

# The Assessment Centre process

## What is an Assessment Centre?

An Assessment Centre is not a new phenomenon, but they have been used more and more frequently since the late 1980s onwards. They are often the final hurdle in the selection process and tend to occur after an initial interview or series of interviews, and after an assessment of your application documents. The Assessment Centre is used to build up a picture of your key strengths against a 'template' of what is required to do the job well.

Assessment Centres consist of a series of different selection exercises. They also involve a number of different assessors or interviewers. These assessors are often managers, human resources (HR) or personnel staff and possibly even external consultants, hired by the employer to help out on the day.

Assessment Centres vary in length. They range from around half a day up to two days' duration, depending on the role and its seniority. On average, most events tend to be around one day in duration. You may find that the Assessment Centre is held at the employer's premises, or alternatively off-site at a hotel or another similar venue.

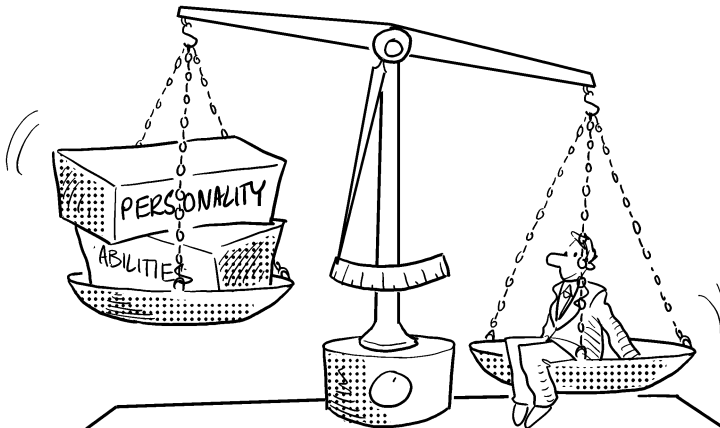
So far so good. One thing you will quickly notice is that other candidates who also applied for the role(s) will be attending the Assessment Centre at the same time as you. You may feel this is awkward or off-putting. Don't worry; we will give some useful hints and tips on this. In the meantime, the key thing to focus upon is that the other candidates will feel the same. Show them the common courtesies and be yourself. Also, remember that other candidates are usually always



present in any recruitment process – you just do not always meet them!

## Why have Assessment Centres become more popular?

The key reasons behind the increasing popularity of Assessment Centres are their accuracy, objectivity and fairness.



## What are employers looking for?

By the time you attend an Assessment Centre, the employer will have thought carefully beforehand about the job in question, the tasks involved and the objectives of the role. This will help them to think about the type of person they need to perform the job well. They will have created a picture of the ideal person to perform the job, defined by the person's experience, knowledge, skills, personality style and other attributes.

This collection of qualities – experience, knowledge, skills, personality style and other characteristics – are often developed into 'Competencies'. Each Competency is written down as precisely as possible, and in such a way that an assessor knows exactly what to look for when assessing a particular candidate.

For example, part of a definition for a Competency called 'Communication' might include the phrase, 'speaks clearly and concisely'. In an Assessment Centre, the assessors will be looking for evidence of a candidate's ability to speak clearly and concisely, as well as any other aspect of the definition, during the various exercises.

A fuller example of how some employers may define a related Competency called 'Oral communication' is shown below:

**Competency – Oral communication****Positive indicators:**

- Speaks clearly and concisely
- Speaks confidently on both a one-to-one and group level
- Utilises facts and information to influence others
- Promotes own ideas
- Convinces others and wins them round to own point of view

It is, however, important to note that the exact definitions of Competencies do differ across employers and from level to level. Competencies for the same level of role can be defined very differently across employers, often reflecting the diversity of their businesses. Nevertheless, an example of a broad Competency ‘menu’ – applicable for a range of professional and managerial roles – can be found in Appendix 1.

You will now appreciate how important it is to have as much information as you can about the job, and in particular the Competencies required to perform the job well. A key aspect of preparing for an Assessment Centre is to gather as much of this information as you can. On Saturday we will spell out the key information you need to obtain to help you in this process.

**What typical exercises can I expect?**

Employers have a very wide range of exercises upon which they can draw in order to get information about the different

Competency areas. They will choose the methods that they feel are most relevant to the job and that are most likely to give you the opportunity to display the Competencies.

In the list below, you can see the most commonly used exercises. However, do not panic! It is *extremely unlikely* that you would be asked to undertake all of these in one Assessment Centre. Instead, you will probably be asked to undertake a minimum of two exercises, and probably no more than half a dozen.

Each and every one of the exercises will be discussed in more detail during the course of the week.

- Interviews: based around your track record, your experience and/or key Competency areas.
- Group exercises: a team activity based around a practical task or discussion exercise.
- Psychometric tests: standardised tests proven to measure as accurately as possible specific skills and abilities, such as numerical reasoning.
- Personality questionnaires: also standardised, but measuring personality characteristics.
- Presentation exercises: where you are asked to present on a given topic to assessors.
- Analysis exercises: structured exercises where you are given particular scenarios or problems to work through under timed conditions.

## Summary

We have begun the week with a general overview about what an Assessment Centre is. We have looked at its history, reasons for its popularity, what employers are often looking for in terms of 'Competencies', and the types of exercises that you are likely to encounter.

The following days of the week will focus on the individual exercises you are most likely to encounter in the Assessment Centres that you attend. These will include plenty of suggestions to ensure that you give your best on the day and avoid some common pitfalls.

You have taken the first key step to preparing yourself for an Assessment Centre. Preparation is invaluable to performing well at an Assessment Centre. You are already on the path to success!

