

Designers Need Extraordinary Skills

Challenges & Practical Steps in Designing a Bespoke Assessment Centre across the organisation for development purposes

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Outline of Agenda

- Current Project
- Project Scope
- Project Timelines
- Project Challenges
- Design Process
- Project Realities
- Learning Points

Current Project

- Tender awarded to a consortium headed up by PWC, Vutivi Management Services & Sithole Human Capital
- Client organisation: Department of Land Affairs (DLA)
- Aim: To conduct a Skills Audit across the entire organisation for development purposes
- Number of staff to be assessed: \pm 4 000
- High stakes project!

Project Scope

- DLA did not want “psychometrics”
- DLA wanted to know from the DG to the cleaner what skills were present and what skills were missing
- Information from Skills Audit project to feed into workplace skills plan as well as feedback to Parliament

Project Timelines

- Project Scoping – 1 month
- Design of assessment tools – 1 year
- Assessor Training – 1 week
- Pilot & review – 2 weeks
- Assessments & feedback – 6 months
- Assessments work in 2-week block cycles
- Timeframes & turnaround time = very tight!

Project Timelines (2)

- Phase 1 – Scoping & communication
- Phase 2 – Job profiling
- Phase 3 – Design of instruments
- Phase 4 – Pilot
- Phase 5 – Assessments & feedback
- Phase 6 – Overall reporting to DLA

Project Challenges

- Politicised environment
- Difficulty in finding a dedicated DLA champion
- BPR process taking place at exactly the same time as the Skills Audit!
- Design of customised assessment centre exercises
- Project delayed by 1 year!!!
- Level of assessors
- Availability of assessors
- Standardisation of scoring & reporting
- Robustness of customised instruments
- Possibility of assessor “burnout”

Design Process (1)

- Customised to DLA environment
- Look & feel of client environment
- Simulations designed for senior management, middle management & team leader level
- Senior management – strategic case study, presentation, role-play
- Middle management & team leader – in-basket, role-play, competency-based interview

Design Process (2)

- Extensive research on issues, challenges & realities in current organisation
- Simulations reflected these factors in both complexity & level in organisation
- Initial assessor training conducted to familiarise with tools
- Constructive feedback from group of about 20 psychologists

Design Process (3)

- Small project team tasked with changes & refinements to batteries
- Key considerations: must have face validity, must be easy to administer, must be practical to score & interpret
- Additional challenge in that the psychologists all have different levels of skills, expertise & experience
- Quality assurance & standardisation critical
- 1 year to complete – from design, review & amendment

Project Realities

- Design of customised assessment centre instruments takes considerable time & skill
- Formulation of “core” design / expert team critical
- Time
- Current DLA environment (both internal & external)
- Sensitive topic in SA in general
- Large scale project management

Learning Points

- Approach customisation with extreme caution
- Peer review (1st training session)
- Pilot review (with sample of staff from DLA)
- Standardisation of scoring
- Standardisation of reporting
- Assessor Training
- Quality assurance / review
- Adhering to strict project management principles
- Staying close of client

Q & A

Thank you!