

# Briefing for Participants



Assessment Centres



## Briefing for Participants

This briefing document is about the assessment process that you are about to undergo. It describes what you can expect to happen at the centre, the types of exercises you will encounter and how to approach the assessment.

## What is an Assessment or Development Centre?

Interviews are the most commonly used method for assessing whether a person has the right kind of strengths to meet the needs of a job or promotion. Increasingly, employers are using different procedures instead of, or as well as, an interview. Often called an Assessment Center, the process is multiple in many ways.

A group of participants take part in a variety of exercises designed to simulate important aspects of the job for which you are applying. You are observed by a team of trained assessors who evaluate each participant against a number of job-related behaviours in each exercise. These assessments are pooled in order to reach an objective decision on whether to shortlist you further.

## Why use this process?

The main reason for the increased use of this approach by employers is the proven success in predicting how well a person will do in a new role, even if their previous experience is less relevant to the new job. Apart from the employer, there are benefits for you:

- Because everything is standardized, everyone has the same opportunity to show their ability on the same basis.
- The process is far more objective than an interview, which depends entirely on the interpretation of one person. Assessment Centers are less prone to bias than many other methods of assessment.
- It is fair. The center allows you to show a range of abilities in various different situations; your performance in all of these situations is taken into account in the final assessment.
- You have the opportunity to demonstrate your strengths in a variety of situations.
- Each exercise situations are comparable to those, which you would encounter in the job you are being assessed for.

## What do I need to do before the center?

- Before the center, there is very little you can or need to do in advance. Make sure, as you would for any form of selection, that you have prepared any questions you have about the job or the employer in advance.
- Read all preparation materials thoroughly. This includes any information sent to you in advance and any briefing material given to you on the day.
- Make sure of all the practical arrangements so you don't arrive feeling unprepared or tight for time on the day.
- Relax. Various things will help you relax on the day, including:
  - Get everything you need ready the night before.
  - Get a good night's sleep.
  - Plan your trip and leave plenty of time to get there.
  - Dress smartly but comfortably.
- Remember to bring a watch and your reading glasses with you.

## What should I expect to happen?

During the course of the center, you will be asked to participate in a number of exercises that simulate major parts of the job you are applying for:

- Group exercises
- One-to-one exercises
- Written or working alone exercises

In addition, you may also have an interview and be asked to complete some psychometric tests. You will be observed by more than one assessor in any particular exercise and all of the observers will have undertaken special training for this role.

You will be told on the day exactly which exercises to do and in which sequence and provided with a timetable. Read all the exercise material carefully. Ensure you understand the instructions – timings, outputs required etc. and ask the administrator if you have any questions.

An assessment centre is a marathon rather than a sprint. If you feel you did not do well in an exercise, don't worry – it is your overall performance across the day that matters and you will have more than once chance to demonstrate your strengths.

The following guidance describes the most common kinds of exercise.

### Group Exercises

Group exercises are timed discussions in which your group will work together to make decisions about work-related situations or scenarios. The discussions typically last about 45-60 minutes and you will be observed throughout that time by an observer. Generally speaking there are no right or wrong answers. Employers are more interested in the way you interact with other people in a team environment.

### One-to-one Exercises

Working one-to-one with other people covers some quite different situations. The exercises you encounter will reflect the nature of the job you are being assessed for. The main forms are:

- Oral presentation or Briefing. These may be formal, in which case you will be given notice in advance, or informal in format. In either case you will have to analyze and interpret given information and have to present a case. Normally you will be questioned afterwards.

- Fact-Finding exercise. In this kind of situation you will be asked to make a decision starting from limited information. The main point of the exercise is to gather more information so you can be confident of making the best decision.
- Interview Simulations. These simulations replicate the kind of thing a manager may do behind closed doors, for example, meeting with a subordinate, selling to a client, or negotiating with suppliers. The exercise uses trained role-players.

## Written Exercises

Like the one-to-one exercise, exercises that require you to work alone can take a variety of forms. The In-Basket (or In-Tray) exercise is the most popular form. This involves working through the contents of a manager's in-tray, which will contain memos, letters and other items. You will be asked to respond to the items and make decisions against a defined time deadline.

The other common form is the Analysis Exercise. This requires you to analyze and interpret a dossier of information and prepare a report on it. Whereas the In-Basket has a number of discrete items, the Analysis Exercise is all about one complex situation.

## During the Center

- During the center listen carefully to any instructions you get and ask if you are uncertain of anything. Centers can be perplexing for many people and you are not being assessed in any way if you ask for clarity about procedures.
- The most important advice is to be yourself. If you try to guess what assessors are looking for, you could end up getting confused.
- No matter how you feel about how well you did an exercise, take each one as it comes. Remember that this is a multiple process, which will give you many opportunities to show what you can do.
- Try also to remember that you are all being assessed against a standard not against other people who are there on the day. A certain amount of competitive banter is inevitable as you take breaks together – but who knows who has found the best approach?
- Try not to discuss the exercise during the breaks with other participants as they might not have done that particular exercise yet!
- You will be provided with breaks, and depending how long your centre is, with lunch; you will not be assessed during these times in any way.

## After the Center

- Immediately after the center you will probably feel quite drained – most multiple assessments are stretching and challenging.
- You will be told at the end of the center what will happen next. There may be another interview with a particular division of the organization. As a minimum you will be told when you can expect feedback.
- You can request feedback, even if you have not been successful. This may prove useful for understanding your personal development areas, as well as for future selection procedures, by giving an insight into your observed strengths and weaknesses.

Remember, the Assessment and Development Center process has been designed to enable you to demonstrate your abilities to the full, and our best advice is therefore for you to be relaxed, be yourself, allow yourself to enjoy the process and most importantly ensure you get as much out of the event as you can. Good luck and try and enjoy the day!



***Are some people at an advantage because of their background and experience?***

No. The exercises generally do not assume technical or other job-specific knowledge. The exercise scenarios will be sufficiently general, or neutral, so that no participant will be disadvantaged as a result of their particular experiences, relative to others. All participants have an equal chance to show their strengths.

***Will I be judged against other participants?***

Your performance will be assessed against the specified criteria, not against the performance of other participants. It may be possible for a number of participants to be shortlisted from the center, or none, depending on their performance against the criteria. Also, remember, that you are being assessed against a range of competencies: different people have different strengths and weaknesses.

***What if I am unlucky and get a 'hard' assessor?***

All assessors are trained in how to objectively observe and evaluate participants' behaviours and all will be working with the same criteria, which describe specific, observable behaviour. No assessor will be any 'harder' than the others and you will be assessed by at least 3 different assessors, supervised by an independent centre manager, during the center and an agreement must be reached on your overall performance by all assessors.