

ASSESSMENT CENTER:

Whys and Wherefores

What is an Assessment Center?

It is a set of procedures, rather than a place...a set of procedures developed jointly by management and behavioral science which are applied by management in identifying managerial potential among employees. Originating within OSS for evaluation of intelligence operations potential, the original concept has been expanded and developed for industrial/business applications, largely through the efforts of psychologists (Drs. Bray and Grant) employed by American Telephone and Telegraph within the Bell System subdivision. Beginning as early as 1956, Bray and Grant, working alongside Bell managers, devised a series of situational, job-related problems which were presented to candidates for advancement into or within the Bell managerial structure. Systematic observations of the candidates' behaviors in the face of these job-related problems were recorded and evaluated as to their efficiency, originality and utility. These behavioral evaluations or ratings have since been studied against the criterion of the given candidates progress through the promotional structure of the Bell System.

Reports of the initial findings regarding the success of Assessment Center procedures in predicting future managerial success did not appear in professional literature until Bray and Grant had followed the first Assessment Center candidates

for about 10 years (first formal report of findings appeared in 1966). The exchange of ideas among behavioral scientists engaged in industrial/business psychology, of course, far antedated the Bell System Management Progress report of 1966. At the present time, for example, organizations such as Sohio, Sears, Penneys and IBM, all have developed and operate their own "custom-tailored" Assessment Centers. Conservative estimates suggest that since 1956, over 100,000 persons have been processed through Assessment Centers designed specifically for identification of managerial ability. (These numbers do not include persons processed through Centers designed to:

- (a) identify creative abilities;
- (b) identify sales potential;
- (c) identify candidates for advanced ("war college") military training by foreign governments.

Likewise, these figures do not include the numbers of "on-board" and "applicant" Career Trainees processed through the Psychological Services Staff's (PSS's) assessment center designed to point up: (a) career directions; (b) long range potential.

How does the Assessment Center work?

It may be helpful to comment first on a comparison of Assessment Center procedures with traditional behavioral science (psychological) assessment procedures.

First, the Assessment Center approach places the candidate into a problem situation in which he must act (behave) so as to

handle same. Unlike traditional procedures, Assessment Center procedures are of exceptionally wide bandwidth i.e., the range of behaviors possible far outstrip^s the more narrow bandwidth procedures demanding either solely speed or general intelligence or verbal facility or eye-hand coordination, etc. The candidate is placed in a position which demands he display more global samples of his behavior than do traditional techniques.

Next, the Assessment Center procedures are developed by behavioral scientists so as to simulate job-situations defined as "stumbling blocks" or "stepping-stones" to managerial success by successful managers within the organization concerned. In other words, after close consultation with management, behavioral scientists design situational tasks which parallel those both "par for the course" and guaranteed to "test the mettle" of managers in the organization. In essence, the Assessment Center tasks are miniature life situations faced by the organization's managers in their day-to-day operations. In this sense, the Assessment Center procedures are akin to the training techniques for commercial airlines pilots...you put the candidate pilot in a realistic but simulated situation (where his worst performance costs neither lives nor a multimillion-dollar aircraft) in order to determine the reasonableness of advancing him to the real-life situation.

Finally, many of the traditional evaluation techniques are constrained by the need to identify THE RIGHT ANSWER from among THE WRONG ANSWERS in order to generate a quantifiable score.

In the Assessment center approach, attempts to resolve the problem situation are not matched against a "school solution" ...the candidate's attempts may be judged to range from highly successful to highly unsuccessful...providing a clearly more detailed description of the candidate's performance than the simple "Right" vs "Wrong" dichotomy.

In this same vein, it should be noted that descriptions of Assessment Center candidates expand rather than constrict the range of possible dispositions of the candidates. Given a representative number of job-related tasks, it is the rare candidate who comes through the Center as either 100% or 0%. Candidates come through identified as to specific strengths and deficiencies. Thus it is that the Assessment Center, properly used by an organization, does not proceed to replace or convert to "rubber stamps", the organization's ongoing mechanisms for advancement of employees. Instead, the Assessment Center provides such mechanisms (viz. promotion panels) with an additional, vital source of data to assist in decision-making.

Why use an Assessment Center?

The most obvious reason is that the Assessment Center works! The less obvious reason is that, given the research support necessary to document the validity and utility of the Center in any given organization, the highest levels of management are constantly up-to-date vis-a-vis the make-up of the managerial

character of the group; are alerted to sources for new input; and are in a position to input new elements to the managerial structure in the face of projected requirements and demands for the future. In essence, the Center offers highest levels of management, the capability for prediction and direction of the character and style of the organization.

Lest the foregoing sound overly optimistic, let's look at the "box-score" for the Assessment Center approach.

One way of checking the box-score is to ask whether the Center offers advantages over previous procedures. The answer is YES in the range of magnitude from 10% to 30% improvement in successful prediction of who will "make it" and "how far" in the organization.

Next, in a unique sort of arrangement set up by Drs. Bray and Grant in the Bell System, conclusions from the Center can be held back from management. Later, Center predicted success can be compared with actual success in the organization. The time elapsed in the Bell System study (from Assessment Center to roughly ten years performance in the organization) draws focus on Center predictions regarding capacity to reach "middle-management" positions. Here, the box-score shows that of candidates described by the Center as having middle-management potential, 2 out of 3 did realize their potential. Of all those described by the Center as deficient in such potential, only 1 out of 3 were actually advanced to middle-management positions.

What of those studies wherein Assessment Center results are directly communicated to management? One of the better, more recent and representative studies in this area has come out of IBM. Using 1086 employees considered reasonable candidates for advancement into managerial positions in the time period 1965 to 1970, IBM used the following summary rating of managerial potential to describe Assessment Center findings:

<u>Rated Level</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	Executive Potential
2	High Level Potential
3	Second Line Potential
4	First Line Potential
5	Remain Non-Management

Of all candidates (1086) processed by the IBM Center, the following Rated Levels were assigned:

<u>Rated Level</u>	<u>Percentage (of 1086)</u>
1	4%
2	16%
3	24%
4	28%*
5	28%*

(*Over 50% of all candidates were rated as incapable of progressing beyond first line management...a fact having implications for preselection of Center candidates to be discussed under the "When" section.)

management, it should not be surprising that the decisions about promotion to First-Line (First-Level) management were the following:

<u>Rated Level</u>	<u>Percentage Promoted to First-Line</u>
1	87%
2	48%
3	42%
4	29%
5	24%

There is a suggestion in the above data of the "Crown Prince Effect" i.e., if you are rated high by the Center, your future in the organization is guaranteed. Further data regarding promotions after this initial promotion into management has been secured and looks like this:

<u>Rated Level</u>	<u>Percentage Promoted Beyond First-Line Management</u>
1	34%
2	32%
3	27%
4	13%
5	7%

Thus, after First Line promotion, later promotions tend to "level off" for the three highest Assessment Center ratings. It would appear that while later promotions are less influenced by the "halo effect" of earlier Center ratings and more determined by factors such as actual on-the-job performance, nonetheless,

those identified by the Center as having higher potential actually do perform at higher levels than lower rated candidates.

What about the "kiss-of-death" effect i.e., if a person receives a low Assessment Center rating, is he doomed? The following figures on separations among the Center candidates by IBM seems to answer this question:

<u>Rated Level</u>	<u>Percentage of Separations Among Candidates</u>
1	0%
2	2%
3	3%
4	3%
5	2%

Obviously, separations are evenly spread across all categories. (Note that given the small number of candidates rated at Level 1, the loss of even one person would be equal to 2% of the group!) Thus low ratings do not unreasonably prejudice the candidates career. Remember that Bray and Grant found that, after about 10 years, management had promoted to given levels 33% of those people rated by the Center as incapable of advancing to those given levels. (Note that Bray and Grant used only the first Center prediction of ten years earlier, unrefined by data regarding training received and skills required.)

The suggestion in the last two tables combined is somewhat intriguing i.e., the Assessment Center appears more appropriate in identifying the "comers" as opposed to branding the "losers".

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Other findings of Bray and Grant further support this possibility in that Center predictions of success in sales activities matched independently obtained field ratings 100%. Center predictions of failure in sales matched field ratings only 10%.

Who operates the Assessment Center?

Since the Assessment Center is a set of procedures designed conjointly by behavioral scientists and managers, applied by managers in evaluating...etc., the Center clearly is operated by the management of the organization for whom the Center is designed. In other words, after the job-related situational tasks are designed, experienced managers in the given organization are selected for training as assessors (observers, raters) in the Center. The preferred training technique is to permit the managers to deal with the same situational tasks the future candidates are to face. In this fashion, assessors both are made aware of the special demands of the tasks and also assist in "debugging" the design of the tasks selected.

The behavioral scientist continues to contribute to the Center in three basic areas: (1) he contributes psychometric data responsive to highly specific questions about candidates; (2) he is available for consultation regarding unusual problems of behavior observed or observation of behavior; (3) he maintains current validity data regarding Center findings and "on-the-job" performance.

This is a critical question bearing on the overall utility (cost-effectiveness) of the Center. Obviously the Center cannot accept all employees in the organization. Some career-development critical point should be identified e.g. the level in the organization regarded as First Line/Level management. Having identified this critical point, the next question is whether inclusion in the Center processing is to be automatic or at the individual's option.

Where conduct the Assessment Center?

This last point, while seemingly simple-minded, is hardly so. Candidates tend to be more spontaneous and less inclined to pursue rigid, "school solution" behaviors when they are removed from institutional surroundings. Most importantly, managers operating as assessors, tend to set aside assessor tasks when "day-to-day" office concerns are pushed upon them i.e., in institutional surroundings, they are too easily distracted from Center activities by phone-calls, "urgent" memos, and the like. Consequently, "isolated" and/or "protected" surroundings are both desirable and necessary for efficient operation of the Center.

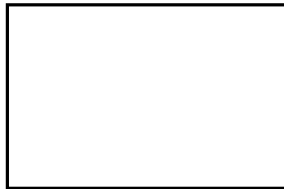
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Psychologist

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. ~~F. S. Spector~~ (Walsh has copy)

Here is the assessments center material
I mentioned yesterday.



1 March 74
(DATE)

FORM NO. 101 REPLACES FORM 10-101
1 AUG 54 WHICH MAY BE USED.

(47)

STAT



Business Review

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Assessment centers for spotting future managers

Many opinions are better than one, especially when a company decides whom to promote and how to develop his management potential

Foreword

Under the controlled conditions that obtain in the assessment center, managers can observe promising young men in action and evaluate them objectively, both for specific job capabilities and for general management ability. From an assessment report, a company can get an excellent "gut" feel for whether a man will fit into its organization in the future, where he will do best, and how he ought to adapt and develop himself for the challenges he will meet as he moves up the management ladder. The assessment center technique has shown itself a better indicator of future success than any other tool management has yet devised; it also brings many valuable fringe

benefits to the company that uses it. This article explains how the technique works, why it is superior to others, and the steps a company should go through in developing a center of its own.

Mr. Byham has developed three applications of the concept for J.C. Penney, where he is Manager of Selection, Appraisal and General Management Development. In 1969, he conducted a survey of the design and effectiveness of all known industrial applications of the concept, which is the basis of a book he is now preparing on the subject. He has a background in industrial psychology and has worked in various personnel-related areas.

Deciding whom to promote to management from the rank and file is a classic difficulty. There is a great difference between the skills and talents required for rank and managerial positions, and a man's performance in the ranks provides scant basis for judging how well he would do if he were promoted to first-level management. Companies have learned from bitter experience that the best salesman or the finest mechanic does not necessarily make the best supervisor.

Usually, it is just about as hard to judge whether a man who is working well at one level of management will "take hold" at a higher level. The skills required may be more nearly

alike in this case, but even experienced executives find it hard to assess the exact scope of man's ability and the breadth of his shoulders. Previously developed yardsticks for measuring management potential have not really been worth their salt. Batteries of written tests, for example, cannot assess the way a man works with people; supervisors' ratings can be highly biased; and so on.

To obtain a basis for making promotion decisions, a score or more of companies have resorted to the corporate assessment center approach. This assessment procedure simulates "live" the basic situations with which a man would be faced if he were moved up and d

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veloped. How well he will cope at the higher level before the decision to promote him is actually made. AT&T, IBM, General Electric, J.C. Penney, Standard Oil (Ohio), and Sears, Roebuck, are a few of the companies that have established such centers.

In these centers, specially trained managers (and occasionally psychologists) act as "assessors" who evaluate candidates for promotion—either into management or within management—on their potential and their areas of weakness. Groups of men pass through series of standardized exercises such as management games, in-basket tests, and leaderless discussion sessions, while the assessors observe their behavior closely. Part A of the Appendix on page 162 explains the schedule of a "typical" assessment center.

The assessors discuss each candidate's performance separately and then generate a comprehensive report on each candidate which management can combine with current performance information as it sees fit. As well as identifying the men most likely to succeed, the assessment reports spell out the individual deficiencies of each candidate and suggest guidelines for management to use in developing him.

These reports constitute powerful planning tools for management: it can use the reports to plan the orderly progression of management within the company; it can adjust its hiring patterns; if necessary, it can direct that jobs be designed which match and give growing space to particular men's abilities and potential; and, most important, the company can plan a rational, sensible route for the candidate to follow as he moves up the ladder.

Reports have proved to be remarkably valid. Longitudinal studies of thousands of employees assessed over the last few years indicate that this assessment method is much more accurate than traditional appraisal procedures, and these seem to be the reasons:

- The exercises used are designed to bring out the specific skills and aptitudes needed in the position(s) for which a group of candidates is being assessed.

- Since the exercises are standardized, assessors evaluate the candidates under relatively constant conditions and thus are able to make valid comparative judgments.

- The assessors usually do not know the candidates personally; so, being emotionally disengaged, they are unbiased.

- The assessors are shielded from the many interruptions of normal working conditions and can pay full attention to the candidates' behavior in the exercises.

- The procedures focus their attention on the primary kinds of behavior they ought to observe in evaluating a promotion candidate.

- They have been trained to observe and evaluate these kinds of behavior.

The first experiments

American Telephone & Telegraph first applied the assessment center idea 14 years ago as part of the data collection procedures for its Management Progress Study, a study of Bell System personnel the company undertook to gain insight into the management development process and to identify the variables related to success.¹

Over four years, AT&T processed 422 men from six Bell Systems through a three-and-a-half day assessment center to obtain basic data on their experimental population. AT&T had got the idea for assessment centers from the pioneering work of the Office of Strategic Services, which used the method for selecting agents during World War II. Descriptions of the ingenious exercises used by the OSS make both interesting and enjoyable reading.²

Some Bell executives who took part in the Management Progress Study assessment centers recognized the possibility that the technique could aid them with one of their critical problems—i.e., identifying potential among candidates for first-line management. They invited the AT&T researchers to set up an assessment center for them, and as a result the first nonresearch application of the method was made in 1958 by Michigan Bell. It achieved immediate and widespread acceptance throughout AT&T. Today, AT&T affiliates operate 50 centers all over the country, processing 10,000 candidates a year. The Bell centers are still used primarily to evaluate the management potential of men being considered for first-level management positions.

Today's applications

Other companies that have observed the success of the Bell System centers have also used

1. See Douglas W. Bray and Donald Grant, "The Assessment Center in the Measurement of Potential for Business Management," *Psychological Monographs*, 1946, Vol. 83, 1110-17.

2. OSS Assessment Staff, *Assessment of Men* (New York, Rinehart, 1945), and *Fortune*, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," March 1946, p. 92.

the method primarily to identify candidates for promotion and development purposes. It seems to be a trend toward using the method with higher levels of management. While still concentrating their primary use at the lower levels, companies such as Standard Oil (Ohio), IBM, General Electric, and AT&T have established middle-management centers for promotion and development purposes. Penney, for instance, is experimenting in how to assess middle-level managers in its retail stores to determine their aptitude for large- or medium-sized store management.

At these higher levels, centers usually focus on stimulating a man's self-development and career planning through increasing his self-knowledge. After the games and exercises, a participant is given time to critique his own performance and also that of his teammates. A "T-group" atmosphere is often created to increase self-learning. Conditions in such a center are sufficiently well controlled, however, that none of the negative effects which have occasionally characterized the T-group session have been noted here.

Middle-management assessment is already exerting profound impact on organizational planning. In meshing the company's projected manpower needs with its manpower resources as described in its assessment and development reports, Standard Oil (Ohio) goes so far as to consider, for each likely man, the kind of supervision under which he works at his best, the kinds of pressures he can tolerate, and so on, to find the best possible place for him to work and grow. The company also tries to tailor specific job responsibilities to the individual through changes in organization and areas of responsibility.

The concept has yet to be applied at the top level of management, and perhaps it never will be. Promotion and development decisions near the top are highly sensitive and highly personal, and a mechanical procedure for assessing candidates, however excellent, may not be suited to the situation.

So far as screening applicants for new employment at lower and middle levels is concerned, the assessment center method has little value for most companies, since there is seldom a large enough group of prospects at a given time to justify the expense of operating a program. Because of their great size, AT&T and Sears have been able to use the method in initial hiring. Sears operates a very short assessment

program for college prospects in its eastern offices. Candidates who pass the campus interview are brought in large groups to Philadelphia for a day and a half of orientation and assessment. AT&T flies candidates for its "communications consultant" school to New York for assessment. Although this is expensive, search has shown that selection based on assessment pays off.

To my knowledge, 20 companies have been responsible for assessing more than 70,000 candidates in the last 10 years, but at least 100 more companies are developing centers or are in an advanced stage of center planning. Many others are "looking into the idea." As an indication of this interest, I might cite the fact that more than 200 company representatives attended conferences on the assessment center method during 1969.

Applications of the method have multiplied almost every year since the first industrial application of assessment centers by AT&T 12 years ago, and, within the limits I have outlined, these applications vary widely. The description of the typical center given in the appendix is best described as a composite of many companies' centers. No center is exactly like one described. Some centers process only 6 candidates at a time, while a few process more than 12. The ratio of assessors to candidates ranges from 3-to-1 to 1-to-1. While centers with a one-and-a-half consecutive day cycle are most common, some cycles are only two days long and these days are not necessarily consecutive. Some cycles are five or six days long because assessment is integrated with training activities.

Obviously, there is no right or wrong way to structure a center—the specific application must be designed to meet specific company needs and operating requirements. This flexibility is reflected particularly in the variety and combinations of exercises used in centers. Each company chooses exercises that bring out the behaviors they desire to assess. Parts B and C of the appendix, however, demonstrate the kind of information the "typical" center might produce and give some insight into the kind of assessment report a center can generate. I shall say more about the appropriate choice of exercises later.

Centers typically find that 30% to 40% of candidates in a group fall into their acceptable outstanding category, 40% into their questionable category, and 20% to 30% into their acceptable category.

Figures like these are often viewed askance by executives, and consequently I should like to discuss the question of validity next, before going into such topics as the "extra" benefits that centers bring and how centers are constructed and managed.

Are the assessments valid?

In brief—yes, they *can* be. Unlike many other management development techniques that industry has widely accepted, the assessment center method has been well received partly because properly controlled research has shown it to be of value. This research has reassured both business executives and professional psychologists working in the personnel area that the assessment center method is almost certainly more valid than any other means of identifying and analyzing a candidate's management potential.

Four kinds of studies

Existing validity studies are of four kinds. Three of them focus on centers that are new or experimental, and the fourth focuses on the operational center that has existed for some period of time. To begin with, let me describe the three kinds of study that focus on the new centers.

First, where an assessment center is purely experimental and set up only for research purposes, a study usually compares assessment predictions with the candidates' later performance. Ordinarily, in these circumstances, the assessment reports are not released to management.

The work of Douglas W. Bray and Donald Grant on the original, experimental AT&T centers is of this kind, and it indicates that these centers' predictions were highly accurate. For instance, 64% of the candidates predicted to enter middle management had done so by the eighth year after assessment, while only 32% of those candidates predicted not to achieve middle-management positions had done so.

Second, a study may compare assessments made at a new, but "real life" center—that is, one that generates reports that are meant to be used—with candidates' later performance. An AT&T study of its new-salesman selection center reflects this pattern. The reports on the first 78 candidates who passed through this center were withheld from line management. All these men were subsequently hired as salesmen, and six months later their performance in the field

was evaluated by trained observers who accompanied them on their calls. The results of both the original assessments and the performance review are shown in *Exhibit I*. This exhibit shows, for example, that of the 32 salesmen assessed as "acceptable" at the center, 19 were still judged "acceptable" when their field performance was reviewed.

In this study, the correlation between assessment ratings and performance is .51. Interestingly, when these men's performance in the field was compared with the ratings of the men made by their supervisors, no significant corre-

Exhibit I. Validity study of assessment of sales representatives

Findings	Number of candidates		Validity of assessment
	Original assessment	Field review	
More than acceptable	9	9	100%
Acceptable	32	19	60
Less than acceptable	16	7	44
Unacceptable	21	2	10

Source: Douglas W. Bray and Richard J. Campbell, "Selection of Salesmen By Means of An Assessment Center," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 52, No. 1, 1968, p. 38.

lation emerged. Similarly, no significant correlation was found between their field performance and the ratings given them by training personnel who worked with them in a sales training program.

(These two AT&T studies are somewhat unusual in that management was not notified of the assessment findings in either case. When management is notified of the findings and uses them in planning promotions and development activity, as in the next two kinds of study, bias is introduced and validity is harder to estimate.)

Third, a study may compare the success of a company's executive development program before and after a center has been set up. For example, one can contrast the "success" of the last 50 or 100 people promoted before the center's installation with the first 50 or 100 people promoted thereafter with the aid of assessment reports. Several studies of this kind report substantial improvement, and these are the ones executives find hardest hitting and most convincing.

From the executive's point of view, the basic question vis-à-vis validity is this: Is the assessment center a definite improvement over other

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and, notably, is it a definite improvement over supervisory judgment? Once again, the answer is "Yes, it can be."

Of all studies, those of the third kind are the ones that can convince managers that the center approach really does work, because it allows them to contrast the effectiveness of relying on supervisory judgment alone (or even assisted by simple testing) with the superior effectiveness of using assessment reports to develop their people. Studies comparing the success of candidates promoted with assessment to those promoted without it consistently show a 10% to 30% improvement.

The *fourth* and most common kind of validity check is the follow-up study of candidates who have been assessed at an operating center and then promoted and developed by a management that is aware of the assessment findings.

Six such studies (some unpublished) report correlation between assessment findings and subsequent performance, the correlations ranging between .27 and .64. For instance, an IBM study of lower-level and middle-level managers reveals a correlation of .37. In general, assessments of potential for positions *above* the first level are more valid than assessments for positions *at* the first level.

Management gains better judgments

While the weight of research is heavily on the side of the assessment center, this alone does not account for the method's phenomenal acceptance by management, which is less influenced by correlation coefficients than by evidence of the adequacy and fairness of a procedure. And a manager has only to act as an assessor or even sit through the assessors' deliberations to be convinced of the fairness, adequacy, and the accuracy of the method.

First timers observing an assessor discussion are always amazed by the extent and depth of information brought out. Like putting together a mosaic, assessors are able to integrate observations from various exercises to build a picture of how the candidate will perform in higher management. The candidate profiles in Parts B and C of the Appendix give only a pale idea of this dynamic synthesis.

Accurate judgments also convince management. In one instance, management insisted on "testing out" its center by putting through several candidates whom it considered "stars" and

assessors had no trouble spotting the bums, but in discussing a man that management considered a superstar, the assessors' evaluations were all negative. After hours of discussion of possible extenuating circumstances, the assessors prepared a verdict of "no potential." The man was promoted anyway. He proved totally unable to handle the job and was replaced after two months. Management needed no more convincing.

In sum, it would appear that the validity of certain assessment centers can be established. But, of course, this does not mean that all assessment centers are valid, for, by their very nature, each company's center is and should be substantially different from any other company's. Still, the accumulation of research findings from a variety of types of centers lends considerable credibility to the general validity of the technique.

In a survey of the 20 companies that operate assessment centers, I uncovered some 22 studies in all that showed assessment *more* effective than other approaches and only one that showed it *as* effective as some other approach. None showed it *less* effective. As I suggested before, these studies exhibit correlations between center predictions and achievement criteria such as advancement, salary grade, performance ratings that range as high as .80. The companies appear satisfied that they are on the right track.

Many indirect benefits

Over and above the explicit goals of assessment centers, companies have consistently found that a number of added dividends accrue from centers.

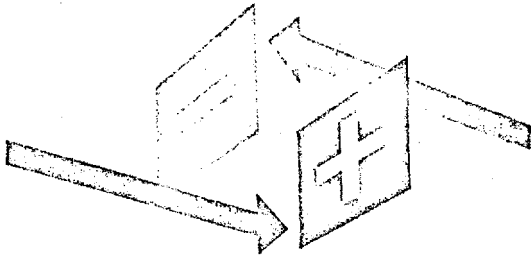
The first and most obvious of these dividends is candidate training. Even when candidate training is not a defined objective of a center, it does take place. Completing an in-basket exercise, participating in group discussions, and playing management games are genuine training exercises, even if there is no immediate feedback on results. After all, such exercises were used as training exercises long before they were used in assessment centers.

Second, passing through an assessment center has a positive influence on morale and job expectations. Candidates see the center as a chance to show their ability in fair and realistic situations. They also obtain a realistic idea of the requirements of the positions for which they

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are being considered. After using an in-basket, for example, some candidates from the ranks have withdrawn themselves from consideration because of their new understanding of the volume of paperwork involved in a manager's job.

Third, by designing the exercises carefully, it is possible to improve candidates' understanding and attitudes subtly while they are being assessed. For example, one company that rou-



tinely assessed service technicians for management potential designed a group discussion exercise that concentrated the candidates' attention on a service-facility staffing problem. This exercise was structured to lead the candidates logically to the conclusion that management sometimes has no alternative but to increase the overtime of the present staff. By participating in this exercise, the candidates who were incumbent technicians gained sympathetic insight into management's reasons for occasionally asking them to work overtime.

Fourth, by far the most valuable fringe benefit is assessor training. The actual training of an assessor prior to his assignment parallels a management training program. During training, assessors participate in management games, in-baskets, and group discussions, followed by reviews of their performance in each of the activities.

An even more important training experience is actual participation as an assessor. In a normal work situation it is rare for managers to have the opportunity to spend uninterrupted time observing behavior and then comparing their observations with others. General Electric feels so strongly about the benefits of the assessment center to assessors that it has established a policy of a 1-to-1 assessor-candidate ratio to expose a substantial percentage of management to this experience.

Almost all of an assessor's training and experience is transferable to his job and should improve his ability to interview and appraise his subordinates. It is also possible for an assessor-manager to transfer some of the actual exercises

from an assessment center to the everyday work situation. This has been done very successfully by managers in one company division, who use the in-basket and two exercises from the corporate assessment center as a screening device for hiring at the management level. These managers have found these procedures to be extremely useful in bringing out information not easily obtained through a personal interview with an applicant or a check on his background.

While these fringe benefits are important individually, they are even more important as an integral whole, since they indicate what may be the crucial advantage of the assessment center method over other, supplementary methods of identifying management potential. When a company uses psychological tests alone, or sends candidates to an outside psychologist for evaluation, it is in reality weakening itself because its executives are becoming dependent on others. Serving as assessor strengthens management skills. In addition, developing a center forces a company to focus on and resolve issues of job goals and define appropriate sources of manpower, things companies ought to do but frequently do not do.

Building & managing centers

The first and most important task in developing a center is establishing its goals and priorities. Management might ask itself these questions: Whom will we assess? Who will do the assessing? How will center reports be used—especially for manpower development? Who will see them? Will the reports be discussed with candidates? If so, how? The following discussion will develop some perspective on how these questions might be answered.

Identifying the candidates

Candidates are commonly nominated for assessment by their supervisors. Usually supervisors are instructed to nominate employees who are performing adequately in their current jobs and who, in their estimation, have potential for advancement.

However, relying on supervisors' nominations represents a major philosophical inconsistency. One of the reasons for using the assessment center technique in the first place is to overcome some of the prejudices and biases inherent in supervisory judgment; yet the supervisor is

ordinarily made the sole judge of whether a person should be assessed.

Companies can circumvent this potential bias by allowing candidates to nominate themselves or by establishing a rule that assessment will be automatic for all candidates who reach certain levels in the company. Both these alternatives mean that more candidates must be assessed, and this involves additional expense. Hence, they have been tried only on a limited basis.

Choosing the assessors

Typically, assessors are line managers working two or three levels above the man being assessed. A group of junior foremen, for example, might be assessed by a team that includes division superintendents to whom the senior foremen report. These are the individuals who are responsible for promotion and who know most thoroughly the job requirements of the positions one level above the candidate's.

The job background of the assessor, of course, depends on the purpose of the specific assessment center. Where broader management aptitudes are being assessed, it is common for the assessors to be drawn from a number of areas in a company. This not only brings in a number of viewpoints, but exposes the candidate to representatives of a number of areas where he may find promotional opportunity. Having representatives of different areas also increases the acceptance of the findings throughout the company.

Assessors from management, like the candidates themselves, are usually nominated by their superiors (although in a few companies the center administrator makes an effort to recruit them). Naturally, the practice has its dangers. After a center has passed from the experimental to the operational phase, "purity" controls may be relaxed somewhat, and senior management may be tempted to send "cooperative" managers to centers to act as assessors. This temptation is particularly strong where the assessors serve for extended terms.

Center administrators have chosen to react to this problem in various ways. Some companies rely on their assessor training programs to screen out assessors who are unacceptable in the role, for one reason or another. The rationale here is that it is easy to spot an unqualified assessor during training and ease him out without bloodshed. As a fine point of strategy, for example, many center administrators suggest that

it is easier to establish a pool of assessors, rather than train assessors for specific assignments. With the pooling arrangement, it is easy for the administrator to bypass unqualified assessors.

A major point of controversy among operators of assessment centers is the desirability of using professional psychologists rather than specially trained managers as assessors. Most arguments for using psychologists are based on their skill in observation; they are trained to recognize behavior not obvious to the untrained eye. While this argument is plausible, it has yet to be demonstrated in an operational center. Three studies have found no differences.

However, the superiority of psychologists over completely untrained managers is well established. Because of this superiority, companies often use psychologists as assessors in experimental or pilot programs, where training management assessors would be difficult. Psychologists are also used extensively for assessing higher levels of company management; at high levels, it is difficult to get and train managers who do not know the candidates personally, and the objective, independent psychologist is seen as the fairest evaluator.

By and large, companies now prefer to establish a pool of trained manager-assessors, each of whom serves more than once. Individual assessors are usually drawn from the pool to serve once or twice a year—a few companies ask assessors to serve only once. AT&T's practice is exceptional—it assigns assessors for six-month terms and center administrators for one year.

There are advantages and disadvantages to brief assignments. On the one hand, brief assignments usually mean that better men can be recruited, their enthusiasm and effort will be greater, more managers will benefit from the training involved in becoming an assessor, and more managers will be well prepared, after their tour of duty is over, to make judicious use of assessment reports. On the other hand, more managers must be trained and kept off their jobs; and those who serve briefly will not have as comprehensive an experience as assessors who would if they had served a longer period.

Where the appointment is for an extended period of six months or so, of course, more rigorous and lengthy assessor training is feasible. AT&T trains managers for a month—and longer experience in the role is very valuable to an assessor. One substantial disadvantage of the long assignment is that assessment becomes a routine matter, which it never should. Report

from fatigued assessors react like computer output, and it is hard to think of them as anything more. Currently, only AT&T appoints assessors for prolonged periods.

Training the assessors

In the companies now operating assessment centers, there is a notable difference in the emphasis placed on training assessors. Some companies give new assessors as little as one hour of training, which really amounts to just an orientation to the whole procedure, while most others spend three or four days.

One can argue that the task of an assessor is similar to the requirements of most managers' jobs—a manager must interview individuals, observe groups, and evaluate presentations. Assessing requires skill in these same areas, and hence many feel that there is little justification for further training.

The principal rebuttal to these arguments is this: because a man has been doing something, he has not necessarily been doing it well. Companies report marked improvements in the reliability of supervisory ratings after the supervisors have been trained to work as assessors. Nonprofessionals need to be shown what to look for in observing group discussions and individual presentations, or they may focus on purely surface characteristics. While rigid scientific studies are lacking, it is obvious from comparing the reports presented by experienced and inexperienced assessors that training makes a very big difference in the quality of performance.

The most common method of training is by understudy. In the usual situation, an assessor-in-training sits through an entire assessment cycle as a nonvoting member. Another method of assessor training, particularly when assessment centers are being introduced, is to have the assessors go through the assessment experience first as candidates. Everything is the same except that there are no assessors present. In a typical training situation, the assessors go through an activity such as group discussion and then critique the discussion and identify possible areas of observation afforded by the situation. Several companies videotape activities to give assessors practice in making observations.

Selecting the exercises

A center's success rests in large part on the thoughtful, accurate selection of assessment ex-

ercises for they simulate the behavior to be observed. Thus, the first step is to define the behavior one wants to observe. Key managers familiar with the positions for which the candidates are to be assessed should discuss this among themselves, and the center developer should ask them questions like these: "Can you describe the behavior of successful and unsuccessful people in the positions in question?" "How do you evaluate people for this position?" "What are the tasks to be performed?" "What characteristics will be needed in our managers 10 years from now?"

After a list has been compiled and agreed on, another meeting should be held to determine which of these characteristics can be assessed adequately on a man's current job. After eliminating these from the list, the characteristics that remain become the objectives of the assessment center program, and the assessment exercises should be selected to bring out these behaviors.

Because certain key forms of behavior, such as leadership, delegation, control, motivation, selling ideas, organization, and operation under time stress, are important to many companies, exercises that bring them out are common to many centers. Almost all centers have an in-basket, one or two leaderless group discussion exercises, and a management game. While these activities may be similar in type from center to center, the specific content may be quite different depending on the educational and organizational level of the candidates.

The whom-to-promote leaderless group discussion described earlier is more appropriate, for instance, for lower-level candidates because the decision to be made is relatively simple and straightforward. One higher-level variation puts the candidate in the role of a member of a school board. The board has just received a bequest of \$100,000. Each candidate is told to advocate a different point of view, and he is given adequate time and information to develop his arguments. Unlike the promotion exercise, where only one decision can be reached, the board can allocate the money to one or any combination of the members' projects. The points of view specified for the candidates are rather weakly defined, and hence there is considerable opportunity for them to develop their arguments in a creative fashion.

Many jobs have a unique but highly important aspect, and if this can be simulated, the company ought to develop a special exercise.

Here are two interesting examples of such special exercises:

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□ Penney has developed an effective exercise called the Irate Customer Phone Call. During dinner on the first night of the program, the candidates are told that they are to play the role of a manager during the evening, and that they may receive a phone call between 8:00 and 10:00 that night. This phone call is from an assessor playing an irate customer who makes several unreasonable demands on the candidate, after thoroughly convincing him of how upset he is about a service matter. The candidate's ability to handle this situation is evaluated along several dimensions, such as tact under stress.

□ The Peace Corps puts individual volunteers into a mock community development meeting with host nationals. The volunteer has been briefed in writing by the previous Peace Corps volunteer for the area, who has stated that the most important thing for the community is to bring in fresh, uncontaminated water from the nearby mountain. The purpose of this exercise is to determine the extent to which the new man will follow and push the ideas of the previous volunteer and the extent to which he will listen to the host nationals and form his own judgments.

At the meeting, the host nationals propose their own pet (and conflicting) projects. Depending on the characteristics of the people of the particular country being simulated, they ignore the volunteer's proposals, demonstrate impatience, pretend lack of understanding, exhibit hostility, and so on. They demand that the volunteer raise money or redesign plans, and a national might try to win over the volunteer to his own schemes through subtle persuasion or flattery.

Tests can also make a significant contribution to assessment if they are selected and used wisely. Intelligence, reading, arithmetic, and personality tests have all been found to increase the accuracy of certain assessment decisions. Tests should only be used under the direction of a psychologist, however, and great care should be taken in communicating test results lest they bias observations. Results are best reported to the assessors working at a center in broad terms such as "superior," "average," or "below average," since they can easily misinterpret numbers or percentiles. It is good practice to hold back giving test findings until the very end of the assessment discussion of the candidate.

Management must also take extreme care of the relative importance of various exercises. Depending on the objectives of the center and the content of the exercises (all games are not equally effective or appropriate), the relative importance of various assessment activities may vary greatly. One thing seems clear: where it is included, the in-basket is usually the most important exercise in the assessment center.

Informing candidates of results

One of the most important, yet most hazardous aspects of assessment center operation is feeding the reports back to the candidates. Companies handle this in widely different ways, depending on the purpose of their centers. Three companies offer candidates the option of receiving or not receiving feedback. Between 60% and 90% ask for it. These companies find that candidates who do very well and those who do very poorly usually know where they stand and do not request feedback, whereas those in the middle want to find out how they did and get hints for self-improvement. Some companies give feedback to all candidates automatically.

In almost all cases, and certainly in companies that are strongly concerned about management development, results are carefully couched in terms of the directions that a candidate's personal development should take in the future. The candidate's impact on his fellow candidates may be communicated to him to make him more objective about himself. His performance on individual tasks may be discussed with an eye to establishing a plan to overcome noted deficiencies.

When assessment and training are combined, it is possible to provide some feedback to candidates prior to their leaving the center. In some companies, a candidate must wait weeks before a feedback interview. Obviously, the sooner the feedback interview takes place, the more impact the training and development recommendations will have.

If a psychologist is available, he usually takes the responsibility of discussing the center's results with the candidate. Otherwise, assessors or former assessors are given the responsibility.

The place of professionals

An industrial psychologist working in a large company was asked by a senior manager to

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in selecting supervisors for a newly created division. The psychologist suggested the assessment center method and submitted a report describing the technique and various exercises frequently used. The psychologist waited a month without receiving any reaction and finally telephoned the manager—who, to his surprise, reported that the assessment center was a big success and that he was very pleased with the outcome. Along with his subordinates, this manager had developed an assessment center for his own specific purpose, created his own exercises, and was running the center to his own satisfaction.

This vignette not only proves that managers can create assessment centers for their own specific purposes, but indicates also that a professional may not be needed. Yet psychologists do play an important role in center development. Psychologists are particularly valuable in these areas:

- Aiding managers to identify kinds of behavior that are critical to success.
- Developing or selecting assessment center exercises to bring out these kinds of behavior in the candidates.
- Training assessors.
- Administering pilot programs.
- Reviewing, critiquing, and improving the program.
- Researching the program's effectiveness.

Often psychologists' major contribution is to speed up the development of assessment centers. Some companies have spent as long as a year going through the various steps leading to the operation of their first center; with professional aid, other companies have accomplished the same thing in one month. As in so many areas, the difference seems to be in knowing what you are doing and benefiting from the experiences of others.

Just as there is no evidence that psychologists necessarily make better assessors than line managers, there is no evidence that psychologists make better assessment center administrators than line managers. Nevertheless, with the exception of AT&T, the majority of companies' centers are operated by industrial psychologists. This is partly the result of the newness of assessment centers in many companies. The appropriate role of the industrial psychologist seems to be that of developing and installing centers, rather than their continual operation. Psychologists should, however, retain responsi-

bility for quality control and, in some cases, assessor training as well.

Negative effects of centers

When assessment centers are first explained to them, most managers immediately ask two questions: "What happens to the men who are not chosen for the center?" and, "What happens to the men who do not do well in the center?"

The effect of not being chosen: This depends primarily on how the center has been set up within a company. In some companies, centers have achieved the status of management development programs, and here, just as a young executive may feel he must go through T-group or grid training, he may feel he must be assessed. In these situations, anxiety develops among the ones not chosen, but to no greater extent than from failure to be chosen for any other development activity.

The effect of doing poorly: Candidates who do poorly in assessment centers are usually quite aware of their performance. A logical response from a candidate who has done poorly would be to start looking around for another job. Whether this actually happens is unclear: one study indicates a higher turnover among poorly rated candidates, but other studies find no differences.

Turnover among weak candidates may be viewed in different ways. Some companies see a moderate amount of turnover as beneficial, in that "dead wood" disappears and opportunities for advancement are increased. Of course, if the candidate represents a sizable investment in terms of company experience or technical know-how, losing him may be a disaster. The key to preventing turnover is the method and content of the feedback of results to the candidate.

What do centers cost?

It is obvious that assessment centers are not inexpensive. The costs vary, naturally, depending on the length of the program, its location, and whether the candidates' and assessors' time is counted. Considering only out-of-the-pocket expenses, Wolverine Tube estimates that the cost of assessing 12 men is equivalent to 12 lunches. AT&T, which has regional centers and usually must transport and house most of its candidates and assessors, figures total cost (including

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\$500 per candidate. A division of IBM which uses motels for its centers roughly figures \$5,000 per 12 candidates exclusive of staff salary.

While these costs may appear high, they are probably quite small compared with the cost of executive failure. In general, the cost of operating an assessment center should be proportionate to the importance of the assessment decision to be made. Companies should be willing to spend much more money and time on assessing candidates for middle- or top-management positions than they are for assessing candidates for first-level positions.

Savings in small organizations

Many companies feel that they must have 10,000 or more employees to use assessment centers. This is not true. In the last two or three years, I have seen several effective applications in small organizations. There are many ways that costs and time requirements can be shaved:

□ A center can be run on company property, instead of taking men away to a motel or other expensive facility.

□ A center can be designed to fit into the normal workday, which cuts overtime costs. To avoid disrupting work, assessment can take place all in one day or in two or more separated days. Even Saturday and Sunday have been used.

□ To shorten time requirements, candidates may be required to do many exercises before coming to the center. For example, candidates may complete a personal information form, take tests, and go through an in-basket exercise before coming to the center. In one Penney center, the personal interview and in-basket interview are conducted at the common convenience of assessor and candidate; only group exercises are held on the one day allocated for assessment.

□ It is often possible to combine assessment activities with an existing training program without lengthening the training program. For instance, a two-day assessment center was integrated into a two-week training program for Junior Achievement professional staff by merely restructuring training activities already a part of the program.

The resulting training was more effective because of the increased self-awareness provided by the assessment and took no longer to accomplish. The one new activity added was an in-basket, which proved to be a needed addition to the training program. The only added costs

incurred were for assessors, but there was a secondary payoff to this because the assessors' presence added greatly to the effectiveness of training.

□ Using commercially available exercises instead of specifically modeled exercises is a significant source of savings, but sound judgment must be used in selecting them. The only company offering exercises specifically designed for assessment centers is Assessment and Development Designs of New York City.

The major problem reported by small organizations is that the assessors know the candidates and sometimes are their immediate superiors. While this kind of contamination is not ideal, most problems can be controlled by careful training of assessors coupled with judicious assignment of assessors to candidates.

Conclusion

The assessment center method may not be appropriate for many companies, even where the cost of operation is manageable. Particularly higher level positions, most companies do not have enough candidates to warrant the operation of an assessment center. For these companies, a possibility may be the operation of multiple company centers where a number of companies send one or two individuals to a center operated by a consultant, a university, or another company.

Three such centers have been operated on an experimental basis with seemingly good results. One center used psychologists and other professionals as assessors, while the other two relied on their managers. The latter seems preferable because it trains the managers, orients them to the proceedings, and helps them understand the use of the assessment center report.

While the effectiveness of an assessment center has not been proved beyond a shadow of doubt, all the research, both published and unpublished, seems to indicate that the method has more validity than other existing methods. It is in this comparison that the strength of an assessment center lies. Granted that it is not perfect, it seems that using an assessment center for identifying management potential is a sounder and fairer method than those traditionally used by management.

[For Appendix, turn to page 162.]

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Appendix to Benjamin's "Assessment Centers."

The material described in this Appendix is based largely on J.C. Penney's programs, but it reflects the practices of a number of other companies as well.

Part A: A typical assessment cycle

I have arranged the following descriptions of assessment activities by periods, without attempting to manufacture a formal schedule. It is important to note that during any period, different groups can be engaged in different activities; in fact, schedules are commonly staggered and doubled up to economize on time and staff requirements.

Exact schedules vary greatly between companies, but they are always extremely tight. Any spare minutes are generally used for informal, coffee-break discussion between candidates and assessors, in the course of which both groups can gather and give a good deal of additional information. In Penney's centers, for example, we try to build in at least one half hour after each major group activity for open discussion among the candidates of how their performance might be improved. This technique, we find, strengthens the training effects of the program.

Sunday

Six management assessors meet at a conveniently located motel and organize materials for the week's activities. Late in the day, twelve candidates, all of them of comparable rank in the company, arrive and settle in.

Monday morning

Period 1: After orientation announcements the candidates are divided into teams of four, for participation in a management game. Each team is given a limited amount of capital to purchase raw materials, make a product, and sell it. The raw materials are usually tinker-toy parts which can be assembled into a variety of products of different complexity, each of which has a different, prespecified market value.

The players must first decide how to invest their capital to maximize profits and then organize the purchasing, manufacturing, and selling operations. Assessors observe the players for signs of leadership, organizational ability, financial acumen, quickness of thinking, and efficiency under stress.

Suddenly the players are notified that the prices of the raw materials and the products have been radically changed, requiring drastic redeployment of capital and extensive operational reorganization. As soon as they have regrouped, these prices are abruptly changed again. The actions the players take allow the assessors to estimate their adaptability.

The game is then halted, and each candidate is

asked to write a report evaluating his own performance and that of his fellow players.

Period 2: The candidates are divided into groups of six. While one group takes written psychological tests, the members of the other group are interviewed individually by the assessors. The assessors have been provided with detailed background information on each man, and they use this to probe for evidence of drive, motivation, and sense of self-development. This Assessment Interview, so called, is ordinarily the only exercise in the assessment process that focuses on the candidate's past behavior.

Monday afternoon

Period 1: The testing and interviewing groups are reversed.

Period 2: In two leaderless groups of six, the candidates join in discussion of a promotion decision. Here the candidates play the role of supervisors brought together on short notice by their boss to pick one man from a pool of six for advancement. Each candidate receives the file of one of the men in the pool, whom he is then to "champion" for the promotion. After each candidate has studied his protégé's folder, the group meets for an hour's discussion to choose the man it will recommend. Assessors observe the candidates' exchanges in the meeting for signs of aggressiveness, persuasiveness, expository skill, energy, flexibility, self-confidence, and the like.

Alternative exercise: In leaderless groups of six, candidates discuss the 20 most critical functions of a manager and list them in order of importance. (This forces them to think about the qualities on which they are being assessed.) Each group then chooses a spokesman who presents the list and the rationale behind it to the whole group of assessors and candidates.

Monday evening

Each candidate receives material on how best to conduct employment interviews and also the résumé of a job applicant. He studies these for use in one of the exercises on the following day. He may also receive special phone calls—for example, theirate Customer Phone Call.

Tuesday morning

Tuesday morning is devoted to the In-Basket Exercise. This simulates the experience a candidate would have if he were suddenly and unexpectedly promoted a grade or two and arrived at work one morning to find his in-basket full of unfamiliar material typical of the sort he would then have to handle. He is instructed to go through this material and deal with the prob-

Approved For Release 2005/11/23 : CIA-RDP80B01495R000900030022-9 This further defines each man's grasp of typical problems and opportunities.

Tuesday afternoon

Period 1: The candidates conduct the employment interviews for which they prepared the night before, each interview taking place in the presence of an assessor. The applicants are college students who have been especially trained in the applicant's role. The interview itself lasts roughly half an hour, after which the applicant leaves and the assessor quizzes the candidate to determine what insights he has obtained about the applicant.

Period 2: The next exercise is the resolution of disciplinary cases. In groups of four, candidates decide how to allocate their time between three such cases and then decide the cases themselves, within one hour. This exercise provides the assessors with information on a candidate's appreciation of personnel problems and his sensitivity to subordinates' views of events and actions, as well as insight into his behavior within a group.

Alternative exercise: The candidates are assigned roles as city councilmen who meet to allocate a \$1 million federal grant to the city departments. Each "councilman" interprets a briefing document provided by a city agency—the police department, sanitation department, water department, and so on—and tries to get as much of the grant allocated to this agency as possible. Again, effective discussion is limited to one hour.

Tuesday evening

Detailed data on a company are provided to all the candidates. Each is asked to examine its financial and marketing situation from the viewpoint of a consultant and to prepare a written recommendation for its board of directors on the future expansion of a particular part of its product line.

At the same time, also in preparation for the next day's activities, the assessors study the results of the candidates' In-Basket tests in detail.

Wednesday

Period 1: Four groups are formed, each consisting of three candidates and an assessor. Each candidate takes his turn presenting his oral analysis of the company data studied the night before and submitting written recommendations.

Period 2: These three candidates work together for an hour to reconcile and consolidate the recommendations.

Period 3: The In-Basket Interview follows, in which an assessor discusses with a candidate the various

Wednesday afternoon

In a final group session, the candidates rate each other and ask any questions they may have. They then leave for home.

Wednesday afternoon to Friday

The assessors discuss the candidates and prepare their ratings and reports.

Throughout all the exercises, the assessors have been rotated so that as many as possible have had a chance to observe each candidate closely. Thus, in these discussions, the assessor who conducted Jones's personal interview summarizes his background and his own impressions of his behavior in the interview; next the assessor who checked what Jones did in his In-Basket Exercise and interviewed him on it presents his impressions; and so on. Each assessor attempts to keep these descriptions nonevaluative and objective.

Only when all the assessors who have observed Jones have spoken does the group begin to judge his behavior from the viewpoint of his management potential and the directions in which he needs to develop. After they have reached a consensus, they prepare a final report.

Within two weeks a manager who has had experience as an assessor meets with Jones to communicate the results. In this meeting he lays stress on the areas in which Jones needs to develop himself and encourages him to set appropriate goals.

Part B: A weak candidate for general management

John's overall performance must be considered a weak average. Individual opinions showed that four assessors considered his performance to be low to average and two other assessors considered his performance to be much below average.

In appearance, he was poised, confident, and businesslike—well above average. In performance, however, he clearly displayed conflicting capabilities.

John is master of those situations that permit to operate alone under well-planned and well-organized conditions. On the other hand, he loses confidence, retreats within himself, and fails to participate in unplanned and group operations. The latter is especially evident on those occasions where his leadership appeared to be challenged or tension of some type became noticeable.

For example, John turned in an above-average performance in the Applicant Interview, where he had complete control of the situation, and also in his presentation of the Financial Analysis Oral Presentation, where he had ample time to prepare his analysis and presentation. (The content of his Financial Analysis was far below average.)

Yet, on the same day, assessors were unable to evaluate his performance in two group discussions at all, simply because he failed to participate and there was nothing to evaluate. His single remark during one entire exercise only succeeded in steering the group away from the logical conclusion.

In the In-Basket Exercise, John did exceptionally well in one sense, in that he handled all the items. But the depth and variety of his actions were below average. In the opinion of the assessor, he had little insight into the overall problems at the plant described and showed below-average judgment in his assignment of priorities and in his resolutions of the more pressing problems. He assigned priorities chronologically, rather than by urgency.

His intent, as he stated in his In-Basket Interview, was to process the material by in-date as opposed to content of material. His overall diagnosis of the problems, his ability to delegate, and his judgment were below average. There was no indication that he noted the discrepancies in the financial areas or connected the interrelated incidents. The above-average points of the In-Basket Exercise were his self-confidence, his ability to communicate in writing, and his sensitivity toward the feelings of other people.

In the Commodities Market Game, John tended to avoid risks, and he checked and rechecked his calculations before reaching a decision. On occasion, he showed confusion and returned to his seat when he had prepared to make a transaction and then noted that the prices that he had used were no longer valid. In both games, he either ignored or failed to recognize the opportunity to establish his leadership and organize the team play, although the opportunity was clearly available.

In both the interview simulations, John demonstrated command of the situation. In fact, the assessor who conducted the Assessment Interview completely failed to throw him off balance, and throughout the whole exercise he demonstrated outstanding capabilities in salesmanship, leadership, interpersonal sensitivity, tactfulness, organizational ability, and

patience. He communicated well and again showed his mastery over a situation that he had planned and in which he felt in control. His behavior in the Applicant Interview was similar, and he created a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere. He showed genuine concern for the applicant and was able to direct the applicant's thoughts and obtain vital information without conscious effort.

In all group discussions, including the discussions of the Financial Analysis in which his oral presentation had been above average, John again showed the tendency to disassociate himself from the group and the project. It was interesting to note that three different assessors expressed the feeling that, on those occasions when John felt he had something to contribute, his statements were directed toward the assessors and not toward the group participants.

It was also interesting to note that throughout the exercises, his peers rated him consistently higher than did the assessors. This may be partly the result of his bossy and confident attitude.

Throughout, the following characteristics were prominent:

Strengths

1. Plans and works well alone.
2. Exceptionally confident under conditions with which he is familiar and which he can control.
3. Displays strong appreciation of and ability in interpersonal relations.
4. Has average intellectual ability.

Weaknesses

1. Is not a "natural" leader.
2. Is not a team player.
3. Displays lack of ability to interpret unfamiliar situations and material.
4. Lacks ability to perform under tension.
5. Lacks management skills: i.e., organizational, planning, and decision-making.
6. Displays little appreciation for or ability in delegation.
7. Analyzes situations superficially and makes hasty decisions.
8. Tends to retreat under opposition or unfavorable conditions.
9. Has high need for praise and security.

Suggestions for his development: The assessors are unanimously of the opinion that John has limited im-

mediate capability to advance in line management. While his personal characteristics may have supported him adequately thus far in his career, it is doubtful that he can handle more complex and responsible jobs requiring more advanced management skills. Possible alternative career routes should be considered. His interviewing and interpersonal skills, for example, should make him an excellent personnel interviewer. But no matter what his next job assignment, his lack of administrative skills needs attention. His supervisor might use the In-Basket as an administrative training device.

Points to consider when presenting this assessment summary to the candidate: In the final peer ratings, John ranked himself as first in performance and as second in higher management potential. In informal talks with assessors he also indicated high expectations for the assessment results and a high opinion of his own performance. Feedback of these results should be planned carefully. It might be best to try to draw out his own views of his performance further, asking him to recall his action in the group discussions, while giving feedback slowly and carefully.

Part C: A strong candidate for service-center management

Bob rated very high as compared with the other candidates. He is 40 years old, neat, and clean-cut in appearance.

In the Assessment Interview, Bob came across to the assessor as likable, relaxed, and tactful, and he communicated well. He stated realistic goals and displayed a strong interest in the company and in his work. His work and educational history showed considerable motivation and drive. For instance, after getting a technical-school education at night, he has continued to take at least one course of some kind each year. He is or has been an officer in almost every organization to which he belongs, and the scope of his interests is quite broad.

During the interview, Bob men-

tioned two points about his present situation that make him unhappy: first, he feels badly about not being able to convince upper management of the value of some of his ideas and of his capabilities; and, second, he feels that he is spending too much time on clerical work as opposed to technical supervision.

In the one-to-one exercises, Bob's performance was mixed. He handled the Irate Customer Phone Call extremely well. Bob asked if the customer would hold the phone while he pulled the history, or if he could call back. He made it clear that he did not agree with the customer, but he also did not antagonize him and showed a great deal of tact. He finally agreed to come to the customer's home with a technician. The assessor who made the call rated him much above average.

He also handled the In-Basket Interview well. Bob may have talked a little too much, but he was calm, collected, and spoke with self-confidence. On the other hand, his Applicant Interview left much to be desired. Bob took extra time for preparation, yet he had formulated no plan or organization, and there was no rapport. He did not sell the company well, he did not spot the hole in the applicant's history, nor did he follow up on leads.

Bob was assessed in four different leaderless-group exercises and two management games, and in every case he was rated well above average in personal impact, in group relations, and in amount and quality of contribution. He was accepted by the groups, he offended no one, others listened when he spoke, and he was always sensitive to others. In one case (the Problem-Solving Task Force), another member of the group got himself into trouble; Bob recognized this and offered his help. Without fail, he was rated high in group situations, not only by the assessors but by his peers as well.

So far as leadership goes, Bob's performance was mixed. At the outset the Manufacturing Company Game, he was confused and unsure of himself. He caught on slowly, but

became more aggressive as he organized what the game was about. He did not lead the group, but helped in decision making. In the Service Center Staffing Discussion, he sat quietly and said practically nothing. During the group discussion of the discipline cases, Bob did not really push his ideas, and appeared to be afraid of offending someone. He had the leadership of the group for a small period of time, but did not hold it. In the Retail Store Game, he tried to lead, but the second member of his team was too frustrated by the game to understand and the third was operating strictly alone.

While no real leader emerged in the Supervisory Practices Group Discussion, Bob convinced two people to change their opinions. In the Financial Analysis Group Discussion, he sold the group on several ideas and was rated high by his peers.

Bob rated well above average on interpersonal sensitivity. At no time during the exercises, even with the Irate Customer, did he become offensive—he was always sensitive to others and considered their comments as he dealt with them.

Bob has a good understanding of financial matters, catches on to situations quickly, and tends to make accurate decisions. In the financial analysis of the lawnmower business, he diagnosed very well and came up with the proper answers. In the Retail Store Game, he caught on quickly and was not afraid to take a few risks. He handled the Irate Customer Phone Call well, without giving away any financial advantage. In the Manufacturing Company Game, he also diagnosed well and helped direct the group to the high-profit items. He came up with some very original and creative ideas that brought his team from a losing to a winning position.

Bob handled 17 items out of 30 in the In-Basket, and he handled these in depth. He recognized too late that he would not be able to complete all items. He caught on to the problems of the two troubled subordinates, noted the need for retraining other employees, and saw that the person-

was not in satisfactory shape. He developed an organized approach to problems, set follow-up dates on material delegated, and recognized the need for planning. His treatment of the problems was often excellent.

Throughout, the following characteristics were prominent:

Strengths

1. Is motivated and wants to advance himself.
2. Shows strong interpersonal skills.
3. Is good in group relations.
4. Is tactful.
5. Withstands stress generally.
6. Has good management skills.
7. Has good financial comprehension.
8. Has average intellectual ability.

Weaknesses

1. Lacks good interviewing skills.
2. Has high need for approval.
3. Is rigid in his thinking once his mind is made up.

Suggestions for his development: Bob rates well above average as a candidate for service center manager. With counseling and guidance, he should be ready for promotion in less than one year. A careful development plan should be worked out to ensure his exposure to all aspects of center operation. Some exposure to regional operations is suggested to let him understand the rationale of the paperwork generated in a service center.

He needs experience in selection interviews and appraisals, and this should be provided under close guidance until he gets a feel for interviewing. His manager should contact the central training department for books or training programs on the subject.

Points to consider when presenting this assessment summary to the candidate: On several occasions, Bob indicated that he liked the assessment program and was glad to be involved. Also, he stated that he wants some experience in interviewing. It would be appropriate and helpful to discuss the training needs of this candidate openly and fully.