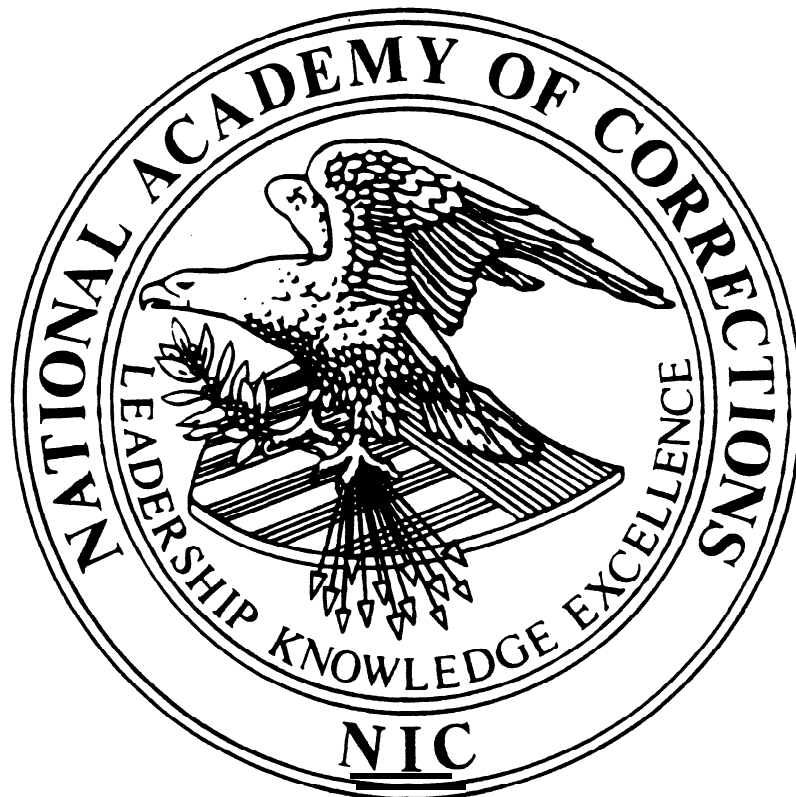


U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF CORRECTIONS



Overview of Assessment Centers

June, 1989

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National Academy of Corrections
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OVERVIEW OF ASSESSMENT CENTERS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

assessment center is not a place. It is a procedure that uses trained assessors to observe and make conclusions about the behavior of participants. Assessment centers have become widely used because they are a systematic process of position analysis, observation of individuals in activities that replicate work situations, documentation of observed behavior, and feedback based on the observations and conclusions of a team of trained assessors.

COMPONENTS OF AN ASSESSMENT CENTER

Planning - An assessment center evaluates individual performance in relationship to a specific position or set of positions. A detailed job task analysis is completed to determine the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to perform the job. An assessment center can be used for three purposes: selection of personnel, as a basic component of a management development program, and as a training experience. (See Section 1)

Dimensions - Based on the job task analysis, a list of dimensions is compiled that will be evaluated in the assessment center. Common dimensions used in management centers include planning and organization, interpersonal sensitivity, judgement, oral communication, and leadership. (See Section 2)

Simulations - Test situations are constructed to provide structured settings for assessors to observe how individuals would perform in specific situations. Basic simulations found in many centers include in-basket exercises, leaderless discussion groups, interaction exercises, management games, and structured interviews. (See Section 3)

Trained Assessors - Assessors can be agency employees who hold positions senior to the position participants are being evaluated against or specialists in assessment centers. In all instances, assessors are formally trained in the assessment center process, documentation of observed behavior, and the feedback process. (See Section 4)

Structured Feedback - The data compiled during the simulations is synthesized into final conclusions about each of the identified dimensions. The data is then given to the employee both verbally and in writing. (See Section 5)

ADVANTAGES OF ASSESSMENT CENTERS

- + Evaluates individuals in relationship to the requirements of a specific job: employees interested in a specific position can be told the specific skills or abilities necessary to do the job and how they are performing on each of those dimensions.
- + Credibility of the assessment process is high among employees when properly constructed and administered.
- + Training managers to work as assessors improves the ability of managers to evaluate employee performance and identify causes of employee problems.
- + Provides feedback in specific areas of performance that can be used to build individual development plans: this provides training staff with data for development of needed training programs and gives employees feedback to work on their own development.
- + Accurate predictor of performance: longitudinal studies by AT & T and others show centers can predict both high and low performers.
- + Legally defensible; Berry v. City of Omaha and others show centers have validity, are not discriminatory, and have been used to resolve court cases involving personnel selection.

DISADVANTAGES OF ASSESSMENT CENTERS

- Require detailed job task analysis, the development of simulations, and establishment of a feedback process.
- Center administrator and assessors must be trained or hired: since in-house assessors should occupy positions equal to or higher than the position being evaluated, the assessors must come from upper management ranks.
- Labor intensive to conduct; a typical management assessment cycle takes 1 to 2 days to complete, evaluates 10 to 15 people and uses 1 assessor for every two participants.

PLANNING

Assessment centers that are properly done have been viewed favorably by the courts and participants because the result is a methodically constructed evaluation process. Assessment centers are not a series of new or unique procedures or activities. In most instances, each component has been used by personnel or training staffs for other purposes. A job task analysis is a basic component of most personnel classification systems. Simulations are commonly used for training purposes. Recording of observed behavior is common practice with behavioral psychologists. When compared to interviews and other testing procedures, assessment centers have tremendous creditability because of the detailed planning that must be done to conduct an assessment center.

PURPOSE

Assessment centers are commonly viewed as a selection technique. Research at American Telephone and Telegraph and other companies found assessment center results consistently predicted both high performers and low performers. Centers have been heavily used to select middle and upper level managers. Use has been heaviest in the private sector because of the cost involved in operating a center and the increased propensity to hire from outside.

However, one of the assessment center's greatest potential uses is in the development of management personnel. Typical management training programs have not been shown to be particularly effective. Employees are scheduled and attend training on a variety of subjects without meaningful analysis of the individual's level of functioning. The individual may already have good skills or abilities in a particular topic; consequently, money is wasted having the person attend training on that topic. Or, the training that has been provided may not be enough to correct weaknesses an individual has in a particular area; the individual returns to work, performance does not improve, and either the training or the individual is deemed a failure.

Assessment centers offer a solution to these problems. Since an assessment center evaluates an individual in the behavioral performance areas necessary to perform a specific job or set of positions, feedback from a center can be used to assess the level

of functioning in each area, training in those areas can be developed and/or scheduled, and the individual can later go through a second assessment to see if the deficiencies have been resolved. Training is not necessary or provided in areas where an individual is functioning well; thus, money and time are saved. It may be determined that weak areas can be better resolved by the use of development techniques other than training; examples might be transfers to jobs where needed experience can be developed, career mobility assignments, special task force assignments, and mentoring.

Assessment centers also have value as an educational experience. Individuals who have participated in a center find they have learned about themselves, gained experience in handling different situations, and been given specific information about performance if they wish to make changes on their own.

JOB TASK ANALYSIS

An assessment center is built around a detailed analysis of a position or positions. If used for selection, the analysis should focus on the specific position that the center will be used to fill.

This can be a class of positions. For example, if an agency has ten institutions, an analysis could be done on the warden's position and one center used to screen candidates for positions in any of the institutions. Assessment centers are used for selections at levels other than management. Agencies have used assessment centers for selection of entry level personnel, including correctional officers, as a basic step in the hiring process. In the criminal justice field, assessment centers have been used more for the selection of entry level personnel than for management staff. This is partially the result of court scrutiny of hiring procedures and the need to establish selection processes that are objective and have validity.

Assessment centers for development of management personnel often look at groups of positions that have responsibilities that are generally comparable. Since the focus is on feedback for individual development, promotions, increased pay, and other tangible rewards will not accrue as a direct result of the assessment center. The stringent personnel requirements that should be applied to centers that result in those actions are not as applicable. Consequently, the job task analysis can be more general and can look at positions that are not identical. Care should be taken, however, to restrict access to the results so individuals will not feel their career is hurt if they do not do well in the center.

The job task analysis starts with an analysis of the specific tasks that the occupant of the position would be expected to perform. There is not one required method of doing that analysis: however, the analysis should include interviews with incumbents who are performing the job. It may also include other personnel that these individuals work for and employees who work for occupants of the position being evaluated. One process called DACUM has been used by the Academy to analyze positions within corrections. Positions that have been analyzed include jail administrator, community corrections administrator, and warden. A copy of the DACUM breakdown of the warden's position is included in the back of this section.

Once the task analysis has been completed, the tasks required in the job and the traits or abilities are grouped into behavioral dimensions and simulations can be designed.

EMPLOYEE AWARENESS

The term assessment has been used to describe a variety of evaluative processes that have been used for numerous purposes. Consequently, people often have misperceptions of what an assessment center consists of and what it can do. As a result, an employee awareness program is essential if an agency is going to implement an assessment center process.

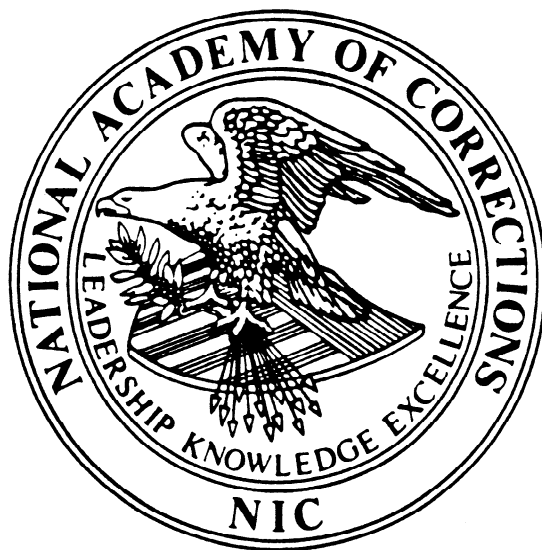
The need for an awareness program is heightened by the anxiety that will result simply because some aspect of agency practice has changed. Employees may not like interviews as a selection technique and feel they are not objective, but at least they know what to expect; many prefer a known inefficient process over a unknown process. Even as a part of a management development program, employees will feel apprehension. Questions will be asked about how the process will occur, who will get copies of the results, and how participants will be selected. Aside from the specific scenarios used in the center itself, there is nothing about an assessment center that needs to be kept secret.

Education about assessment centers should be provided to all employees, especially management personnel. If managers do not understand the assessment process, they will not be able to answer questions from their employees, may pass on wrong information, and may have doubts of their own which get passed on to employees.

Participation in the assessment center process should be voluntary. Employees preferring not to participate in a management development program or promotion opportunity should not be forced to undergo the assessment process.

COMPETENCY PROFILE OF WARDEN/SUPERINTENDENT

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**October 25-26, 1988
Boulder, Colorado**

WARDEN/SUPERINTENDENT

is responsible for the overall management of the correctional facility, including administrative services, safety and security, and program and support services.

Duties						
A	Manage Human Resources	A-1 Assess staff training needs	A-2 Identify training topics/ requirements	A-3 Provide opportunity & resources for training	A-4 Monitor training delivery	A-5 Determine staffing needs
		A-12 Monitor &/or implement staff discipline	A-13 Monitor employee evaluation system	A-14 Conduct staff evaluations	A-15 Promote career development	A-16 Monitor the staff grievance system
B	Manage the External Environment	B-1 Conduct/ permit tours	B-2 Make public presentations	B-3 Participate in community meetings	B-4 Respond to external inquiries & complaints in a timely fashion	B-5 Maintain memberships in community organizations
		B-12 Develop contracts & coordinate activities with medical service providers	B-13 Encourage & monitor the use of volunteers	B-14 Provide for the recruitment & training of volunteers		
C	Manage the Budget	C-1 Monitor & control overtime	C-2 Maintain staffing within funding levels	C-3 Direct preparation of budget requests	C-4 Submit & justify budget requests	C-5 Monitor & review appropriate financial reports expenditures
D	Develop Short & Long Term Goals & Objectives	D-1 Determine institutional mission	D-2 Analyze & project needs of institutional components	D-3 Establish goals based upon needs	D-4 Assign responsibility for development of institutional objectives	D-5 Review & approve a plan of action (i.e., short, long term)
E	Manage Litigation	E-1 Review correctional case law	E-2 Review & implement pertinent ACA & other applicable standards	E-3 Train staff on how to testify & present themselves in court	E-4 Update policy & procedures, if needed, to avoid litigation	E-5 Monitor policy compliance
		E-12 Assist counsel in developing courtroom strategies	E-13 Review & propose settlement agreements	E-14 Implement court decisions		
F	Manage Security Processes	F-1 Approve security policies & procedures	F-2 Monitor compliance with security procedures	F-3 Review &/or approve post orders	F-4 Inspect security equipment & systems	F-5 Maintain intelligence system

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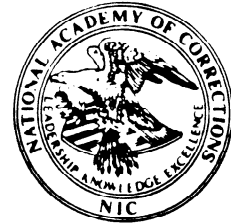
Tasks →

A-6 Control position utilization	A-7 Authorize/recommend hiring of staff	A-8 Terminate or recommend termination of staff	A-9 Promote & facilitate recruitment of staff	A-10 Interview applicants	A-11 Supervise and counsel staff as appropriate
A-17 Respond to staff grievances	A-18 Implement staff grievance &/or arbitration decisions	A-19 Provide incentives & recognitions for employees	A-20 Maintain working relationships with labor representatives	A-21 Provide for employee assistance programs	A-22 Promote & support affirmative action programs
B-6 Develop & maintain media relations	B-7 Develop & maintain legislative/political relations	B-8 Develop & maintain relations with other criminal justice agencies	B-9 Dev. & maintain relations w/special interest groups (i.e., ACLU, victims advocacy groups)	B-10 Consult & comply with regulatory agencies	B-11 Develop & maintain relationships with higher education institutions
C-6 Establish budget priorities	C-7 Allocate appropriate/authorized funds	C-8 Monitor appropriateness of expenditures by staff			
D-6 Disseminate plan of action	D-7 Monitor progress towards achievement of goals	D-8 Report to appropriate levels on achievement of goals	D-9 Modify goals as appropriate		
E-6 Assign staff to coordinate litigation activities	E-7 Orient legal counsel as to correctional processes	E-8 Maintain & monitor documentation in accordance with policy or practice	E-9 Review/respond to interrogatories & affidavits	E-10 Give depositions & testify in court	E-11 Encourage & participate in pre-trial conferences with staff & counsel
F-6 Develop an internal investigation process	F-7 Direct internal investigation	F-8 Provide appropriate housing & services for special management inmates	F-9 Maintain 24-hour availability of identified key staff		

WARDEN/SUPERINTENDENT

Duties						
G	Manage Emergencies	G-1 Review & approve emergency plans	G-2 Test emergency plans	G-3 Ensure readiness of emergency response team	G-4 Maintain liaison with emergency support agencies	G-5 Monitor indicators of potential disturbances & take appropriate actions
		H-1 Oversee/approve inmate classification actions	H-2 Maintain frequent & direct contact with inmates	H-3 Provide for inmate program services	H-4 Provide for inmate support services	H-5 Provide inmate custody & safety services
I	Review & Inspect Institutional Operations & Physical Plant	I-1 Direct development of preventive maintenance plan	I-2 Direct routine maintenance to assure proper sanitation & upkeep of facility & equipment	I-3 Inspect facility to determine the condition of the buildings & grounds	I-4 Initiate & monitor special repair & improvement projects	I-5 Review & site documentation for policy & procedure compliance
		J-1 Assess readiness for change	J-2 Identify stakeholders	J-3 Consult with stakeholders	J-4 Create ownership for involvement	J-5 Assess impact of proposed change internally & externally
J	Manage Change Within the Institutional Environment	J-12 Monitor & evaluate the change	J-13 Accept & demonstrate support for imposed change			
		K-1 Document & report institutional activities	K-2 Develop, revise & update institutional policy & procedures	K-3 Delegate responsibilities	K-4 Review & analyze institutional processes	K-5 Organize paper processes & communication flow
K	Manage the Office	K-12 Control phone calls and drop-ins	K-13 Direct maintenance of active & historical records			
		L-1 Seek & participate in training	L-2 Read professional journals	L-3 Maintain & encourage membership in professional organizations	L-4 Demonstrate ethical behavior	L-5 Seek information on trends & regulations in corrections
L	Maintain Professional Competence & Awareness					

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Boulder, Colorado



- Tasks					
Activate emergency plans	G-7 Develop after-incident reports	G-8 Conduct after-incident briefings			
Assure scheduling of activities & movement to account inmates	H-7 Maintain inmate discipline system	H-8 Maintain inmate grievance mechanism	H-9 Facilitate communication from inmates	H-10 Provide for & control inmate self-betterment programs	H-11 Provide programs & services for special needs inmates
Confer with staff & inmates	I-7 Observe staff & inmate behavior	I-8 Observe programs, activities & oper. for compliance w/policies & perform. standards	I-9 Monitor allocation of space	I-10 Monitor & allocate man-power, equipment & supplies	I-11 Observe compliance with life safety conditions
Develop strategy for change	J-7 Give advance communication & evaluate feedback	J-8 Assess timing & staging for change	J-9 Prepare for potential disruptive behavior	J-10 Keep appropriate management levels informed	J-11 Publicize & implement the change
Receive & respond to communications	K-7 Initiate communications	K-8 Monitor assigned tasks	K-9 Prioritize & categorize work	K-10 Determine distribution of communications & information	K-11 Schedule, conduct &/or attend meetings
Review policy documents	L-7 Encourage involvement of academic community	L-8 Provide for involvement in continuing education	L-9 Conduct training	L-10 Support & participate in research	

WARDEN/SUPERINTENDENT

Worker Traits & Attitudes

Creative
Professional
Flexible
Decisive
Empathetic
Dependable
Tactful
Ethical
Assertive
Energetic
Sense-of-humor
Tenacious

Resilient
Analytical
Poised
Emotionally stable
Perceptive
Resourceful
Attentive
Firm/fair
Cooperative
Sincere
Optimistic
Self-motivated

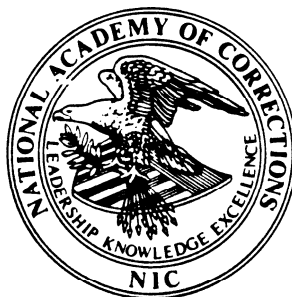
General Knowledges & Skills

Communication (oral & written)
Organizational skills
Management/supervisory skills
Budgetary skills
Leadership skills
Training
Public relations
Decision-making skills
Prisoner classifications
Incorporate emergency plans
Ability to interpret departmental policies & procedures

Knowledge of stress management techniques
Knowledge of labor relations
Knowledge of institutional programs
Knowledge of office management
Knowledge of political/legislative process
Knowledge of health & safety regulations
Know how to use community resources
Know how to work with personnel
Understanding of good facility preventative maintenance
Understand criminal justice system
Understand dynamics of human behavior

Tools & Equipment

Communications equipment
Audio-recording equipment
Computers
Firearms/weapons
Security equipment & systems
Reference materials (i.e., law books, policy/procedure manuals, etc.)



**Warden/Superintendent
Panel Members
October 25-26, 1988
Boulder, Colorado**

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Kansas Correctional Institute at Lansing
Lansing, KS

Harold W. Clarke
Warden
Nebraska State Penitentiary
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Central Correctional Institute, Capitol Station A
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Richard Rison
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Pam Withrow
Warden
Michigan Reformatory
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Charles Zimmerman
Superintendent
State Correctional Institute at Graterford
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National Center for Research in Vocational Education
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Sponsored By:

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Corrections
National Academy of Corrections

Organized By:

Dr. Dianne Carter
President
National Academy of Corrections



DIMENSIONS

Design of an assessment center starts with an analysis of a particular position or related group of positions. Once this is done, a list of tasks, activities, duties and responsibilities will have been compiled. In addition, the evaluation should have looked at the personal attributes needed to function in the position or positions under consideration. For example, the tasks may have included writing letters, holding staff meetings and supervising subordinates. The personal attributes required to perform the job well may include having a sense of humor, assertiveness, and intelligence.

The assessment center process takes this analysis one step further by combining these tasks and traits into behavioral dimensions. Dimensions are groups of similar behaviors that are definable, observable, and verifiable. A group of behaviors that include giving everyone an opportunity to speak in a meeting, discussing an issue or problem with involved subordinates before a decision is made, and visiting employees in the hospital could be grouped together under a dimension entitled "Interpersonal sensitivity." Simulations would then be constructed to create situations where a candidate would normally display some level of this dimension. A suitable simulation might be a one on one interview with a problem employee: during the interview, assessors could evaluate the participant's use of open ended questions and reflective feedback to assess their level of sensitivity.

The data from the job task analysis is analyzed and grouped into clusters of behaviors. These are then given labels or titles for use in the assessment center. The name used to identify the dimension is not as important as the list of behaviors that is compiled, that assessors are trained to consistently recognize and record those behaviors when they occur, and that there is an effective feedback system to communicate the expectations associated with each dimensions.

Reviewing dimensions used by different assessment centers reveals different labels are often given to similar groups of behaviors. One center may call a set of behaviors that include gathering information, defining causes of problems, exploring alternative solutions, and selecting action steps "analysis" while another center calls it "problem solving." One center may combine

behaviors into a single dimension that another center looks at separately. For example, an assessment center may consider planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling all elements of dimension called "management" while another center may consider them separately. The decision to group behaviors must be based upon the common characteristics of the behaviors that have been identified, the overall duties and requirements of the position being evaluated, and the purpose of the center.

INCIDENCE OF DIMENSIONS

<u>Dimension</u>	Percentage	
	<u>Middle Management</u>	<u>Top Management</u>
Management		
Planning and Organization	80+	80+
Delegation	80+	80+
Development of Subordinates	50-79	80+
Leadership		
Individual	80+	80+
Group	80+	80+
Supervision		
Sensitivity	80+	80+
Negotiation	30-49	80+
Decision Making		
Judgement	80+	80+
Creativity	30-49	80+
Risk Taking	30-49	80+
Professional & Technical Knowledge	30-49	-30
Communications		
Written	50-79	50-79
Oral	80+	80+
Personal		
Energy	50-79	80+
Initiative	80+	80+
Tolerance for Stress	80+	80+
Motivation	80+	80+

Data from Assessment Centers and Managerial Performance

In management assessment centers, certain dimensions are often identified and looked at. Research has identified 15 to 20 dimensions that are found in 80% or more of assessment centers looking at middle and upper level management positions. These are summarized in the list below. Since managers in most organization have tasks and responsibilities that are similar or related, it is not surprising to find assessment centers from different organizations using dimensions that are similar.

It would be expected that dimensions such as communications skills, decision making and management skills would appear in most management assessment centers because they are so basic to the functions of any manager.

The following list is provided to show some of the typical dimensions that are used and how they are defined. The behaviors that would be considered indicators of behavior in each dimension are provided only in general terms..

Adaptability Ability to adapt to new environments, adjust to situations, or demands and function effectively in them with a minimum of confusion or loss of productivity.

Creativity Look at a problem or situation and generate new ideas for consideration.

Decisiveness Ability to look at a fact situation or dilemma, make a decision, and implement some solution; commit oneself to a course of action.

Delegation Assign decision-making and work functions to subordinates in an appropriate manner and utilize those individuals effectively.

Developing Subordinates Strategically assign duties and opportunities to subordinates in a systematic way to develop their potential.

Extra-organizational Sensitivity Awareness of the changes, trends, and issues that are present in the society that the work organization must function within.

Integrity Possess and maintain personal, organizational, and societal values.

Interpersonal Sensitivity Concern for and sensitivity to the feelings, beliefs, and needs of others.

Judgement Ability to analyze a problem, consider alternative courses of action, and select the logical alternative given the data available at the time of the

Leadership Take action based on one's beliefs or convictions, effectively use one's personal style to influence others, set and demonstrate values, and keep a focus on future needs as well as present problems.

Oral Communication Use verbal communication to effectively convey ideas and information; nonverbal communication such as eye contact, body language and gestures would be included.

Organizational Sensitivity Awareness of and consideration for the values and mission of the agency; decisions reflect awareness of impact upon the other work units of the organization.

Planning and Organizing Set goals and objectives: organize resources to accomplish those objectives.

Problem Define problems, gather data, evaluate alternative courses of action, and implement the best potential solution.

Risk Taking Take stances or make decisions that involve personal risk but are judged advantageous to the individual and the agency.

Stress Tolerance Performance under conditions of pressure, resistance, or opposition.

Supervision Provide directions to subordinates, oversee their work, and provide feedback.

Technical and Professional Knowledge Possess the knowledge of the agency, profession, and technical areas necessary to perform the job.

Tenacity Follow through with a project or position until the desired outcome is achieved.

Written Communication Convey ideas and information clearly and concisely in grammatical form.

In preparation for an assessment center, an extensive list of observable behaviors would be prepared. That list of specific examples of behavior would be used for the training of assessors.

SIMULATIONS

The term simulation is used in assessment centers to describe the exercises or processes that are used to elicit behavior or information that is then used by the assessors to draw conclusions about the functioning of the individual participant. In a well designed center, different simulations are used to enable assessors to see performance in a variety of environments. For example, individuals may function differently in a group setting than they do in one on one interviews so an assessment center should look at employees in both settings.

There are some requirements: an assessment center must consist of more than one simulation, use at least one simulation other than an interview, include live observations (can not be just paper and pencil tests), and each identified dimension should be observed in

SIMULATIONS USED IN MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT CENTERS

<u>Exercise</u>	<u>Percent Frequency of Use</u>
In Basket	95
Leaderless Group (assigned roles)	85
Interview simulation	75
Leaderless Group (unassigned roles)	45
Scheduling	40
Management Games	10
Background Interview	5
Paper and Pencil - Personality	1
Projective	1

Data from Assessment Centers and Managerial Performance

two simulations. These restrictions reduce the possibility an individual did not understand what was expected of him or her in a particular exercise or that conclusions were based on data that is limited.

The types of simulations that are used in an assessment center are determined by the specific tasks required by the position the center is designed around. There are common techniques that are often used, but there is no requirement to use any of those simulations. Once the list of dimensions is developed, the

simulations that will best display those dimensions are selected or created. For example, a center designed to evaluate receptionists might include a typing exercise using a machine similar to the one the person would use, a group exercise to look at how the participant relates to co-workers, and a problem-solving exercise to see how the person would resolve problems. The specific simulations would need to provide an opportunity to assess all of the identified dimensions.

The simulations that are commonly used in assessing managerial personnel allow for the observation of numerous dimensions. The in-basket exercise, leaderless group discussion exercises, and various interview simulations provide an opportunity to observe most of the dimensions found in those positions.

In-basket The in-basket exercise duplicates a situation a manager is often confronted with; faced with a number of pieces of paper each containing a problem, decisions must be made about how to handle each one. How the participant deals with those problems can provide information about organizational skill, delegation, problem solving, interpersonal sensitivity, and creativity.

Leaderless Discussion Groups These simulations provide an opportunity to see how people relate to each other, problem solve, and organize time and resources. Simulations may have assigned roles or be an open discussion. When roles are assigned, each person is given a set of directions; these often include objectives that should be accomplished, points where concession is possible, and options that should be avoided. For example, an individual might be assigned the role of a warden in a staff meeting where budget cuts are on the agenda: the directions might include concessions in certain areas, resistance in others, and information about rumored excess moneys belonging to others in the meeting.

Interview Simulations Interview formats can focus on a variety of problems or tasks. The participant might be faced with disciplining an employee who has been involved in violations of policy or have to answer questions from a reporter concerning a recent escape. These situations provide assessors with data about the participant's oral communication skills, problem solving ability, and interpersonal sensitivity.

Management Games Like structured groups, simulations of this type involve observing participants performing within a group setting. However, the structure of a management game is much more complex. While some role

definition may be done, the individuals are given a set of rules within which to operate and then expected to work toward the completion of some goal or task. As the game progresses opportunities to observe creativity, judgement, value orientations, negotiation skills, and ability to work as a member of a team usually occur.

Background Interview Interviews to determine the applicability of a person's experience are sometimes used as part of an assessment process when many of the participants are from outside the agency.

Knowledge Exams An exam to determine the extent of an individual's knowledge of policy or technical information required in the job can be used as part of the assessment center.

The simulations should replicate situations faced by occupants of the position the center is designed around, force the participants to grapple with problems or issues that are typical of the position, and be framed in the language and context of the agency. When properly constructed, participants feel they have been given an opportunity to demonstrate how they could perform in the job, given feedback that is specific, and shown how they can prepare to fill the position they desire.

ASSESSOR TRAINING

Assessors are the core of the assessment center. The data collection and design functions of the assessment center provide the framework the center uses to complete the evaluations. However, the ultimate success of the center depends upon the quality of the assessors used in the center. If relevant behavior is not recorded and evaluated during the convergence process, the feedback will have little meaning. Further, while the other steps may be objective in nature, the assessors must ultimately make judgements about an individual's level of functioning, readiness for the identified position or positions, and development that needs to occur.

SELECTION

The selection of assessors is the critical first step in the training and use of assessors. For years, managers of assessment centers used psychologists, professional assessment center personnel, or administrative personnel from the agency as assessors. However, research has shown psychologists did not have any unique qualifications that made them better assessors than agency personnel. Consequently, the primary source of assessors for management assessment centers has become managers from the agency itself.

In assessment centers used for selection, it is recommended assessors be one to two levels above the position being filled.

Some assessment centers have had success with using a balance of agency personnel and people from interested community agencies. Miami-Dade County developed an assessment center for selection of correctional officers after their old selection process was found inadequate. Assessors were recruited from other public agencies, private companies in the county, and from civic groups interested in a fair selection process. The result has been a selection process that is well accepted: planning is now being done to use assessment centers for promotions.

When selecting assessors, it is important to select individuals that are viewed by agency staff as successful, respected, and having credibility. If participants at the center do not trust the individuals doing the assessing, the results will not be accepted.

TRAINING

Training must be conducted with the assessors, even if they are experienced assessment center personnel. Assessors must be orientated to the dimensions that are being used and the simulations that have been developed.

For individuals who have never worked as assessors, two to four days of training are recommended. The training would cover all aspects of assessment centers.

Design Some overview of how an assessment center is designed is necessary for assessors to work effectively. However, they do not need to know how to construct an assessment center. Providing information about the job task analysis provides an understanding of the dimensions and what they mean.

Dimensions A significant portion of the training for assessors must focus on the behavioral dimensions that will be used in the center. This should include discussion of specific behaviors that could be anticipated in each of the dimensions. Opportunities to observe and record behavior should be provided. It is critical that an assessor understand the dimensions and be able to attribute any specific behavior to the appropriate behavioral dimension.

Simulations Providing assessors with the opportunity to go through each of the simulations is an excellent way to familiarize assessors with the simulations that will be used. It is possible to use assessors as role players in the one on one interviews and other interactive simulations; however, they should not be the evaluating assessor assigned to that exercise. The responsibility to perform the role would hinder the recording of observed behavior.

Feedback Assessors must record behavior observed in each of the dimensions for every simulation. At the end of the assessment center assignment the participant should not only get information about the conclusions reached by the assessors during convergence, but should receive feedback about performance in each of the simulations so he or she understands how those conclusion were reached. Assessors must understand where to record the data and how it will be synthesized.

If an assessment center will not be used for selection, or the assessors have previous experience as assessors, the length of time necessary to complete assessor training can be shortened. However, even experienced assessors must have some orientation to the simulations that will be utilized.

FEEDBACK

The feedback process for a participant should consist of more than an interview or written report at the end of the assessment center assignment. It starts with the observations recorded during each of the simulations and continues through the discussion and conclusions reached during the convergence process. This data is then ideally conveyed to the participant both verbally and in writing.

RECORDED OBSERVATIONS

While there is no requirement, it is usually easiest to create a data recording sheet for each simulation; the form would be for one participant, would list the dimensions that are measured during that simulation, and contain the assessor scores for the individual if scoring is being done. It is helpful to even list some of the typical behaviors that are associated with that dimension. This provides the assessor with ready reminders to record observations about all the dimensions. This makes the data tabulation easier because the data sheets for each individual can be placed together and summaries written with ease.

SCORING

When scoring is used as part of the evaluation process, a five point system is common. The numbers are used in reference to a level of performance that is considered adequate to successfully perform area of the job. The significance of each number is as follows:

Five A rating of five means the assessor felt the participant did everything that could be done; a score of five represents an ideal performance.

Four A score of four indicates the participant would function well above the average in that particular dimension.

Three If the assessor feels the participant has demonstrated an adequate level of skill in a dimension, a score of three would be given. This indicates that the individual could step into the position and perform acceptably.

Two A score of two indicates an individual would have difficulty in that behavioral area if placed in the position.

One If the assessor felt the participant was not functional in a given behavioral dimension, a score of one would be assigned.

A score of one to five is given only if a participant demonstrated enough behavior to make a conclusion about a dimension. A "Not observed" should be given if there was no basis upon which to make a decision. For example, if during a discussion group simulation, a participant is non-verbal, an assessor could not make conclusions about the participant's problem solving skills and there would be no data on which to make a conclusion.

A basic scoring sheet is shown below. Following the simulations, the scores from each of the simulations are recorded on the form. up to this point, the recording and scoring has basically been an individual task; each of the assessors has been recording and scoring observations. However, once the individual scores have been recorded, the assessors must discuss and come to agreement on the final scores.

ASSESSMENT CENTER

RATING SHEET

Name: _____

<u>Dimension</u>	<u>Role Play</u>	<u>Ldrless Group</u>	<u>In Basket</u>	<u>Bkgrnd Interview</u>	<u>Final Score</u>
Written Communications	N/A	N/A			
Oral Communications			N/A		
Decision Making					
Supervision					
Management					
Leadership					
Personal					

Optimum = 5 Exceeds Expectation = 4 Acceptable = 3

Area for Improvement = 2 No Skill Shown = 1

CONVERGENCE

Individual assessors will have formed conclusions about the participants after observing them in the simulations. However, they will not have observed the individual in all of the simulations. Ideally, 'a different assessor will have observed a participant in each of the simulations, so the largest possible number of assessors will have knowledge of and be able to discuss the participant's performance. Then, during convergence the conclusions of the assessors can be pooled and final decisions documented.

Scores are not averaged. A final score can not be the result of a majority vote. The assessors must discuss and agree on the final score. This process reduces Or eliminates the effect of the bias an assessor might have after observing a participant.

The numerical scores are not the only area where convergence is done. The final report will contain narrative comments about each dimension. Assessors should discuss and agree on what those comments will contain.

DEBRIEF

At some point following the assessment center process, the center administrator or a person trained in providing feedback would meet with each participant individually and discuss the results of the assessment center. The written evaluation would be covered and the participant would have an opportunity to ask questions about any part of the center process.

Since the feedback contains information about each specific dimension, the participant can be given assistance or guidance in setting up a program to strengthen weak areas, Thus, the center can be a positive experience even if the individual did not do well; unlike many selection mechanisms in which no meaningful feedback is given, participants in an assessment center can receive specific feedback about what needs to be done to improve.