

VIRTUAL
ASSESSMENT
CENTRES

VIRTUAL ASSESSMENT CENTRES

The impact of 2020's COVID pandemic on working culture cannot be understated. The wholesale switch to remote working -- long the desire of employees and organisations alike - has forced businesses to make fundamental changes to their operational procedures. One specific area of change is the selection and assessment of talent.

Organisations who have previously run assessment centres have faced one key question: In the new virtual working environment, are virtual assessment centres viable?

Thankfully, with the advent of video technology, the answer is yes. However, there are several operational and psychological considerations that must be acknowledged before undertaking virtual assessment.

This guide is designed to offer practical advice for the design, implementation and execution of assessment centres. It takes into consideration how technology can facilitate the assessment centre process, to ensure the predictive validity of the assessment is maintained.



Introduction – the case for assessment centres

The assessment centre concept was first developed for recruiting soldiers in the Army, and was used to assess individuals' ability to cope with the rigours of war. In the post-World War peacetime period, assessment centre methodology was adopted into business as a way of identifying and selecting individuals with a high degree of predictive validity in terms of future success within a role.

American businesses such as At&T and IBM were among the earliest adopters of assessment centre methodology, applying the techniques in both their employee selection and development processes. Assessment centres slowly grew in popularity, before becoming commonplace for large global businesses in the 1980s. Today, the latest statistics show 64% of global business currently uses some form of assessment centre in the selection and development of employees.

There are some critics of the assessment centre process. Criticism typically focuses on some of the group elements or tasks that applicants can be asked to undertake. For those of an introverted nature, being asked to interact in a group environment may cause discomfort and may not be the best way of demonstrating their skills.

The question is therefore one of relevancy. If the role in question requires a collaborative individual with the ability to communicate effectively in a group setting, then a group task may be appropriate. However, if the role requires a more analytical or process-focussed skill, then the task in the assessment centre should reflect that.

Utilising a range of tasks that allow the individual to demonstrate their relevant skills is vital in achieving an outcome where the most appropriate person is selected for the desired outcome.

Predictive Validity

Predictive validity refers to the likelihood of an assessment method being a reliable predictor of future performance. Businesses are looking for the 'holy grail' of predictive validity when assessing future employees entering their organisations.

The reasons for this focus include cost and future productivity. If assessment centres can give the highest likelihood of employees' future success, then there is a clear case for their usage as a method of recruitment and selection. When comparing different methods to review and assess future talent – from unstructured and structured interviews, to ability and behavioural psychometrics.

Assessment centres consistently offer the highest predictive validity; ranging from a 0.62 to

0.8

degree of accuracy. This is hugely relevant when designing an effective assessment centre process.

Section 1 –

Assessment Centre Criteria – planning a successful assessment centre

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1. Job Analysis | skills assessment

Before deciding which competencies should be assessed, and which tasks are best placed to demonstrate these competencies, it is important to undertake a job analysis. This will determine the required skills that need to be demonstrated during the assessment centre process.

Reviewing the job and person specifications, interviewing the management community, and working with the learning and development team are all vitally important in understanding what the role is, and what success looks like for the incumbent employee.

2. Competencies

A job role is made up of key competencies that allow organisations to benchmark applicants against skills, behaviours and values. These competencies play a vital role in creating effective assessment centres. Assessors will be observing the key competencies being demonstrated in real time, therefore the competencies and associated behavioural indicators must be defined and relevant for the job role.

3. Task Design and Relevancy

The correct choice of tasks to be undertaken in an assessment centre is another vital component for effective assessment. Typically a range of tasks will be undertaken, to allow the applicant to demonstrate a diverse range of skills.

These can include group tasks with focus on collaboration, communication and emotional intelligence; written tasks or in-tray exercises to review research, written style and level of language comprehension; presentation style tasks to review impact, passion and engagement; and finally role plays to assess behaviours such as resilience, active listening and influencing skills.

4. Psychometrics

Psychometric assessment falls into two categories, Ability and Behavioural, and using psychometric testing as part of the assessment process can really help to predict future performance. It is important to note, however, that the British Psychological Society recommends psychometrics – particularly behavioural (personality) assessments – are not used in isolation to decide on an offer of employment. There are no right or wrong answers in personality-based psychometrics. They are tools to gain insight into an individual's personality, and can be used to probe further into how an individual may behave or perform in certain situations or environments.

In ability-based psychometrics there is a fixed answer, so they can be used to ascertain someone's level of ability against set criteria like numerical or verbal comprehension. Other tests can be used to determine logical thought or situational judgment, to set a benchmark of ability. However, the type of ability assessment must be relevant to the job role. For instance, if the role requires a strong focus on numerical comprehension then a numerical reason test would be most appropriate.

5. Scoring Methodology

In an assessment centre setting, the scoring of applicants is designed to be based on observable behaviours. Within the design process, behavioural indicators under key competencies will have been written to both allow the applicant to showcase their abilities and the assessor to recognise a level of capability. A rating scale is provided to give the assessor a benchmark and guidance for the observed competency.

6. Rating Scale

Rating scales can range from 3 points to 10 points i.e. 1-3 or 1-10. It is generally accepted that using a maximum of 5 points in a rating scale is best practice. Using 10 points on a rating scale can lead to confusion over what constitutes a specific score, i.e. what is a 6 versus a 7. By keeping the matrix more concise, clear distinction can be made between observed levels of behaviours and skills.

SCORE	DESCRIPTION
1	Provides no evidence and/or demonstrates no behavioural indication of desired competency
2	Provides little evidence and/or demonstrates limited behavioural indication of desired competency
3	Provides some evidence and/or demonstrates basic level and behavioural indication of desired competency
4	Provides good evidence and/or demonstrates capable level and behavioural indication of desired competency
5	Provides strong evidence and/or demonstrates comprehensive level and behavioural indication of desired competency

Section 2 –

How to Deliver a Successful Centre in a Virtual Environment



Section 2 –

How to Deliver a Successful Centre in a Virtual Environment

This section will cover how to administer an effective virtual assessment centre. It will reference video room technology, training requirement for assessors, structure of the day, assessor moderation, recording and evaluating data, and delivering effective feedback.

Administration / Structure of the Day

One of the main benefits of an assessment centre is that it serves as an excellent engagement tool for future employees. Rather than a standard interview, applicants get to see the working environment, feel the culture of the organisation and spend more time with different organisational stakeholders. They can also glean information on the organisation and the role.

Within a virtual assessment centre, the applicants will not see the physical working space. But many of the positive aspects around future employee engagement can still be replicated within a virtual environment.

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A positive applicant experience can still be maintained within the virtual environment

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Welcome and Opening of the Day

The 'welcome' part of an assessment day has many roles to fulfil. It must make the applicants feel comfortable, and explain the structure/format of the day. It must also detail the nature of the assessment and, importantly, it must deliver any key messages.

Aside from perhaps the tea, coffee and pastries, this process can be delivered virtually. Organisations should prepare an interactive presentation to be delivered by the relevant senior stakeholders in the business.

Areas covered can include:

COMPANY OVERVIEW

VALUES

'WORK FOR US' VIDEO

ROLE OVERVIEW

COMPETENCIES BEING ASSESSED, TASKS

AND STRUCTURE

Room Set-up

Much like an in-person assessment centre, allocations of virtual rooms need to be prepared in advance. Suggested room designation is listed below.

1. APPLICANT ROOM

This room should be used for the opening of the day. It is recommended that this room be left open for the duration of the assessment centre. It provides a comfortable space for applicants and any designated employees from the organisations, to interact with one another. An appointed facilitator/s from the hiring organisation should be present all day, to help ensure applicants attend the relevant assessments and tasks in their allocated timeslot. If the tasks are overrunning, they can advise accordingly to ensure a seamless process.

2. ASSESSOR ROOM

The assessor room is designed to act as a private room for assessors to congregate between assessments. Each assessor will be provided with a timetable to adhere to, for the relevant time slots. This room also serves as the evaluation room for the 'wash up' session, when deciding to progress to a competency-based interview or decide on formal offers of employment.

3. TASK ROOMS

A task room will be allocated for each of the tasks being undertaken during the day. The assessors and applicants will be provided with the necessary URLs/virtual room links, along with the timetable for assessment. It is recommended that the virtual rooms are 'locked' for the duration of the assessments, to avoid any applicants entering the room mid-assessment. Additionally, the ability to record the session is a function may be used to refer to for evaluation purposes.

4. FACTORING IN BREAKS – COGNITIVE LOAD

Assessment days, by their very nature, are long and intensive. Objectivity is key in making the correct observations, and the concept of 'cognitive load' needs to be factored in when structuring the day. Regular breaks should be taken throughout the day to ensure the assessors have the mental capacity to make objective decisions when scoring applicants.

5. ASSESSOR PACK / TRAINING

Whether an organisation is moving from the traditional face-to-face model to a virtual assessment, or undertaking assessment centres for the very first time, assessor training is a key component in the execution of the day. This is important from an administrative standpoint, and will help to ensure the scoring remains objective.

6. COMPETENCIES

The competency framework being used must be explained in detail, to provide the assessor with reference to the skills, behaviours and values being observed during the tasks.

7. TASKS

Each task should be reviewed in detail, and the assessor needs to know the role they play in facilitating the assessment. If they are to take an active role in explaining the nature of the task, then factors such as timekeeping, active participation in a role play scenario, and relevant questioning should all be covered.



Platform Training

Familiarisation with the technology platform being used to administer the assessment is a crucial part of preparing for the day. When adopting new technologies, there can be varying levels of competency and anxiety around performing what may once have been pen and paper-based exercises. Training should be delivered – be it by a relevant in-house 'super user', or by the technology provider itself – to ensure everyone is comfortable in undertaking the assessments and tasks effectively.

The key benefit of using a technology platform over pen and paper-based methods is the ability to record both quantitative data (scores) and qualitative data (written notes) easily.





Evaluation

Technology platforms for assessment centres make the evaluation process efficient and transparent. With pen and paper-based methods, scores have to be calculated manually - which can be time-consuming and subject to error. Also, any written notes must be referenced back to the assessor's assessment pack. When using a technology platform, all scores are calculated at the click of the button and assessors' written notes can be easily collated.

This not only makes the process more efficient, but also allows a data-driven approach to selecting the appropriate candidates to progress to CBI or be given a formal offer of employment.



Assessor Moderation

A further benefit of using a technology platform is the ability to review trends with the assessor community. With the ability to review average scores, you can identify if a particular assessor may be a low or high scorer as a mean average - and therefore provide feedback to them to adapt their scoring levels on the rating scale.

You can also start to pick up preferences and trends in gender, age or ethnicity, and feed through to potential further training around objectivity or unconscious bias.



Communicating Feedback

Under the traditional pen and paper-based interview model, collating the data to provide objective feedback for each applicant takes time and effort. By using a technology platform, personalised reports can be easily produced to show how applicants scored in each task. This can serve two purposes.

Firstly, it provides objective feedback to unsuccessful applicants. It serves as a development plan to allow them to work on areas of underperformance, so that they may be more successful in the future.

Secondly, the report can be used to provide detailed data on strengths and development areas. These reports can assist the onboarding process, and help create tailored learning and development pathways for the new employees, reducing time for them to reach competence in their new role, and positively effecting productivity.

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The ability to capture data through the use of a technology platform increases objectivity in decision making

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We are Phoenix51

hello@phoenix51.io
phoenix51.io

Phoenix51 is built on a passion for creating simple solutions to complex problems. When it comes to an organisation's most important asset – its people – we believe that leaving hiring, assessment, and development decisions down to 'gut feel' is like playing the lottery. Our commitment to excellence combines the best aspects of human and technological advancement, allowing organisations and the people within them to thrive in today's modern talent landscape.



Assess

Assess prospective applicants against core competencies, using state-of-the-art technology and embedded video tools.



Hire

Use data analytics, graphs and scoring to make informed hiring decisions for your organisation.



Train

Analyse specific data points to create tailored development pathways for each employee in your organisation.



Retain

See increased levels of year 1 retention and productivity, with employees that bring the right skills, attitudes, and values to your organisation.

Phoenix51 is a state-of-the-art talent assessment platform enabling organisations to make data-driven decisions at every stage of the employee journey, from hiring through to benchmarking and development. Providing detailed analytics on each individual, the platform helps organisations not only to make the right hiring decisions, but to benchmark, train and retain their employees.

Virtual Assessment Centres

As the world moves to increasingly digital or remote models of working, the need to assess and interview remotely has become paramount. Our team of in-house business psychologists has designed assessment pathways that test applicants against relevant job-specific tasks in a remote setting.

<https://www.uk-acg.com/ac-history>

<http://www.mkbusinesspsychology.co.uk/file-manager/evidence-for-assessment-centres.pdf>

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/validity.html>

The Importance of Predictive and Face Validity in Employee Selection and Ways of Maximizing Them: An Assessment of Three Selection Methods Kelechi John Ekuma International Journal of Business and Management; Vol. 7, No. 22; 2012

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http://carmen.buzea.ro/Buzea_c_2007_The_predictive_validity_of_selection_methods_in_staffing_activities

Anderson, Neil & Shackleton, Viv. (1986). Recruitment and Selection: A Review of Developments in the 1980s. Personnel Review. 15. 19-26. 10.1108/eb055545.



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