



Demystifying Assessment Centre and its significance for Indian banks

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Introduction

The main function of HR Department is to provide right person for the right job at right time so that the functions of the organisation are performed successfully. There is always shortage of competent manpower in the organisations to match the needs of different jobs in terms of required competence to handle the functions efficiently and effectively. The organisations, therefore, look for extraordinary human resources and are prepared to pay decent compensation to acquire talents to handle strategic and complex functions for the competitive advantage over their competitors. They constantly try to create pool of talented human resource by investing in acquiring, developing, motivating, nurturing and retaining them. Such pool of talented human resource is treated as the human capital. It is easy to imitate all other business inputs like infrastructure, capital required, systems & processes, technology but not the human resource, which is the major differentiator for the success of any organisation. The caliber of different person always differ in their abilities, aptitude, mental abilities, personality characteristics, emotional and temperamental traits. Therefore, the competence of people in the organisation becomes the main strategic factor for the success of any organisation.

Jobs are becoming more and more complex in banking sector too which require both behavioural and technical competencies at superior levels to perform these complex functions successfully. The strategic role of HR Development requires to adopt competency-based approach for identification

of competencies for different jobs (competency mapping) and assessing those competencies in the incumbents for achieving the objective of providing right person for the right job. This process is becoming more complex and dynamic because of increasing competition and complexities in business environment due to Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA). Indian Banks are also required to adopt competency-based approach in all its HRM functions to gain strategic advantage.

The competency-based approach in HRM comprise 3 major components viz. **identification of competencies** for different jobs/jobs groups (competency mapping), **competency assessment** of the incumbents of jobs and **implementation of competency models** for various HRM functions. Assessment Centre technique can extremely be used for competency assessment with high degree of reliability and validity though it is time consuming, costly and requires expertise of trained and experienced assessors. This paper gives analytical details of assessment centre both at conceptual and implementational levels.

What is an Assessment Centre?

The assessment centre is an approach for assessing candidates for a job/job family or group of jobs against pre-determined job-related competencies for the purpose of implementing various human resource functions like recruitment & selection, training & development, promotion, job placements, talent management, etc. The purpose of assessment centre is entirely different from the performance appraisal system. Assessment centre method is used to assess

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the potential and predict the future performance with reference to a job for which the incumbent is being considered, whereas, the performance appraisal system assesses the performance where the person has already been working. It is also not a physical location, as generally misunderstood. It is a process to assess the candidates for their suitability for specific job(s) against pre-identified competencies. During the process, the candidate's performance is evaluated through a series of job-related activities involving exercises/tasks which simulate the functions performed for the target job(s) against pre-determined criteria. The assessment centre technique has its proven efficacy as established by different validation studies and researches. There are various definitions given by different practitioners and researchers which have certain common elements.

The Task Force on Assessment Centre Guidelines (1989) adopted the following definition:

“An Assessment Centre consists of standardized evaluation of behaviour based on multiple inputs. Multiple-trained observers and techniques are used. Judgment about behaviour is made, in major part, from specifically developed assessment simulations. These judgments are pooled by the assessors in a meeting among assessors or by a statistical integration process. In an integration discussion, comprehensive accounts of behaviour and often ratings of it are pooled. The discussions result in evaluations of the performance of the assessee on the dimensions or other variables which the assessment center is designed to measure.”

Genesis of Assessment Centre Method

The first systematic use of the Assessment Centre (AC) methods has been found by the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during the Second World War which has used some simulation exercises to identify potential agents (leaders). The use of simulations and multiple exercises for the assessment of performance by multiple observers was however, found in 1930s for identification of leadership potential by German Psychologist Max Simoneit as the head of army's laboratory by introducing leadership tests. It was discontinued in 1941 because many favoured candidates could not clear these tests. The British

War Office Selection Board used this method in Second World War conducted by all its three wings viz. Army, Air Force and Navy. It was also used by British public sector selection procedures and the police.

The pioneer use of assessment centres in industrial setting was found in the early 1950s when it was used in American Telephone & Telegraph Company (AT&T) by Robert K Greenleaf and Douglas W. Bray for identification of organisational and individual parameters for recognising potential successful managers. It was further practically taken up in the Bell System in 1958 and has then become the standard model for design and practice of assessment centre in the USA, UK and rest of the world. Douglas Bray with his associates Richard Campbell and Donald Grant in 1974, through their published research analysed the long-term effects of the AT&T model. The research found that the assessment of managers was a valid predictor of performance in terms of the strengths and weaknesses even after twenty years of first round of assessment. Thus, the AT&T studies could be considered as the breakthrough in establishing the trustworthiness of assessment centre method for implementation in industrial setup. The assessment centre methodology reached to different advanced countries as reliable assessment tool in 1970s and onwards.

The multinationals and major consultancy companies like PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte, KPMG, Ernst & Young use assessment centre extensively for the recruitment of their trainees. From a survey, it has been found that 68% of recruiters in the USA and UK, use assessment centre in some form or the other as selection process for recruitment and promotion. Quite a few recruitments consulting now help the corporates for conducting assessment centres for selecting candidates for them and identifying the developmental needs of employees at managerial level positions.

Like other countries, the first use of assessment centre methodology in India was in the defence forces. All the 3 wings of defence forces viz. Army, Air Force and Navy used it for selection of their commissioned officers through Services Selection Board (SSB). The use of assessment centre is spreading in Indian

corporates, Public Sector Organisations, Banks and Multinationals operating in India such as Colgate Pamolive, ITC, RPG group, ICICI Bank, Central Bank of India, etc. ICICI Bank had used assessment centre process to assess the suitability of Bank of Madura Officers when the Bank of Madura was being merged with ICICI Bank. Same numbers of ICICI officers along with the officers of Bank of Madura underwent the assessment centre exercise to get comparative performance assessment. Reserve Bank of India also introduced assessment centre in 1999-2000 for identifying the development needs of its officers for senior positions.

Task Force on Development of Assessment Centre Standards

The Task Force on Development of Assessment Centre Standards (1979) for establishing good practices, prescribed **seven conditions that should be met** if an Assessment Method is to be considered as an Assessment Centre to ensure standardised evaluation of behaviour. The 7 conditions are as below:

1. Multiple Assessment Techniques

There need to be multiple assessment tools/techniques to have broader assessment. Few assessment techniques should be in the form of simulation exercises which can generate behaviours associated with the dimensions of the job-related performance and should be like situation at workplace. The exercises like Group Discussion, Business Games, In-basket, Role Play, etc. are designed to simulate job-related activities and should generate desired behaviour. The candidates should be tested on the different activities to get a reliable and valid score.

2. Multiple Assessors

A large number of assessors, proportionate to the number of participants should be deployed to reduce assessment biasness by pooling their assessments. One assessor for 3-4 participants should be assigned. The assessors must be trained in assessment methods and behavioural assessment. They should also get sufficient briefing before conducting Assessment Centre.

3. Pooling of information

The assessments of different assessors who observe a particular activity/candidate are to be pooled to work out final outcome. The observations recorded by the assessors are to be used for reconciliation of inter assessor differences to reduce inter assessor bias.

4. Time of Observation

During the assessment centre process, the assessors should fully concentrate on observing the behaviour of candidates on different activities and they should record the behaviour indicators/critical incidents for analysing behaviour/performance. The final evaluation should be made after the assessment centre activities are over. The assessment along with the observation done simultaneously might result in missing some significant observation of behaviour indicators.

5. Design of Exercises

The assessment tools/exercises used should be able to assess job related competencies. The tools, exercises, activities and tests should be so designed that they intend to assess pre-identified competencies and should generate competency related observable behaviour. The job-related exercises should help in predicting future job performance of the applicants with higher confidence.

6. Dimensions, attributes, characteristics

The assessment of the different competencies in the form of dimensions, attributes, characteristics or qualities using the assessment centre techniques should be identified by analysis of related job behaviours. A detailed competency mapping exercise should be done to identify the relevant competencies needed for performing a job successfully. Competencies mainly focus on abilities required to be possessed by the candidates being considered for the job. Only critical job-related competencies should be assessed. Assessing many competencies would not be feasible in terms of availability of time and resources.

7. Tools/Techniques/Exercises used

Tools used in assessment centre are designed to obtain information about the participants to

assess their performance in terms of pre-identified competencies. These exercises should be designed to emulate the tasks and requirements of the job, the candidates are being assessed. The exercises could be individual or group and the participants should be observed by assessors when the exercises are performed by the participants.

Variety of exercises/tools are used in Assessment Centres. The most prominent exercises used are 'Leaderless Group Discussion', 'Psychological tests', 'In Basket or In Tray', 'Case Study Analysis', 'Role Play', 'Committee Meetings', 'Business Games', 'Presentations' and 'Behaviour Based Interviews'.

Group Discussion is the most common exercise conducted in assessment centres. Schultz & Schultz (1994), described the leaderless group discussion as: "The leaderless group discussion is a type of assessment centre exercise where groups of applicants meet as a group to discuss an actual job-related problem. As the meeting proceeds, the behaviour of the candidates is observed to see how they interact and what leadership and communication skills each person displays". Depending upon the purpose and the competencies to be assessed, different forms of group discussions are conducted. The most common form of group discussions could be (i) a 'debate' to argue in favour or against of an issue, (ii) a 'discussion' to find the solution of an emerging issue, (iii) a 'committee meeting' for taking decisions in a formal committee meeting or a 'case study' discussion to discuss certain issues to arrive at specific solutions, (iv) a 'consensus building exercise' to arrive at common solution by sorting out differences of viewpoints. The competencies assessed by using group discussion exercise mainly are idea generation (ideation), effective communication, leadership qualities, group cohesiveness/group maintenance, decision taking abilities, etc. For consensus building exercise, it can also assess the inter-personal skills including conflict management and negotiation skills.

Psychological Tests are commonly used for assessing different mental and personality dimensions in almost all assessment centres. These tests are used to assess the potential of candidates for predicting their suitability or identifying their

aptitude for the job for which assessment centre is conducted. The psychological tests are conducted at individual level to get insights about the candidates on various mental and personality aspects. The outcome of psychological tests is also sometime used to supplement or correlate with the outcomes of other exercises. The psychological tests could be in the form of ability tests or aptitude tests or personality tests. The selection of test is carefully done keeping in view the purpose and the competencies assessed.

In-basket or In-tray exercise mainly aims at assessing decision-making abilities of the participants. It is a simulation exercise for judging the candidate's ability to handle the responsibilities of a role assigned to the candidate in an office situation. According to Schippmann, Prien, & Katz, (1990), "the in-basket exercise has been becoming a focus of interest because of its utility in selection for different types of jobs". The in-basket exercise is conducted at individual level. The candidates are given the correspondence received with some background material for reviewing to take appropriate actions in the form of decisions and to record/notes in writing they feel most appropriate to dispose of the item (case). The candidates should prioritise the tasks (items/cases given) and also to decide whether some items could be postponed or could be delegated to others officials in view of limited time available. The items (tasks) in the form of correspondence are constructed either based on some complex actual situations faced by the organisation in past or some common situations generally faced in other organisations. The competencies generally assessed through in-basket exercise are analytical and decision-making abilities, time management, prioritisation, delegation, written communication, etc. It can also be used for assessing the technical knowledge/competency, if intended to test it as the input for taking decisions. The candidates are generally required to record the rationale behind their decisions on a separate sheet or they are interviewed to get the insight for their decisions. The e-tray exercises are now used in place of in-basket in the paperless office scenario.

Case Study exercises are used to describe some real situation in organisational scenario narrating sequence of events taken place involving some

issues which require extensive discussions to arrive some viable solutions to resolve them. It is generally a group activity; participants are required to analyse and discuss the issues with reference to the information/facts of the case in order to suggest viable solution(s) to resolve the issues. Sometimes, the identity of the organisation is hidden or it is totally a hypothetical case presenting the situation generally faced by the organisations/ industry. The participants are required to prepare a brief written report of their recommendations to resolve the issues. The participants are sometime required to explain their recommendations/decisions in the form of a formal presentation. Through the case study exercise, the participants are assessed on their analytical and decision-making abilities involving analysing situation using facts/information available, generating and evaluating alternative solutions for arriving at decision(s). The case is carefully selected to have relevance with the role for which the assessment centre is conducted.

Role Play is used as an exercise where the candidates assume certain pre-defined roles. The role players play their specific roles in an interactive job-related simulated business scenario. Like in a real business situation, the role players can play the roles of a boss and his/her subordinate(s), a peer, a customer, etc. The role play exercise is quite popular in assessment centres in which the participants are given different roles to play and each participant is provided a role brief (script) of a situation where they are to play the role of the character assigned to them. It is a simulated exercise where the participants interact with other participants spontaneously. The role brief gives the general outline of the role but lot of things are left to the visualisation of the participants to their own understanding of role. The role brief of one participant is not made available to other role players to bring more element of anticipation and spontaneous reactions beyond role briefs. Through this exercise, the participants are assessed on inter-personal skills like negotiation, conflict management, leadership, team work, communication, etc.

Committee Meeting is a structured simulation exercise depicting a formal committee meeting. Such meetings are commonly conducted in the

organisations discussing vital issues for taking some important decisions. The committee meeting exercise may have some overlap with the role play exercise and therefore, treated as a structured role play exercise. Each member of the committee meeting is to play a specific role holding some position in the organisation and a chairman of the committee is assigned to lead the meeting. At the end of the meeting, written report or the minutes of the meetings are to be prepared covering important decisions taken and major points discussed. Like meetings held in organisations, background material and the agenda for meeting are provided to the committee members in advance. The committee meeting exercise generally assesses leadership & team building abilities, interpersonal skills including negotiation and conflict management skills, analytical & decision-making skills, oral & written communication skills etc.

Business Games are commonly used in assessment centre as simulation exercise to present business-like situation for solving a business-related problem in an interactive business environment. The participants interdependently perform different tasks to achieve desired results. It is relatively an unstructured exercise and the participants are given some instructions to perform the tasks along with the material and resources required. These business games in assessment centre are organised mainly to assess inter-personal skills, leadership qualities, abilities to work in teams, strategic planning, analytical and decision-making ability, etc. The assessors mainly focus on the process and inter-personal interactions to get behaviour indicators rather than the outcome.

Presentation exercise requires the candidates to orally present their views on the given topic using relevant facts with logic. This exercise is conducted to assess the participants' logical thinking, organisation of thoughts, articulation, communication skills, creativity, idea generation, etc. The exercise also helps in getting some clues related to some personality and behaviour aspects including their attitude about the topic/ issue is also judged through the exercise. The participants sometime are required give extempore speech on a topic provided to them randomly just before the speech and only few minutes are given to organise their thoughts. Sometimes, presentation

exercise is conducted to test public speaking ability of candidates to speak before a big gathering to observe the confidence level of the candidate before the large audience.

Behaviour-Based Interview technique is used to observe behavioural aspects of candidates by asking them to describe their actions taken for achieving the outcomes related to some past event or some exercise of assessment centre like in-basket. It is done to get the insights about their behaviour (behavioural indicators) related to the competencies being assessed. The behaviour-based interview is conducted by the expert interviewers who are trained in behaviour analysis. The behavioural experts conduct such Competency-Based Interviews (or CBIs) to generate responses on the critical situations faced by the candidates and actions taken by them to achieve the outcomes. The activities performed by the candidates under assessment centre may not adequately generate the required behavioural indicators while performing, therefore, may require further probe. The interviewers observe and analyse the responses from the participants through their competency focussed questions to assess the intended competencies. The purpose of behavioural interview conducted as a supplementary activity of in-tray exercise is to get the rationale behind the decision process. The behaviour-based interviews consist of predesigned questions which require the candidates to describe any specific situation or task handled by them during the exercise or in past involving some action displaying the use of specific competency being assessed (Similar to Behaviour Event Interview -BEI). The assumption behind these behaviour-based interviews is that the 'past behaviour of the candidate is the best indicator of future behaviour'. It also gives opportunity to the assessor to go into deep through supplementary questions on the answers of the candidates.

Designing Assessment Tools for Assessment Centres

Conducting assessment centre is a highly technical process. The quality of exercises (tools) deployed for assessment of the competencies determines the credibility of assessment centre. Thus, the selection of exercises is a crucial task for planning and

designing assessment centre. The assessment tools are developed by adopting standardised procedure used in psychological test development including pilot testing under expert guidance. The features of the exercises viz. the purpose, duration, process and instructions for conducting the exercises, etc. are documented as a part of assessment centre manual to ensure clarity while conducting these exercises by different assessors and at different locations. Number of readymade tools are available off the shelf but such tools are required to undergo thorough testing and customisation for using them in assessment centres.

Assessors' Skills

The skills and abilities of assessors are utmost important to make reasonably accurate assessment of candidates in terms of competencies assessed by them. An erroneous assessment may lead to wrong selection of candidates which will be devastating for both, organisation and the candidates. The assessors should be thoroughly trained and experienced in assessment technique and behaviour analysis. They should be keen observers of clues reflected through the participation of candidates while performing different simulated activities in assessment centre and should be able to analyse behavioural clues (behaviour indicators) and critical incidents related to different competencies. If an organisation frequently conducts the assessment centres for different purposes/positions, they should create a pool of internal assessors by providing training to the line managers in assessment methodology to save the cost of engaging external experts. Since the internal assessors have some knowledge of content and context of the job, they can easily relate the simulated activities of assessment centre with the job. The HR Department is the user of the assessment results for implementing HRM functions, therefore, its officials are generally not engaged in assessment of candidates to avoid their role conflict, though they facilitate the process by providing logistic support for conducting the assessment centre.

Planning an Assessment Centre

Planning an assessment centre is an extremely crucial task which requires lot of time and efforts. At the planning stage, the entire process of conducting

assessment centre is elaborated. If the planning is poor or inadequate, it would create problems and confusion at a later stage and the objectivity of the process would be lost. Conducting an assessment centre is both science and art. It is science because it follows set of rules, processes and standards. It is an art because it requires human competence to assess the candidates in an objective and logical manner with keen observational ability of the assessors. The instructions, sequence of the events and process adopted should be properly followed to avoid any kind of biasness in conducting the assessment centre. The final and significant activity of assessment centre (post assessment) is to prepare candidate-wise reports by compiling all the observation and scores assigned by the assessors. The candidate-wise reports should not only contain the quantitative scores assigned on each of the competencies but also qualitative observations of critical incidents and observable behavioural which formed the basis for these scores.

The elaborate planning and designing of assessment centre provide the foundation for successful implementation of assessment centre. Every step and stage of its execution should be well planned and documented. A faulty planning or missing any crucial aspect at planning stage has an adverse impact on the effectiveness of implementation of assessment centre. Planning an assessment centre essentially requires following steps:

- (i) To know the **Purpose** whether it is for Recruitment, Promotion, Identification of Development Needs, Job Posting/Placement or Incentives;
- (ii) To know the **Position** for which it is to be conducted and the details of job activities;
- (iii) To know the **Target Group** for whom it is to be conducted;
- (iv) To prepare the list of **Critical Competencies** to be assessed based on the purpose and position;
- (v) Developing/Selecting **Assessment Tools** for assessing identified competencies;

- (vi) Finalising **Criteria and Procedure** for Assessment;
- (vii) Organising **Training of Assessors** to follow the Criterion and Procedure for assessment; and
- (viii) Preparing the instructions in the form of an **Instruction Manual**.

Assessment centre is planned keeping in view **what purpose it will serve**. It should not be done as a fancy exercise without clearly understanding the purpose. It should also be very clear that how the outcome or the findings are to be used. The most common purpose of conducting assessment centres is hiring for the managerial positions where the already identified competencies are assessed. Another important purpose for which the assessment centres are used is for promotion of internal candidates. The performance appraisals are generally not found adequate for promotion of employees to the next level particularly when the role and responsibilities of higher position is significantly different and the performance appraisal system generally fails to assess the potentials or competencies required at a higher position. The assessment centres are also used for identifying the training and development needs of internal employees which is often referred to as the development centre. It can also be used for talent management by identifying extraordinary talents to occupy the crucial and strategic positions through their career plans to meet the succession planning objectives. Such talents are required to be nurtured and adequately incentivized as a part of retention strategy by the organisations.

It is essential to clearly identify the **position(s)** for which the assessment centre is to be conducted. It is needed because different jobs require different set of competencies to perform them successfully. The competency mapping gives a clear idea about the competencies required for the specific job(s) which helps in identifying/selecting or developing the tools for assessing those competencies. Planning and designing an assessment centre also necessitate to know about the **target group** for whom the assessment centre is to be designed. The activities to be planned and the tools to be used are to match the background of the candidates viz. qualifications, experience, age, etc.

Competency mapping provides the list of competencies required to perform the job(s) successfully. The assessment centre is organised to assess the pre-identified competencies at organisations level, job family level or a job/role level, as the case may be. Even if the competency mapping process identifies the competencies, it is advisable that a group of experts again relook the list and **decide the critical competencies to be assessed** in the assessment centre keeping in view significance of each identified competencies, time and resources available. The **development or selection of appropriate tools** to assess different competencies is the most crucial task in planning an assessment centre. A wrong tool selection may result into faulty assessment of competencies. Since the evaluation based on assessment centre activities are used for many human resource management related decisions, the inaccurate assessment of any competencies due to use of erroneous tools can be risky for the organisation and disheartening for the participants.

The **criteria and procedure** for assessment should be well defined and communicated to the assessors and other key persons involved in the assessment centre before conducting the assessment centre. The **scaling procedure** on which the candidates are to be evaluated should be clearly defined. The success of assessment centre and the quality of assessment largely depends upon the expertise of the assessors. The **selection of assessors** should be made carefully. There are advantages and limitations of having in-house assessors. There are some inherent variations in assessment by different assessors due to the individual differences between the assessors. The assessors should be rotated between different groups/candidates to minimize the assessment biasness.

To maintain the uniformity of approach, a well-documented **manual of instruction** is to be prepared. The instruction manual contains all the finer details like purpose, position, target group, competencies assessed, tools administered, seating arrangements, material required, instructions to the participants, instructions to the assessors, allocation of assessors, formats for assessment, scoring and evaluation procedure, format for individual reports, etc.

Benefits of Assessment Centre Usage

- The assessment centre technique for assessment of candidates for assessing their capabilities in terms of job-related competencies using multiple tools is considered an effective and dependable method. Therefore, the outcomes of the process are treated as highly reliable, impartial and transparent.
- The detailed and well-structured assessment process is considered more precise and meaningful compared to traditional assessment methods because in assessment centre, the evaluation done through direct behaviour observations in a simulated situation by expert assessors. The suitability of candidates for a job can be predicted more accurately since they are observed while performing simulated activities. The different behavioural aspects of the candidates in an interactive situation can be observed while the participants are engaged in the exercises.
- Assessment centre process assesses the candidates with reference to various job-focused competencies in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitude and other behaviour dimensions which has direct linkage with the job success, whereas, the traditional methods based on written tests and/or interview fail to do so.
- Assessment centre is considered as an unbiased process of assessment which provides equal opportunities to all the candidates by ensuring that no candidate gets any advantage or disadvantage. The participants also see the process as fair and unbiased.
- Both assessors and the participants get some unique experience by going through the process of assessment centre. While the assessors gain experience and enrich their observational and assessment skills, the candidates find the exercises quite exciting and are benefitted from their unique experience of participating in exercises. Through the feedback mechanism, the participants also get insights about their developmental needs.
- The main purpose of the assessment centre

is to find the suitable candidates for the job(s) for which it has been conducted and to ensure their fitness with the organisational culture. It, therefore, aligns the selection process with the business goals and objectives by customizing it with the requirements of the organisation.

- Using assessment centre methodology deploys high costs, efforts and involvement of experts for designing and standardizing the process, but in the long run, its benefits outweigh the cost and efforts. It also reduces the recruitment, error of hiring wrong candidates who are not found suitable for the job. It, therefore, reduces the incidents of turnover of employees and avoids re-conduct of selection process.
- The companies which use assessment centre process enjoy better reputation and credibility because the candidates have more trust in assessment centre as a selection process compared to other selection processes. The candidates who are not selected also see the process as objective and transparent.

Conducting Assessment Centre

Detailed plan of conducting assessment centre should be documented in the manual. It should provide the step-by-step process. It gives all the details including briefing the candidates, sitting plan, material to be used, sequencing of activities, instructions to the candidates, time allotted to perform each activity, parameters and process of assessment, etc. The assessors are required to follow the entire process. A pre-assessment centre briefing session of assessors is conducted by the chief conductor to ensure the objectivity and uniformity of conducting the assessment centre. Sometimes, when the candidates are large, assessment centre is conducted concurrently at multiple shifts/locations/ and the uniformity of instructions help in ensuring objectivity. During assessment, the assessors are also required to record all critical incidents, behaviour indicators which may help in deciding/justifying final rating. It may also help in reconciling inter assessor discrepancies with mutual discussion. Sometimes, video recording of activities is done so that the activities can be reviewed for final ratings.

After assessment centre activities are over, the main task of assessors is to compile the candidate wise reports by incorporating the assessment scores of all the assessors to finalise the scores for each competency assessed. Since, each activity is assessed by multiple assessors and each competency is assessed by multiple tools, specific format is used to compile activity-wise/competency-wise assessment in the form of a matrix. The critical incidents/behaviour indicators are also recorded at the end of the report with observations of the assessors. The candidate-wise report is the gist of entire assessment centre activities based on which critical decisions can be taken about the candidates.

Causes of Restrictive Use of Assessment Centre Methodology

The main causes of restrictive use of assessment centre method are: it is costly, time consuming and non-availability of trained and experienced assessors. There is also lack of awareness of the benefits of assessment centre techniques compared to other methods of assessment. These deterrents should not be the cause of its broader use in industries and corporates. The HR professionals should spread its benefits among the top management of the companies to get their support. A pool of trained assessors should also be created to facilitate the process.

There is a widespread myth that the assessment centre is another form of performance appraisal system due to lack of knowledge about its purpose. Assessment centre is entirely different from the performance appraisal. This confusion restricts its use. The major purpose of assessment centre is the assessment of potentials in terms of job-related competencies for predicting success on a job for which the candidate is assessed, whereas, the purpose of performance appraisal is to evaluate the performance on current job.

The assessment centre exercise requires large number of assessors. Generally, for an ideal group size of 20 to 30 candidates, 8 to 10 assessors are required. If the assessment centre is conducted for large number of candidates in different batches/ different locations/different days, it may require more trained assessors and may take more days to

complete the process. Lack of availability of trained assessors to maintain uniformity becomes deterrent for using assessment centre. However, the use of technology like audio-video recordings and computer aided scoring methods can facilitate scoring and assessment.

Planning assessment centre and developing assessment tools are highly time consuming, it also requires identification of competencies (competency mapping) before conducting assessment centre to have intimate knowledge of job(s) which is also time consuming and needs expertise. The job related, organisation relevant simulation exercises require lot of time for designing and pre-testing.

Need for Assessment Centre in Indian Banks

Assessment centre technique is considered highly trusted method to assess the suitability of candidates for job(s) requiring specific competencies. Using assessment centre is a strategic decision and should be evaluated against its advantages and limitations. Therefore, it requires management support to seek their commitment and get adequate resources. The HR Department should sell the idea and its potential benefits to the top management. Some of the Indian banks have been using assessment centre for giving weightage in promotion at senior management level though there has been resistance from the associations because they prefer to have higher weightage for seniority and are always averse to adopt any new selection methods. Therefore, there is a need to educate them about its fairness and potential benefits. There is also a myth about its use as one of the appraisal systems. Some banks also use it to identify the development needs of officers in terms of competency gaps calling the process as development centre.

The banks generally conduct it as a standalone exercise without conducting any competency mapping exercise to identify the critical competencies for the job(s) for which assessment centre is conducted. Unless competencies are clearly identified, assessment centre may not serve its purpose. The assessment centre technique is not considered practical at initial level of recruitment as Probationary Officers/Assistant Managers in

banks because of large number of applicants and the traditional aptitude tests generally comprising comprehension, analytical/quantitative techniques, reasoning, etc. are still preferred. However, for specialised jobs at middle and senior management levels, the assessment centre should be considered with proper planning and involvement of trained experts. Use of assessment centre for internal promotions will be more useful than the traditional selection methods. The assessment centre method can also be considered for the selection of officers for the positions requiring specific competencies like risk management, auditing, etc.

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