In-Basket Design

Developing and Implementing an On-Line, Competency-Based, Multiple-Choice In-Basket Job Simulation

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Session Goals

- Outline the steps for developing a competency-based multiple-choice in-basket assessment
    - Instructions and Overview
    - E-mail messages
    - Multiple-choice questions
    - Documentation

- Emphasize procedures for ensuring validity
    - Traditional job analysis
    - Competency-based job analysis
    - Generic competency and assessment specific performance benchmarks

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What is the In-Basket Assessment?

- The **In-Basket Assessment** provides a snapshot of a supervisor's or manager's duties and responsibilities

  - The **Overview** and **E-mail Messages** incorporate tasks and duties typically performed by job incumbents

  - The **Multiple-choice Questions** target critical competencies

- Successful performance depends on proficiency in critical competencies

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Who Takes the In-Basket Assessment?

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- Supervisory Border Patrol Agents (GS-1896-13/15)

- Supervisory CBP Officers (GS-1895-13/14)

- Supervisory CBP Agriculture Specialists (GS-1895-13/14)

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- Supervisory/Managerial Special Agents (GS-14)

The Steps

- Step 1: Determine Critical Tasks, Duties, and Competencies

- Step 2: Collect Source Materials

- Step 3: Develop Overview and E-mail Messages

- Step 4: Develop Performance Benchmarks

- Step 5: Write Multiple-Choice Questions

The Steps

- Step 6:   Confirm Fidelity and Job Relatedness

- Step 7:   Assemble, Review, and Finalize

- Step 8:   Prepare for On-Line Administration

- Step 9:   Administer the In-Basket

- Step 10: Conduct Key Clearance

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Step 1: Determine Critical Tasks, Duties, and Competencies

Validity evidence is based on test content

- The In-Basket is grounded in comprehensive job analysis
  - SMEs identify critical tasks, duties, and competencies and perform a duty/competency linkage

- Validity relies on comprehensive sampling of critical tasks and duties and critical competencies
  - The overview and e-mail messages incorporate tasks and duties typically performed by job incumbents
  - The multiple-choice questions target critical competencies

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Step 1: Determine Critical Tasks, Duties, and Competencies

Conduct a Job/Task Analysis

- Duties and tasks guide the development of in-basket content

  <u>CBP Critical Supervisory and Managerial Duties</u>

  - Technical/Operations
  - Budget and Finance
  - Resource Management
  - Human Resource Management
  - Public Relations

Step 1: Determine Critical Tasks, Duties, and Competencies

Develop or Adopt a Competency Model

Competencies guide all phases of in-basket development

- The collection of source materials

- The identification of issues addressed by candidates

- The generation of in-basket content (overview & e-mail messages)

- The development of multiple-choice questions

- The calibration of the scoring key

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Supervisory/Managerial Competency Model
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The In-Basket focuses Management Skills and Applied Thinking Skills

Leadership
- Flexibility
- Fostering Ethical Conduct
- Leading Others
- Managing Conflict
- Teaching Others
- Teambuilding

Management
- Financial Management
- Human Resource Management
- **Managing & Organizing Information**
- **Planning & Resource Management**
- **Performance and Results Measurement**
- **Self-Management**
- Technology Application

Thinking
- Continual Learning
- **Decision-Making/Problem Solving**
- External Awareness
- Innovation
- Organizational Awareness
- Reasoning

Communication
- Collaboration
- Influencing & Negotiating
- Interpersonal Skills
- Oral Communication
- Written Communication

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Step 2: Collect Source Materials

- Review readily available information
    - Position descriptions
    - Training manuals and operational handbooks
    - Information from Internet/Intranet
    - Materials from other assessment development efforts

- Collect information from representative locations
    - Type of facility
    - Geographic location
    - Work cycle

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Step 2: Collect Source Materials

Work with SMEs, Superiors, Incumbents, Direct-Reports

- Gather representative documents
    - E-mail messages
    - Memos
    - Organizational charts
    - Forms
- Collect critical incidents (war stories)
    - What happened?
    - Antecedents—Behaviors—Consequences (ABC's)
        - How effective was the incumbent's behavior?
        - Can you provide examples of more or less effective responses?

Step 2: Collect Source Materials

Work with SMEs, Superiors, Incumbents, Direct-Reports

- Conduct competency-based "typical day" interviews:

    "Tell me about some of the issues you might handle on a typical day?"

    - How did you find out about this issue? Who did you inform about this issue? (*Managing & Organizing Information*)

    - What actions did you take to resolve this issue? (*Decision-Making/Problem-Solving*)

    - Who did you delegate this to? (*Self-Management*)

    - What, if any, follow up did you do to evaluate the resolution of the issue? (*Performance & Results Management*)

Step 3: Develop Overview and E-mail Messages

The overview sets the stage for the in-basket

- The overview includes:
  - The candidate's role and responsibilities
    - *You are Pat Jones, the manager of . . .*
  - The time frame
    - *It is 8:00 a.m. on Tuesday, July 20th. You have been on leave for the past 2 weeks. In 40 minutes you must leave for an all-day meeting.*
  - The organizational setting
    - Location and surroundings
    - Organizational structure and staff
    - Critical issues

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Step 3: Develop Overview and E-mail Messages

Create a balanced pool of e-mail messages

- Cover job duties and critical tasks
- Address critical competencies
- Vary document features
  - Sender
    - Organization
    - Organizational level
  - Origination date
  - Priority/criticality

Create more e-mail messages than you think you need!

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Step 4: Develop Performance Benchmarks

The In-Basket Uses Two Types of Benchmarks

- Generic **competency benchmarks**
    - Developed by PRAD to apply across all PROM occupations
    - Defined in PRAD taxonomy at the <u>subcompetency</u> level

- Specific **e-mail benchmarks**
    - Developed by SMEs for each new in-basket

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Step 4: Develop Performance Benchmarks

Generic Competency Benchmarks

- Characteristics
    - Applicable to future assessments
    - Applicable to other occupations

- Process
    - Analyze the competency definition
        - *Think about performance requirements*
    - List the behaviors that define performance
    - For each behavior, provide performance benchmarks (exceptional, meets expectations, needs improvement)
    - Use for scaling multiple-choice response options

Step 4: Develop Performance Benchmarks

Generic Competency Benchmarks -- Example

- Competency Definition

    Managing and Organizing Information - Identifies need for information; determines its importance and accuracy, and communicates it by a variety of methods.

- Subcompetencies

    1 Recognizes when available information is incomplete, inaccurate, or contains conflicts.

    2 Determines appropriate disposition of information.

    3 Recognizes relationships among documents.

Step 4: Develop Performance Benchmarks

Generic Competency Benchmarks -- Example

Managing and Organizing Information *-* **Identifies need for information; determines its importance and accuracy, and communicates it by a variety of methods.**

1. Recognizes when available information is incomplete, inaccurate, or contains conflicts.

Benchmark example to be provided during tutorial.

Step 4: Develop Performance Benchmarks

Specific E-mail Benchmarks

- Are developed by well qualified SMEs
    - Have held the target position
    - Are not eligible to take the test
        - Are currently at target level or higher
    - Are recognized as competent

- Define possible actions that can be taken in response to each e-mail message

- Form basis of multiple-choice response options
    - Competency benchmarks help to calibrate response options

Step 4: Develop Performance Benchmarks

SME Content Review and Benchmark Development

- SMEs provide preliminary review of in-basket materials
    - Respond to in-basket in "candidate mode"
    - Rate job-relatedness, technical accuracy, format, clarity
    - Suggest changes to improve fidelity

- SMEs develop performance benchmarks
    - Focus SME responses with competency-based probes
        - *Specific issues (e-mail messages)*
        - *Broader issues (overall in-basket*)
    - Define performance levels
        - *Highly effective*
        - *Marginally acceptable*
        - *Ineffective*

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Step 4: Develop Performance Benchmarks

Competency-based probes help SMEs generate benchmarks

Managing and Organizing Information - Identifies need for information; determines its importance and accuracy, and communicates it by a variety of methods.

Consider the following questions as you review each document:

- Does the information in this document provide insight into issues presented in other documents?

- Who else needs the information presented in this document? How soon must you present this information to these individuals?

- What should you do with this document once you have read it? Do you need to transmit it to or inform others this document? Should it be filed? Can you discard it?

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Step 5: Write Multiple-Choice Questions

- Prepare the test plan

- Select the best e-mail messages

- Write questions and response options

- Prepare answer key and justification of correct and incorrect responses

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Step 5: Write Multiple-Choice Questions

Prepare the Test Plan

- Weight each competency based on job analysis results
- Set test length and determine the number of items needed for each competency
- Write more questions than you need

| | # of Questions | |
Competency	Draft	Final
Decision-Making	20	18
Planning & Resource Management	15	13
Perf. & Results Management	15	13
Managing Information	20	16
Self-Management	20	15
Total	**90**	**75**

[1]Assumes that 2 forms will be developed and that there will be about 40-50% overlap between the forms.

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Step 5: Write Multiple-Choice Questions

Select the Best E-mail Messages

- Each e-mail message should . . .
    - Look and feel like the job
    - Address at least one critical competency

- The pool of e-mail messages should . . .
    - Sample the domain of critical duties and work activities
    - Vary in "sender" and priority
    - Be able to be read within time limits
        - Average reading speed = 300 words/minute
        - 25 - 30 e-mail messages = about 30 minutes

- Reserve "back-up" e-mail messages
    - E-mail messages will be eliminated during item writing and test reviews

Step 5: Write Multiple-Choice Questions

Write Questions and Response Options

- Develop competency-based stems
  - Use "competency-based probes" to guide development

- Develop response options
  - E-mail based benchmarks define highly effective, marginally acceptable, and unacceptable performance
  - Sub-competency benchmarks help calibrate responses
  - All response options must address the same competency

Guideline

  - Each e-mail message should produce at least 1 item
    - If not, delete or revise the document
      - *Consider the impact on other e-mail messages!*
      - *Tell the other item writers!*

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Step 5: Write Multiple-Choice Questions

Sample E-mail Message # 3

From: SBPA Stan Markowitz
To: Chief Patrol Agent Chris Smith
Subject: Questions from Media

Assistant Chief Susan Cook called at 6:30 this morning from Sector Headquarters. She was unable to reach you. She got a call from Dick Grady a reporter from KNWS-Talk Radio. He asked AC Cook to comment on our strategy for this week's joint operation with DEA. AC Cook said that Dick Grady knows much more about our plans for Operation CATTRAP than we have released to the public.

AC Cook referred Dick Grady to our Public Information Officer and then asked him where he obtained his information. He said he could not reveal his sources. She asked me to pass this information on to you ASAP and to ask you to handle the situation.

If you need me, I will be on location for the remainder of the day.

Step 5: Write Multiple-Choice Questions

Competency: Problem Solving and Decision-Making

- Identifies and analyzes problems; **distinguishes between relevant and irrelevant information to make logical judgments;** provides solutions to individual and organizational problems; draws correct inferences from available information to make sound and well-informed decisions.

Subcompetency: Assesses the relevance of information

Benchmarks to be provided during tutorial.

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Step 5: Write Multiple-Choice Questions

Sample Decision-Making Item

- In E-mail 3, Supervisory Border Patrol Agent (SBPA) Markowitz informs you that a reporter has asked Assistant Chief Susan Cook for comments on Operation CATTRAP. What is the most critical issue raised in this message?

  A) Assistant Chief Cook's inability to reach you.

  B) SBPA Markowitz's location for the remainder of the day

  C) Assistant Chief Cook's inability to reach you this morning.

  D) Dick Grady's knowledge about Operation CATTRAP.

  E) Dick Grady's refusal to divulge the source of his knowledge about Operation CATTRAP.

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Step 5: Write Multiple-Choice Questions

Prepare Answer Key and Justification

- For each question, include
  - Assigned test series and respective question #
    - Is it an "anchor item?"
  - Competency/subcompetency
  - E-mail message(s) referenced
  - Question stem
  - Response options and key (correct response)
  - Justification for each response option

Step 5: Write Multiple-Choice Questions

Documentation:

Text Format

Job Simulation Question Development Worksheet

Development Number:	Item #2	**Question Number:**	Series 110 Item #2
Documents Used:	Document #3		Series 120 Item #4
Primary Competency Measured:	**X** **Decision Making**		**Planning and Evaluating**
	Managing Information		**Self-Management**

Item Stem and Alternatives

In Document 3, SBPA Markowitz informs you of an urgent telephone call he received from Assistant Chief Cook last night. What is the MOST critical issue raised in this document?

Key
- 0   A) Dick Grady's invitation to Assistant Chief Cook
- 0   B) SBPA Markowitz's location for the remainder of the day
- 0   C) Assistant Chief Cook's inability to reach you last night
- 2   D) Dick Grady's knowledge about Operation CATTRAP
- 0   E) Dick Grady's refusal to divulge the source of his knowledge about Operation CATTRAP

Explanation

Key: Justification for correct answer goes here

Option D is the best answer. The most critical piece of information is the fact that Dick Grady has more extensive knowledge of Operation CATTRAP than has been released to the public. The fact that Dick Grady has invited Assistant Chief Cook to appear on his radio program.

Other Response Options: Justification for incorrect answers go here

(A) This option is less important; it is Assistant Chief Cook's decision whether to accept the invitation.

(B) SBPA Markowitz's whereabouts are known and he can be contacted if needed; therefore, this information cannot be considered as critical.

(C) Assistant Chief Cook's inability to reach you last night is now irrelevant because you have been contacted.

(E) Dick Grady's refusal to divulge his source is less critical than the fact that he knows a great deal about Operation CATTRAP.

Reviewer's Comments	***Reviewer's Initials*** JC

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Step 5: Write Multiple-Choice Questions

Documentation: Spreadsheet Format

Microsoft Excel - Justification2.xls

ID #	E-mail	Test #	Anchor	Comp	Key	Intro.	Stem	A	B	C	D	E
1	1	130, 140	YES	DM	B	In E-mail 1 . . .	Question goes here	Response A	Keyed Response	Response C	Response D	Response D
								JUSTIFICATION				
2	2	130	NO	SM	E	In E-mail 2 . . .	Question goes here	Response A	Response B	Response C	Response D	Keyed Response
								JUSTIFICATION				

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Step 6: Confirm Fidelity and Job Relatedness

Assemble Materials for SME Review

- In-basket
    - Overview
        - Organizational chart
        - Background information
        - Calendars
    - Over-length test
        - All multiple-choice questions
    - Documentation of response options
- Unresolved issues for SMEs to address
    - Policy
    - Job knowledge

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Step 6: Confirm Fidelity and Job Relatedness

Conduct SME Review Session

- SMEs complete the assessment
  - Read overview/e-mail messages
  - Complete over-long test
- Review and revise the overview and e-mail messages
- Review and revise questions and documentation
  - Reflect changes to overview and e-mail messages in multiple-choice questions
    - Delete questions corresponding to deleted e-mail messages
    - Modify response options
    - Provide additional documentation

Step 6: Confirm Fidelity and Job Relatedness

- SMEs evaluate all in-basket materials for:
  - Job relatedness
  - Clarity/conciseness
  - Technical accuracy
  - Fidelity

- Multiple-choice questions receive additional scrutiny
  - Generalizability across settings
    - Must generalize across facility type and geographic location
    - Cannot rely on localized knowledge or regional policies
  - Soundness of answer key and justification of responses
    - Keyed answer must be the best answer
    - Other response options must be plausible

If SMEs alter a response option make sure that it addresses the intended competency!

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Step 7: Assemble, Review, and Finalize

Assemble Alternate Forms

A True Balancing Act

- Both forms must follow the competency-based test plan

- Each document must be addressed by at least one multiple-choice question

- One question cannot imply the answer to other questions

- Response options should be equally distributed
    - Each option (A,B,C,D,E) will comprise about 20% of the total

- Response options should be appropriately sequenced
    - no more than 3 "A's," "B's," "C's," etc. in a row

Step 7: Assemble, Review, and Finalize

- Write instructions for administration
  - On-line
  - Paper-and-pencil

- Quality control: *Proofread!!*
  - Look for common mistakes – watch for inconsistencies
    - Names of characters
    - Names of places
    - Dates/times
    - E-mail format
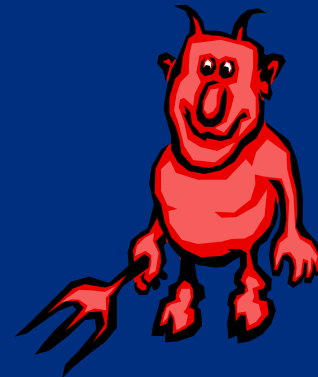
"the details"

Step 7: Assemble, Review, and Finalize

Technical (Psychometric) Review

- Examine instructions, introductory materials, e-mail messages
    - Sensitive organizational issues
    - Conformance to organizational policies, practices, procedures
    - Grammar, syntax, clarity

- Review/edit multiple-choice items
    - Grammar, syntax, clarity
    - Correspondence to competency
    - Independence of response options

- Review/edit scoring key

Step 8: Prepare for Administration

- On-line administration
  - Program the in-basket for on-line administration
    - *Allow enough time–PRAD's contractor requires 8 weeks*
  - Conduct User Acceptance Testing (UAT)
    - Preliminary review
      - Contractor's Quality Assurance (QA) team
      - PRAD test developers
    - Live review
      - Conducted by PRAD one week before testing
- Paper-and-pencil administration
  - Prepare Directions for Conducting (DFC)
  - Prepare master copy for reproduction or printing

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Step 9: Administer the In-Basket

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Step 9: Administer the In-Basket

Candidates register for the assessment during an open period

- On-line version
  - Administered in multiple testing sites nationwide
  - Self-paced administration in a proctored environment
  - Total test time is 90 minutes
    - Up to 40 minutes for review of overview and documents
    - Remainder of period for multiple-choice questions

- Paper-and-pencil version
  - Used for international administration and in making reasonable accommodations
  - Not self-paced
    - 40 minutes for review of overview and documents
    - 50 minutes to complete multiple choice-questions

Step 10: Conduct Key Clearance

- Prior to assigning scores, we examine item functioning to:
    - Verify the accuracy of the computer-programmed scoring key
    - Evaluate the integrity of each item

- What we examine
    - Item difficulty (p-values)
    - Point biserial correlations (pbi)
    - Hi/Lo Split (response distribution of upper and lower 45%)
    - Internal consistency reliability
    - Content of question stems and response options

- Decisions we make based on item statistics and content review
    - Poorly performing items are eliminated
    - Alternative plausible responses receive full or partial credit

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Step 10: Conduct Key Clearance

Questions we ask during key clearance:

- *Item difficulty (p-values)*
  - What percent of candidates select the keyed response?
  - Is the item overly difficult or too easy?

- *Item point biserial correlations*
  - Does highest pbi correspond to the keyed response?

- *Variation within the distribution of response options*
  - How often is each response option being endorsed?
  - Are "top" candidates endorsing the keyed response?
  - Which response options are being endorsed by poorer performers?

- *Internal consistency reliability*
  - What would happen if a low performing item was dropped?

Don't Forget to Clean House!

Assemble documentation for future reference

Include hard and electronic copies of:

- in-basket materials
    - Instructions and Overview
    - E-mail messages
- All test series (e.g., 130 & 140)
- Key and documentation
- Item-level statistics
    - include items that are not scored

Shred/destroy what you don't need!

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Questions?

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Important Managerial Duties and Tasks
Performed by Supervisory & Managerial Law Enforcement Officers
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The following Duties and Tasks were based on a job analysis that was done when the Promotional Assessment system was created. To be included, tasks had an average importance rating of 3.0[1], and were performed by 70% of respondents.

Technical
1. Plans work and makes work assignments to subordinates
2. Reviews job related forms/applications/work products
3. Schedules staff coverage
4. Gives technical advice

Budget & Finance
5. Monitors expenditures, funding transfers, makes sure that money is spent appropriately; analyzes operating costs

Resource Management
6. Analyzes resource requirements; allocates resources to meet goals of the Service
7. Analyzes workload
8. Plans for physical facilities
9. Ensures that technology needs are met
10. Reviews requisitions
11. Maintains the security of computer systems, equipment, and sensitive documents

Human Resources Management
12. Ensures that staff receives appropriate training
13. Disciplines employees when necessary
14. Works with the union
15. Ensures compliance to integrity standards
16. Makes recommendations re: selection, personnel action
17. Reviews, ensures timely submission of monthly statistical work reports
18. Reviews/evaluates employee performance

Public Relations Communications
19. Deals with other INS units or organizations
20. Serves as liaison to external sources
21. Gives information to upper management
22. Responds to Congressional, interagency, intra-agency and public inquiries/complaints and oversees appropriate resolution of issues.

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[1]Respondents used the following scale to rate tasks:
        1=Considerably less important than other tasks;
        2=Somewhat less important than other task;
        3=About the same as most other tasks;
        4=Somewhat more important than other tasks;
        5=Considerably more important than other tasks.

Competencies Assessed by the In-Basket

The ***In-Basket Job Simulation*** measures management skills that are critical for effective performance in supervisory and managerial jobs. The competencies in the management skills cluster include:

Decision Making and Problem Solving - The ability to identify problems and to gather, interpret, and evaluate information in order to determine its accuracy and relevance; skill in generating and evaluating alternatives; the ability to make sound and well-informed decisions; and the ability to commit to action to accomplish organizational goals.

Planning and Resource Management - The ability to organize work, set priorities, and determine resource requirements; skill in determining objectives and strategies to achieve organizational goals; and the ability to coordinate with other parts of the organization to achieve these goals.

Performance & Results Management - The ability to establish goals and quality standards of performance for one's organization; the ability to hold oneself and others accountable for meeting expectations; and skill in monitoring and measuring the attainment of organizational goals.

Managing and Organizing Information - The ability to identify a need for information, determine its importance and accuracy, and communicate it by a variety of methods.

Self-Management - The ability to show initiative; your skill in setting well-defined and realistic goals; the ability to monitor progress; one's motivation to achieve; and one's effectiveness in managing one's time and dealing with stress effectively.

Competency-Based Probes for Performance Benchmarks

The in-basket assesses five competencies. Use these questions to help define your responses to specific issues in each e-mail and to broader issues raised by the in-basket as a whole.

Decision Making and Problem Solving – Identifies problems; gathers, interprets, and evaluates information to determine its accuracy and relevance; generates and evaluates alternatives; makes sound and well-informed decisions; and commits to action to accomplish organizational goals.

Consider the following questions as you review each document:

- What factors are most important to consider in deciding how to respond to the situation raised in this document?

- Does the information presented in the document provide you with a sound basis for decision making? If not, what additional information would you want?

- What actions are likely to be most effective in dealing with the situation presented in this document?

Managing and Organizing Information – Identifies need for information; determines its importance and accuracy, and communicates it by a variety of methods.

Consider the following questions as you review each document:

- Does the information in this document provide insight into issues presented in other documents?

- Who else needs the information presented in this document? How soon must you present this information to these individuals?

- What should you do with this document once you have read it? Do you need to transmit it to or inform others this document? Should it be filed? Can you discard it?

Planning and Resource Management – Develops short and long-range plans that are realistic and appropriately comprehensive; includes contingency plans, as appropriate; determines material and human resource requirements and ensures that needed resources are available; coordinates with other parts of the organization to accomplish goals.

Consider the following questions as you review each document:

- What specific steps would you take to resolve the situation in this document? Which of these steps would you take first?

- What resources would you need to resolve the situation in this document? (Personnel, equipment, funding)? Are there other situations that would compete for these resources?

- Of the factors mentioned in this document, which would create the greatest burden on your organization's resources?

- Which organizational units need to be involved (e.g., Headquarters, Office of Public Affairs, other jurisdictions)?

Competency-Based Probes for Performance Benchmarks

Performance & Results Management – Takes steps to achieve quality end products; is committed to continuous improvement; assures that effective controls are in place; holds self and others accountable for meeting expectations; monitors and evaluates plans; focuses on results and on measuring attainment of outcomes.

Consider the following questions as you review each document:

- What steps would you take to follow up to ensure that your efforts are on schedule and within resource allocations?

- What events are likely to cause delays or changes in resources?

- What indicators would provide the strongest evidence that the way you dealt with the situation had been successful?

Self-management – Shows initiative; sets well-defined and realistic personal goals; monitors progress and is motivated to achieve; manages own time and deals with stress effectively.

Consider the following questions as you review each document:

- What priority would you assign to each issue or situation presented in the in-basket?

- When must each situation be handled? Does the situation require immediate attention or can you delay action? If the situation does not require immediate attention, how long can you delay action?

- Is this situation something that you should handle personally? If not, who on your staff should?

Item Development Checklist

The **ITEM** as a whole should:

- clearly reflect a competency and subcompetency
- focus on a single problem
  - o the solution can involve several steps but only one question should be asked
- be totally independent of all other items for its correct answer
- be free of cultural, gender, or other biases
  - o keep the sentence structure and vocabulary as simple as possible
- be printed entirely on one page or one screen

The **STEM** should:

- be self contained
  - o the candidate should be able to answer the question without the alternatives
- ask a question that has a definite answer
- be clearly worded and free of ambiguity
- be free of irrelevant unnecessary detail
- be grammatically correct within itself and in its relationship to each of the alternatives
- not provide any grammatical clues to any alternative

Each **RESPONSE OPTION** should

- be appropriate to the question asked or implied by the stem
- be plausible
- be grammatically consistent with the stem and parallel in form
- be independent; response options should not overlap with other response options
- be stated as briefly and simply as possible

In addition, when preparing **RESPONSE OPTIONS**:

- avoid the use of trickery
- always use the same number of alternatives
- keep all alternatives as close to the same length as possible
  - o do not provide inadvertent clues to the correct response
- place words that are common to all the alternatives in the stem
- avoid absolute terms like "always" and "never"
- refrain from using "all of the above" or "none of the above"

When developing the **ANSWER KEY**:

- vary the distribution of keyed items in a random manner
- arrange numerical response options in ascending or descending order
- assign the same number of points to each item
- make sure that the keyed answer for one item does not give away other keyed responses.
- make sure that the keyed answer is the only correct answer or clearly the best answer