

Assessment Centers

Used extensively in World War II to select and develop spies, and then adopted by businesses in the 1950's, the assessment center process is one of the most accurate methods for evaluating personnel skills and abilities. Research studies consistently find higher validities for assessment centers in comparison to other methods. The major reason is that the participants are typically evaluated on activities that closely resemble those performed on the job. Rather than making inferences about competencies, the key behavioral skills are observed and evaluated directly, leading to more accurate estimates of potential job performance. As a result, approximately three thousand organizations in the US today use the assessment center process.

Many more companies would like to include assessment center methodologies in their selection and development systems, but constructing a valid system requires a high degree of expertise, and there are a variety of implementation issues that must be managed. Censeo has the expertise and experience necessary to design and deliver a valid and easy to use assessment center process. These can range from full-blown assessment centers to one or more short simulations included in client selection systems that will boost accuracy, but still keep the process manageable.

What Exactly is an Assessment Center?

Assessment centers are comprised of several different kinds of activities called "exercises." Typical exercises include in-baskets, role-plays, business analysis and planning exercises, presentations, and group exercises. Exercises are sometimes tied together by a common storyline, in which the participant plays a central character who must manage a variety of job-related tasks and solve a number of issues and problems in a hypothetical company. In some exercises, participants interact with trained role players or with other participants. In other exercises, participants have to make sense of documents, memos/emails, and respond appropriately in writing. Trained assessors observe the interactions and presentations, review the written work and responses, and then provide ratings on targeted competencies and behaviors. While a full-blown assessment center can run 1-2 days and require a team of role players and assessors, smaller and shorter centers can be effectively designed to take only a few hours and utilize fewer resources.

Typical Project Steps

Censeo's approach varies, depending on the client's needs and the types of job simulations, but these are the basic steps in developing and implementing an assessment center:

- 1. Clarify the logistics and objectives for the process and the context in which the results will be used** – Some key questions to answer in this step include: Will the process be staffed and managed internally? Will the process be used for selection, development or both? What other evaluation tools will be used in the selection or development system?
- 2. Identify the competencies and specific behavioral skills to be measured** – This step involves extensive data gathering (e.g. interviews with job experts) to understand the jobs being evaluated and ensure content validity.
- 3. Develop the overall design for the center** – Given an understanding of the skills that need to be assessed and the time/resource requirements, suitable exercises can be developed to elicit the required skills.
- 4. Develop the assessment center materials** – In order to effectively run an assessment center, several documents are needed, including administration instructions, participant materials, role player instructions, evaluation guidelines, assessor consensus process, etc.
- 5. Develop assessor and role player training programs** – Censeo can provide in-depth training materials on running the assessment center process. Training programs typically include instructions on administering, assessing and role-playing the simulations, along with exercises to practice assessing and role-playing skills.
- 6. Develop the feedback report** – This step involves developing detailed individual feedback reports that will not only inform participants about their strengths and development needs, but provide suggestions on how to improve. Results can also be aggregated to provide group reporting on units, teams and the organization.

7. **Conduct assessor training** – Censeo can directly conduct the required training or train facilitators within client organizations to deliver training to their staff. During this phase of the rollout, we gather feedback from assessors and role players, and make revisions to the simulations as needed.
8. **Implement the process** – Censeo provides guidance on how to best implement an assessment center process, including helping to develop all of the communications that need to occur within the organization.

Key Benefits

Censeo's Ph.D.-level Industrial-Organizational Psychologists have extensive experience in developing highly realistic simulations that will accurately assess required skills and abilities.

While assessment centers are complex initiatives, we simplify the process by providing comprehensive instructions and guides for all assessment center staff. We also have the capability to design computer-based processes for easily scoring and reporting results. Finally, we understand the complexities that can arise in rolling out an assessment center process, and are dedicated to providing as much training, guidance and general support as is necessary to ensure our clients' success.

Censeo Corporation is a human resource consulting firm offering consulting services and Internet-based assessment products. The company's mission is to help clients maximize their investment in human capital by collecting and then strategically using accurate and valid information about competencies and work preferences. For more information, visit www.censeocorp.com, e-mail info-request@censeocorp.com or call 407.645.1600 x150.