Overview

- General assessment center guidelines and trends
- Challenges in the public sector
- Best practices
- Lessons learned
- Future directions
  - Technology-mediated simulation demo
General Assessment Center
Guidelines and Trends
### Essential Elements for an Assessment Center*

1. **Job analysis/ competency modeling**
2. **Behavioral classification**
3. **Link behaviors to dimensions to assessment techniques**
4. **Multiple assessments – elicit variety of dimension-relevant behaviors**
5. **Simulations**
6. **Multiple assessors evaluate each candidate**
7. **Assessor training**
8. **Systematic recording of behavior and scoring**
9. **Data integration (pooled from assessors or statistical integration)**

*Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations (International Task Force on Assessment Center Guidelines, 2009)
Common Practices and Recent Trends

• No “typical” assessment center method
  – Traditionally used “clinical” approach (e.g., end of day judgments)
  – Statistical or hybrid methods gaining support, particularly for decision making

• Traditionally, two primary assessment center purposes:
  – Individual development and selection/promotion

Relatively Recent Trends

• Integrate assessment centers into broader organizational strategies
  – Organizational development, team building

• Adapted for non-managerial jobs

• Competencies expanding to include broader types of dimensions
  – Personality (e.g., resilience); Interpersonal (e.g., cooperation, teamwork)

• Incorporating technology

References:


Challenges in the Public Sector
Challenges in the Public Sector – Federal Examples

• Large-scale assessment
  – Process a lot of candidates as efficiently as possible while maintaining security of the exercises
    • Up to 400 candidates for 10 days
    • 40 candidates per day
    • 40 assessors per day

• Budget constraints
  – Costly to hire external assessors
  – Resource burden to use separate assessors and role players

• Logistical constraints
  – Length of work day constraints
  – Difficult to get dedicated time from high-level internal assessors
  – Tight development and implementation timelines (some agencies)
  – Internal assessors may know candidates
Challenges in the Public Sector - Federal

- "Ownership" of the process
  - Agencies often want to “own” the assessment simulations
    - Customized (not off-the-shelf)
    - High fidelity, face valid and content valid simulations
    - Stakeholders, leaders want to be involved in development/evaluation

- Target competencies
  - Agencies often want to measure a fairly large number of competencies/KSAs
  - Some are difficult to measure

- Issues to consider
  - Purpose of the assessment center
  - General managerial job vs. specific job
  - Applicants from one agency or open to other agencies/departments
Best Practices
Examples of Large-Scale Federal Assessment Centers for Decision Making

• Promotion
  – Field grade 14 and 15 in a Federal law enforcement agency
  – Based on extensive job analysis
  – Includes 4 simulations or 3 simulations and a structured interview

• Selection into Career Development Programs
  – Senior Executive Service programs
  – Based on competency model and organizational priorities
  – 4 simulations (full day)
  – Quantitative and qualitative feedback at competency level
    • Challenge = providing (limited) diagnostic feedback while preserving test security
Strict Content-Oriented Development Strategy

• **Specific jobs/positions**
  – Detailed job analysis data
  – Task-KSA linkages
  – Identify critical tasks that are also:
    • Measurable in a short amount of time
    • Linked to many critical KSAs

• **General managerial/executive programs**
  – Create fictitious organization with similar function as agency offering the career development program (e.g., Federal service organization)
  – Identify target competencies important to the organization/level
  – Identify measurable aspects of target competencies
  – Minimize overlap among similar competencies
  – Develop simulations of the selected tasks using types of materials they would see on the job (e.g., case files, budget report)
Administration

• Innovative scheduling process
  – 1:1 candidate assessor ratio
    • 20 candidates/day = 20 assessors/day
  – 2 assessors per candidate for a given exercise
  – 2 schedules of candidates per day (staggered to maximize efficiency)
  – Up to 8 assessors observe a given candidate in a day
  – Assessor pairs rotate each day
  – Mix assessor pairs by important characteristics
    • Gender
    • Assessor type/location (e.g., HQ vs. Field, current employee vs. hired assessor – e.g., recent retiree)
  – Activities timed to the minute
  – Efficiently obtain brief qualitative feedback (when applicable)
Administration

• Used job incumbents as assessors instead of professional assessors
  – More cost effective in large-scale administrations
  – Ratings consistent with professional raters
  – They have critical job knowledge

• Assess rater familiarity and partiality in advance
  – When using internal assessors
  – Collect maiden names and nicknames when possible
  – Assign assessor pairs to candidates based on these ratings
  – The “lead” assessor (e.g., “role player”) has the lowest familiarity/partiality ratings
# Familiarity and Partiality

## Familiarity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I have supervised/worked with this applicant for at least 6 months and/or have known this applicant for a long time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I have supervised/worked with this applicant for less than 6 months and/or know this applicant fairly well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I know this applicant somewhat, but I have not supervised or worked with him/her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I do not know this applicant but know of him/her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I do not know this applicant at all.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Objectivity (Impartiality)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I should not evaluate this applicant because I would not be objective or it would be perceived that I lack objectivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I may have some problems in evaluating this applicant because I may not be objective or I may be perceived as lacking objectivity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I can objectively evaluate this applicant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Integrating Observations and Ratings: Modified Statistical Technique

Assessors observe, record, categorize behaviors

Provide initial (independent) dimension ratings within-exercise after each exercise

Ratings within 1 point on a 5-point scale are final

Assessors discuss ratings more than 1 point apart to reach “consensus” within one point

Average final dimension ratings within and across exercises

Sum to an overall score
New Directions in Candidate Feedback

- Agencies request normative feedback at competency level by exercise
- Basic diagnostic feedback (strengths, weaknesses) requested in assessment centers for succession planning
Lessons Learned
Lessons Learned

• Need to run administration like a “tight ship;” even a 2-minute delay could temporarily throw off timing

• Well-trained internal managers and executives are a “win-win” as assessors
  – Make consistent ratings as professionals (saves costs)
  – They take it seriously, tolerate the long days, and like being part of the process
  – Able to serve as both role players and assessors simultaneously

• Difficult to provide meaningful qualitative feedback without compromising test security
  – Brief feedback 1-2 sentences per competency per exercise; summarize across exercises
  – Delay delivery of feedback to candidates until after decision making
  – Nevertheless, is well-received by leadership and candidates
  – May not be desirable when decision making is the main focus
Lessons Learned

• Organizational advantages *(feedback from assessors)*
  – Process helps internal assessors with subsequent performance evaluations of subordinates (e.g., focus on observable behaviors)
  – Identify consistent strengths and weaknesses across candidates
    • Can inform gaps at individual or group level for training, rotational assignments
  – Provides a bigger picture for how to groom future leaders

• Can develop very rich exercises to measure multiple competencies subsumed under a manageable number (e.g., 5-7) of core competencies
Future Directions and Innovative Methods
Future Directions and Innovative Methods

- Web-based methods for administration, scoring, feedback
- Technology-mediated simulations
  - Methods that select from pre-determined alternatives do not meet “assessment center” criteria

**Pros**
- Less time commitment from assessors
- Increased realism for some tasks (e.g., email)
- Novel

**Cons**
- Technology costs to program and animate customized simulation
- Decreased realism of complex interactions (e.g., non-verbal behavior, inflection)
- Insufficient validity evidence
Technology-Mediated Simulation Demo (Simulated Role Play)