.e. on the day or days when the centre is run. This will involve two main roles (separate people may fulfil these two roles):

- Quality control;
- Timetabling/venue management.

They need to understand questions of *standards* and be able to establish and maintain these. This includes the matters of principle and good practice as set out in these guidelines and standards applicable to the particular centre or centres in which they are to be involved. The latter includes matters such as whether the centre is to function as a distinct hurdle for candidates, so that some might be deemed to have failed it, or alternatively if it is to operate as an information source feeding into a final decision-making process.

Facilitators also need to be able to *timetable* an assessment/development centre to ensure smooth running. Although the timetable may be set by the assessment/development centre designer, there will sometimes be a need to make adjustments on the spot to deal with contingencies. These could arise in the case of late arrivals, no shows, exercise overruns or other unplanned events such as major interruptions through fire alerts.

Facilitators also may need to be trained in *venue management* including room allocation and layout and liaison with permanent venue staff on catering and other arrangements. Facilitator training is likely to require at least one further day in addition to that for assessors/observers. The availability of appropriate facilities to maintain the security and confidentiality of materials would also be the responsibility of the facilitator.

Role players

Role players are those who *interact with participants so as to generate behaviour* to be assessed. This is often done on a one-to-one basis with a separate assessor/observer present. Role players are trained to understand the overall process in general terms and

their part in it in helping to elicit behaviour. They must be familiar with the particular material of the exercise and the role in which they operate.

They also need to be trained in how far to adhere to the *prepared 'script'* and where they are expected to use discretion, for example in following through a novel line of discussion raised by a participant. Their training should include a process of checking for consistency of standards. This should be subject to periodic review to ensure that these standards are maintained. Where debriefing of role players is to be used to generate supplementary evidence e.g. on their version of what had been agreed, they are to be trained so as to confine themselves to delivering the information requested rather than making generally discursive comments about a participant.

Designers

Assessment/development centre designers are those who put together the working plan for and specify the *content of the centre* – often this will be an occupational psychologist. Designers' training should include the following:

- Approaches to job analysis;
- Selecting appropriate exercises;
- Timetabling the assessment centre;
- Exercise writing.

In practice for some assessment/development centres *job analysis* will have been undertaken as a separate activity, which may support other initiatives such as performance management. In some assessment/development centres, too, all exercises will be drawn from external publishers, or commissioned from authors separate from the staff otherwise involved in the centre. In these cases the designers will have a reduced task, but should still be trained to understand the principles of job analysis and exercise writing respectively.

Job analysis training should enable designers to identify a core set of competencies for any role which will be fundamental for effective performance. It should cover a sufficient range of techniques to allow rich and comprehensive information about a job to be elicited. This might include some or all of the following approaches:

- Questionnaires;
- Focus groups;
- Repertory grid technique;
- Critical incident technique;
- Content-analytic methods;
- Visionary interviews.

7. Decision-Making with Assessment/ Development Centre Information

1. Making Decision Judgements

The output of the decision-making process depends on the objectives of the centre. Where the emphasis is on a decision to fill a vacancy then the output usually boils down to a single rating (either numerical or a descriptive category) and a recommendation about each candidate (employ, promote, reject etc.). If feedback is to be provided to candidates then this is usually provided in the form of their personal performance on each criterion supported by the behavioural evidence; though an overall rating may be provided.

A range of issues arise in terms of best practice decision making:

Assessment centres – decision-making

- *In assessment centres* (as opposed to development centres), after all the data are classified and evaluated from all the instruments, a decision then has to be taken as to whether the candidate has been successful. This is usually done at a wash-up/decision-making session following the assessment centre, where the assessment centre criteria ratings of each candidate are considered. It is important that assessors do not confer before the wash-up so that their judgements remain independent. The relative weightings of the criteria should be based on the job analysis or career direction and take into account such factors as their importance, frequency and trainability. It is then necessary to use the weightings of the criteria, usually by applying some form of algorithmic or scoring process, to make the decision. This approach can be coupled with the application of minimum acceptable ratings for each criterion, based on the job analysis findings.

- Sometimes an assessment centre may be part of a *larger process* where different assessors are using the same assessment centre design with independent groups of candidates, or in different locations or at different times. In this situation, it is essential to have very clear definitions of standards to ensure that the process is being applied consistently. One way of helping to maintain these standards is for some assessors to be common from one centre to another, or alternatively to have a team of quality checkers who visit different centres to review standards.

- Where an assessment centre has used a team of assessors with a *single cohort* of candidates, then the focus will be on these particular individuals, and their performance can be compared directly against one another. Consistency of standards can thus be finely tuned to take into account those specific individuals and their likely later job performance, based on the job analysis profile.

- The *facilitator* responsible for the assessment centre normally chairs the wash-up session (though chairing responsibility is often dependent on the seniority of the assessors). Typically, participants are taken in turn and their performance on each criterion is discussed and assessed by all those who have made observations. Using the job analysis data the team should arrive at a consensus decision clearly supported by evidence from the exercises.

- Although, more commonly, wash-up sessions are structured around the *criteria/competencies* being assessed, it is possible to look at performance on an exercise by exercise basis. Here, the emphasis is based on the performance in a particular situation rather than each criterion being considered across all the relevant exercises. This approach views the exercise (task) as being a particular set of circumstances that may not apply in a different situation.

- Statistical combinations of individual assessors' ratings are sometimes used instead of consensus decision making, or even to replace the wash-up session entirely. Research suggests that this is equally as valid an approach; however the wash-up session has additional benefits such as maintaining a more standardised approach among assessors and challenging inappropriate ratings. Statistical decision systems should at least be supported by strong content validation and if possible criterion related validity. If such a system is automated and makes final selection decisions, candidates have the right under the Data Protection Act (1998) to receive an explanation of the rationale behind the system.

Development centres – decision-making

- *In development centres*, where the output emphasis is on development then the focus is much broader and each participant is provided with *data on their performance on each criterion* along with the behavioural evidence to support this. Observers then work with the participant to produce some plan of action to develop key areas that have been agreed as ones the participant would like to improve.

- In some development centres this process of interaction and feedback happens during the centre, giving the participant a chance to improve their performance during the process and after some initial feedback. The behavioural evidence cited in feedback is nearly always presented *orally*. Sometimes this will be supported by summary notes and sometimes by a more detailed written report.

2. Using Other Information (from sources other than the Centre)

Strategies for Integrating Other Information

Decision making in assessment and development centres is typically based only on evidence collected within the centre. There are clearly good reasons for doing this, such as: avoidance of differing standards that may be used in the workplace, over-positive/ negative assessments by the candidates/participants' line manager, prejudice and fixed opinions, work design limitations such as not having the opportunity to demonstrate certain behaviours, etc.

However there are occasions when it is appropriate to include external information in the decision making or rating process. Each case needs to be considered on its merits, bearing in mind the following points:

External information can be integrated in reaching final centre ratings if data

- Exists for all participants;
- Can be mapped against the competency dimensions used in the centre;
- Has been collected with care to ensure validity.

A clear framework for integrating external data should be established whether this is part of, or separate from, the centre rating process. This will depend on the objectives of the centre. For example in development centres, the main focus of integration is often the construction of action plans for the participant to develop their skills. These action plans need to take into account the current work performance and situation of the participant.

If external information is considered outside the assessment centre decision process, this may occur at an entirely separate meeting or may take place immediately following the wash-up/decision-making session for the centre.

8. Ethical/Professional and Legal Considerations

1. Ensuring Ethical and Professional Issues are considered

Ethical, professional and legal issues should be identified and addressed in the design, implementation and review of any centre. A range of ethical and professional considerations are discussed below. Relevant legal considerations include equality and data protection legislation for all centres. Different employment acts will be relevant depending on the purpose of the centre (e.g. promotion or redundancy) and the type of participants (e.g. internal or external).

2. Candidate/Participant Issues

Candidate/participant information – pre-centre

The information provided to the candidate/participant should place him/her in a position to decide whether or not to attend the assessment/development centre. If participation in the centre is part of their condition of employment, participants have a right to be fully informed of the purpose of the centre and why they are attending.

Ideally the communication should take place at least 2–3 weeks before the centre, including:

- General content of the assessment /development centre – a broad overview of the types of tests or simulations included.
- General information on the assessor/observer staff including composition, the training they have undertaken and their role in the assessment and decision making process.
- Possible outcomes of the assessment/development centre, how the assessment/development centre results will be used and for what period of time the results will be stored.
- When and what kind of feedback will be given to the candidates/participants and by whom.
- Who will have access to the assessment/development centre reports and under what conditions?
- Practice information or sessions relating to aptitude tests – perhaps including relevant internet sites for practice.

- Points of contact for further information and for candidates/participants to discuss any special needs.

Feedback to candidate/participant

A number of issues link to best practice provision of feedback:

- If the results have been stored there is a legal requirement through the Data Protection Act, to give candidates/participants meaningful feedback, should they request it.
- All candidates/participants should be offered feedback on their performance at an assessment/development centre and be informed of any recommendations made.
- In development centres feedback would automatically be given as part of the process.
- Ideally feedback should be provided 'face-to-face', particularly for internal candidates; for external candidates, it is likely to be both practical and more convenient to offer telephone feedback and/or a written feedback summary. The involvement of line manager input may be valuable to offer support in the workplace to address identified developmental needs.
- It is recommended that feedback should be provided promptly after an assessment process (ideally within 4 weeks).
- Feedback should at a minimum cover key themes emerging from the assessment/ development centre (ideally structured by competencies), the outcome of the process and reasons why the candidate/participant was not selected (if applicable).

3. Use of Materials and Data

Access to materials

It is important that control is maintained in terms of access to the various assessment/ development centre materials (exercises, assessor/observer guidelines, etc.). All materials should be kept secure under lock and key. Access to material should only be open to those authorised/trained to utilise those materials.

Life span of data

The life span of data arising from the assessment/development process will be dependent on what if any development takes place, either naturally in the job or through more specific intervention.

Assessment data is generally considered to be relevant for a period of 12–24 months (though this could certainly be longer). After this period it may be appropriate to allow candidates/participants to re-sit processes where necessary.

9.   Monitoring of Outcomes

Reviewing Centre Outcomes

Outcomes arising from assessment/development centres should be monitored. The regularity of reviews should be planned mindful of assessment frequency and volume, and review of the process should take place periodically. Planning for monitoring, reviewing and validating the success of an assessment or development centre should form a fundamental stage of the initial phases of such a project.

Issues in monitoring include:
- Initial review;
- Adequacy of content coverage;
- Equalities/diversity;
- Data gathering and statistical evaluation.

Initial review

The initial review of the assessment/development centre should examine whether it appears to be *serving its purpose*. Questions here include whether the exercises bear any resemblance to work situations, if they conform to organisational standards and if the assessors/observers are familiar with and are operating to the ORCE process. An independent quality control inspection of a centre in operation is recommended.

Adequacy of content coverage

Adequacy of content coverage should be examined first at the level of the *basic design* of the centre to see that the intention has been to cover each competency more than once and in different settings. It is then necessary to establish that *in practice* the centre has been able to fulfil the intention of the design and reveal the competencies as intended. Subsequent inspection of records will reveal competency gaps or otherwise in the exercise design and trends in extreme or 'no evidence' ratings being awarded frequently.

Design considerations also come into play here, such as the centre timings. The *time allowed* for each individual exercise, for assessor/observers to

carry out their evaluations post-exercise, and for the integrations discussion may all need some adjustment to maintain standards. Simulation exercises need to be reviewed to ensure they remain up-to-date.

Equalities/diversity

Assessment/development centres are predicated on the notion of providing *objective, that is accurate, information.* This means that discriminations made in the centre should be on the basis of demonstrated competency rather than on other grounds. Differential performance or scores associated with membership of a particular ethnic, gender or other group should always be investigated further. If this does not reflect real differences in performance potential on the job, it could well lead to illegal *indirect discrimination* under the law.

Performance at the centre overall and in the different exercises should be tracked against sub-group membership. For large groups of participants and centres that are used over long periods, statistical analysis should be undertaken. Whatever the numbers passing through the centre, immediate qualitative review of procedures should be initiated whenever group differences are suspected. This should review the design and implementation of the centre for potential biasing factors such as:

- Overemphasis of a characteristic found less frequently in one gender or ethnic group, e.g. excessive use of competitive exercises such as assigned role discussion groups could discriminate against people from cultures where overt competitiveness is less socially acceptable.
- The mix of characters depicted in exercises should be representative of the diversity of participants in the centre and among the organisation and its customers.
- Conscious or unconscious bias or prejudice among observers or failure to challenge bias by the centre facilitator or other assessors.
- Poor coverage of equality issues in training.
- Failure to make appropriate adjustments for candidates with disabilities.

If candidates/participants represent a mix of internal and external applicants, consideration needs to be given to any prior relevant experience of the internal applicants and the implications of existing knowledge about the candidates/participants among the assessors/observers.

Data gathering and statistical evaluation

Effective scientific evaluations of assessment or development centres start from clear articulation of the centre objectives. This will, in turn, aid in the production of empirical evidence for the **validity** of the assessment centre – in other words did the centre measure what it intended to measure.

Those responsible for evaluating and validating assessment and development centres should apply the following minimum standards:

- Procedures should be implemented in order to ensure the efficient and accurate gathering of data.
- Evaluation should as much as possible be rigorous and scientific in approach, and might include qualitative content analysis, statistical analysis and candidate/assessor attitude surveys. In addition a key emphasis is to undertake empirical validation studies wherever possible (including matching assessment outcomes to performance outcomes).

10. Organisational Policy Statement – Example Design

Developing a Policy

Integration of assessment and development centres within the organisation's *human resource strategy* is likely to enhance the overall effectiveness of the centres – this integration can be clarified within an organisational policy. The sections of this policy may reflect the following:

Purpose

The reasons *why the organisation is using assessment/development centres* should be identified. These could include any combination of external or internal selection, placement and promotion, diagnosis of development needs in the current role, identification of potential, succession planning or skills auditing. This could also include a statement of the intended benefits to the organisation and the candidates/participants.

Candidates/participants

The *target population* from which *candidates/participants* are drawn should be specified. The means by which candidates/participants are selected from this population should be described. It should also be made clear whether participation is voluntary or compulsory. Where appropriate, the alternatives to participation, the consequences of not participating and the circumstances in which re-assessment is undertaken should be made clear.

Briefing of candidates/participants

The organisation's policy on advance briefing of candidates/participants should be outlined, and detail of the contents of such briefing should be specified.

Assessors/observers

Minimum standards of eligibility to operate as an assessor/observer should be set down. This should include training and certification requirements, frequency of assignment as an assessor/observer, organisational level vis-à-vis candidates/participants, and arrangements for evaluation of performance. Selection of assessor/observer groups should specify the importance of diversity within that pool where possible (in terms of ethnicity, gender, age and disability).

11. Further Reading

A range of publications are available on assessment/development centres.
Useful overviews include:
Ballantyne, I. & Povah, N. (1995). *Assessment and Development Centres*
    (2nd edn). Hampshire: Gower.
Woodruffe, C. (2000). *Development and Assessment Centres.* London:
    Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

Guidance parallel to this document may be found in the following:
International Task Force on Assessment Center Guidelines (2000)
Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations.
Endorsed by the 28th International Congress on Assessment Center
Methods May 4, 2000 San Francisco, California, U.S.A.
http://www.assessmentcenters.org/images/00guidelines.pdf

12. Glossary

Term	Definition
Assessment centre	Multiple assessment process – involving a number of individuals undertaking a variety of exercises, observed by a team of trained assessors who evaluate performance against predetermined job related behaviours. Likely to be a pass/fail event.
Assessor	An individual trained to evaluate behaviour observed in exercises (especially at an assessment centre, rather than development centre).
Candidate	One of a number of individuals who undertake assessment centre exercises and receive some form of feedback on outcomes.
Competencies	Key behavioural attributes that identify successful performance within a job role (or group of roles).
Development centre	Multiple assessment process – involving a number of individuals undertaking a variety of exercises, observed by a team of trained observers who evaluate performance against predetermined job related behaviours. Unlike an assessment centre, the emphasis is on identifying training/development needs and establishing a development plan, as opposed to a pass/fail event.
Designer	An individual trained to put together a working plan and specify the content of an assessment/development centre.
Face validity	A process or exercise that is constructed to outwardly appear relevant to the context/target job role.
Facilitator	An individual trained to manage an assessment/development centre to ensure standards are maintained and the timetable and venue operates successfully.