



CONFESSION:

Assessment Centre Observers do it After Hours

› Background/Setting the Scene

- **The Assignment**
A Development Centre to determine training needs
- **The Client**
A Blue-chip SA company engaged in the start-up of a manufacturing plant in Mozambique.
- **Assessors**
Four experienced observers
- **Time Available**
Three days

> Client's requirements

DETERMINE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS:

- Facilitate a Development Centre (DC) for 12 participants over three days.
- Use various simulation exercises, tests and questionnaires.
- Start the DC with a lecture on leadership development.
- Provide each participant with a profile of own strengths and development needs.

> Preparation

- Detailed job analysis data was available.
- The required competencies were determined.
- The DC design was based on the competencies.
- A variety of assessment techniques was included.
- Time slots in the programme were planned in detail.
- Material was printed and packed.

Perfect, so far ...

> Unforeseen Physical Constraints

- Enormous banquet hall as main venue.
- Tiny tables for participants.
- Not enough breakaway rooms.
- Temperature: 42° Humidity: High.
- Air conditioning noisy, like wind tunnels.

> Unforeseen Time Constraints

- Tight programme – no slack built in.
- Too many exercises.
- Not enough time scheduled for feedback.
- Kitchen did not adhere to agreed timetable.
- Participants had transport arrangements.
- Observers spent their nights scoring and writing-up.

> Unexpected Client Requests

- Changed requirements / purpose on Day Two.
 - DC had to become an AC
 - Provide merit list for promotion decisions.
- Required a lecture on leadership development.
- Attended some feedback sessions without prior arrangement.
 - Affected rapport between observer and participant.
- Client did not attend all feedback sessions:
 - Participants became concerned and uncertain.

> Arrangements to reconsider

- Insufficient information about DC to participants.
- Lecture on first morning influenced expectations of what happens at a DC.
- First simulation done on second day.
- Language proficiency of participants was not checked.

> Participants' reactions

- Anxious and insecure.
- Proud to be invited to the DC.
- Drew attention to who was being assessed.
- Expected to be promoted.
- Asked about promotion dates.

> Challenges for observers

- Client was out of country for three weeks prior to the DC.
- Client approved the proposal three days before DC.
- DC design and preparation of material took longer than expected.
- Observers were tired when the DC started.
- Observers were unfamiliar with the programme.
- Write-up, scoring and reporting had to be done in the evenings.

> What worked

- Feedback after every exercise.
(Participants could adjust their behaviour.)
- Participants giving feedback to each other.
- Participants' presentations of PDP to managers.
(Participants were committed on the last day.)
- Well thought-out structured rating forms.
(Saves time if behaviour anchors are observable and discreet.)
- Experienced observers handled the unforeseen.
- Observers could stand in for each other.
(Instructions, group feedback sessions and debriefing sessions.)
- Long "counseling" sessions assisted participants with development planning.

- The AC method provides an effective means to determine development needs.
- Individuals can be placed in a most appropriate development programme.



Next time

> Contracting with Client

PURPOSE OF THE DC:

- Ensure agreement about the purpose.
- Enquire about other uses of the results.
 - Suggest options
- Find out what decisions have to be made.
- Agree on output.
 - Verbal feedback
 - Written reports

> Contracting with Client

INVITING PARTICIPANTS:

- Enquire about the reason for inviting certain participants.
- Arrange that participants receive a letter with information.
- Discuss (or specify) content of the letter.
- Maybe provide a template for a letter.

> Contracting with the Client

CONTENT OF THE INVITATION LETTER:

- Purpose of the DC.
- Why the person is involved.
- Short explanation of what an DC entails.
- What the results will be used for.
- When they will receive feedback.

> Designing the Development Centre

THE ASSESSMENT MATRIX:

- Include a variety of exercises.
- Assess four competencies in each exercise.
- Assess a ten competencies in the AC.
- Use existing information (360° results).
- Complete OPQ (Personality questionnaire) and other tests / questionnaires beforehand.

> Planning the Development Centre

LOGISTICAL ARRANGEMENTS:

- Allow more time between approving the proposal and the DC.
- Explain exactly what type of venue is required.
- Request a quiet and comfortable venue.
- Explain why breakaway rooms are required.
- Arrange for appropriate tables.
- Ensure that the kitchen complies with schedule.
- Inform participants beforehand of start and end times.

> Observer Training

- Negotiate enough time for preparation.
- Ensure observers know the exercises.
- Ensure observers understand rating forms.
- Ensure observers know how to score tests.
- Measure how long scoring of tests will take.
- Explain the programme beforehand.
- Explain the matrix beforehand.
- Explain how to calculate final scores.

> Reassuring Participants

- At onset, introduce observers.
- Explain the purpose of the DC.
- Indicate what results will be used for.
- Ensure confidentiality.
- Explain the DC centre programme.
- Explain what is meant by simulation exercises.
- Start the DC with the first simulation exercise.

› Designing the Development Centre

programme:

- Give feedback after each exercise.
- Allow enough time to give feedback.
- Build slack into the programme.
- Start the DC with a simulation exercise.
- Introduce peer observation early in the programme.
- End the DC with individual presentations of PDP's to line managers.
- Think twice before adding interventions that are not usually part of a DC.

(The hour long lecture on Leadership Development was a mistake.)

> Contents of a Report

- Purpose of the Development Centre
- Choice of Assessment Instruments
- Assessment Instruments
 - Personality Questionnaire
 - Ability Tests
 - In-tray Exercise
 - Presentation Exercise
 - Group Exercise
- Interpretation of Results
- Results of the Assessment
 - Overall Competency Rating (Scores in matrix)
 - Observations for Development (Comments on behaviours)

> Structured Rating Form

GROUP EXERCISE STRUCTURED RATING FORM: Interpersonal Skills

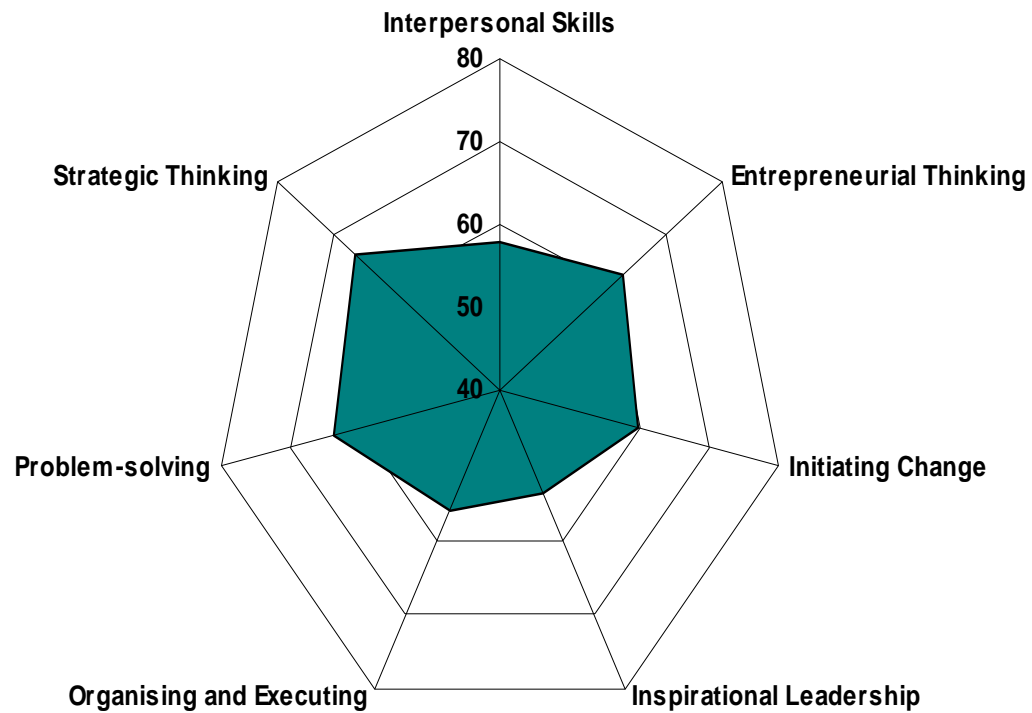
Limiting behaviours	-	-	•	+	+	Enhancing behaviours	Notes/Evidence
Does not actively involve other group members or ask for ideas and opinions.	-	-	-	-	-	Actively involves other group members; asks for ideas and opinions.	
Works independently, or includes one person to the exclusion of others.	-	-	-	-	-	Joins in group work; includes all team members equally.	
Displays consistent behaviour regardless of other people's styles, needs or behaviour.	-	-	-	-	-	Adjusts approach and style to different people.	

> Reporting on Behaviour

Limiting behaviours	-	-	•	+	+ +	Enhancing behaviours
Does not actively involve other group members or ask for ideas and opinions, or disregards their contributions.				X		Actively involves other group members; asks for ideas and opinions.
Works independently, or includes one person to the exclusion of others.			X			Joins in group work; includes all team members equally.
Doesn't listen to others; shows non-verbal signs of inattention (e.g. looks away).		X				Listens to others inputs; shows non-verbal signs of attention (e.g. eye contact).
Ignores, interrupts or dismisses others' contributions, impolite or abrupt.				X		Acknowledges , builds on, refers to or praises others' contributions; polite and respectful.
Displays negative facial expressions and posture that impacts negatively on the groups ability to achieve objectives.					X	Creates an amicable atmosphere through own attitude and body language. Smiles appropriately at others. Uses humour .
Displays consistent behaviour regardless of other people's styles, needs or behaviour.	X					Adjusts approach and style to different people.

> Reporting to Management

Assessment Centre Competency Map for the Group



› Possible Alternatives

- Administer and score some tests beforehand.
 - In-tray exercise
 - Ability tests
 - Personality questionnaire
- Videotape and score some simulation exercises.
- Type observations directly on computer.
- Do “write-ups” on computer.
- Complete rating forms on computer.
- Have report templates on computer.