

'Hiring Right—Using Assessment Centers To Make The Right Selection Decisions'

“We hired based on aptitude and fired because of attitude”



This is so true for many organizations in constant search for the right “person to job fit”. Selection errors, especially in crucial positions are mistakes organizations can ill afford to make. While domain and functional knowledge are easy to acquire and are more ‘trainable’, desired behavioral competencies or qualities are more difficult to acquire and train. It is imperative that effective selection processes focus on behavioral qualities rather than domain knowledge, alone.



While interviews and group discussions are the most commonly used methods for selection, their reliability and validity is limited. Resource and time constraints leave little scope for additional exercises. Using Assessment Centers for selection is quite the ideal solution to the challenges faced in traditional methods of selection.

Origin Of Assessment Centers

Assessment Centers (ACs) were introduced and used by the British War Office Selection Boards (WOSB) in 1942 to meet the pressing need of identifying potential officers for the British army during World War II. These used a mixture of military officers, psychiatrists and psychologists to assess the candidate's performance both in formal testing and socially, as one of the assessors lived with the participants during the selection process. This practice gradually found its way into the corporate world.

In 1946, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) was the first corporate to apply the Assessment Centre methodology. Both individual characteristics of young managers as well as organizational settings in which they work were studied and the evaluation at the Assessment Centre was used to predict whether the participant would make it to the middle management or not in the next ten years or less. The sample included both recent college graduates as well as non-management personnel who had made it to the managerial positions relatively early in their career.

Over time, its scope has widened and many organizations use it today to identify training needs, promotions, lateral movements and even selection. The widespread use of Assessment Centers can be attributed to their uniqueness which stems from:

Use of multiple exercises like role plays, group discussions, presentations, games and other simulations to bring out behaviors necessary for success in a given role or position.

Use of multiple assessors to assess the participants in these exercises. These assessors have no prior knowledge of the participants and hence are bias free.

They bring out consistencies/inconsistencies in the participant's behavior, giving valuable data points to take decisions.

The entire Assessment Center focuses on assessing specific competencies of individuals rather than providing an overall assessment of the individual, making it a scientific and comprehensive approach. When this is used for selection, the results have greater accuracy than those got from using the traditional approach which relies largely on interview, psychometric tests or aptitude and other paper pencil tests. The selection could be from prospective candidates-outside the organization or horizontal movement of employees within the organization. The selection of right talent requires a match between the competencies of the 'potential candidate' with the competencies required to perform the role.



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We often call the Assessment Centers used solely for the purpose of selection, "Selection Centers".

5-Step approach for establishing Selection Centers in an organization:

"Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm"

- Abraham Lincoln

Normally, the organization's HR takes the lead in establishing the Selection Center. Consultants' help may be taken for establishing the Selection Center and for training internal assessors. However, there are many decisions that only the internal HR team can take, jointly with the business heads.

The main steps involved in establishing Selection Centers are as follows :

1. Identifying key role/roles in the organization that require a rigorous selection process

Selection Centers are very resource intensive. Hence, while business may want accurate hiring for all roles concerned, it may not be feasible. In this context, focus and clarity on specific roles that require 'selection centers' as a process is a must.

The selection of these critical roles/levels can be undertaken internally by the leadership team or the business partner, jointly with HR. This can be done after analyzing the roles based on their criticality, ease of replacements,

and/or existing status of the supply versus demand for the key positions under consideration (rarity of talent available), etc.

2. Establishing the Knowledge, Skills and Attitude required for performing the identified roles/levels

Detailed interviews with existing key role holders and their role set members (reporting managers and the subordinates) are conducted to understand the tasks and activities performed, to arrive at a set of 5-7 non-negotiable or critical qualities needed to perform the role. These qualities are then converted into tangible indicators, which are easy to observe. This makes it easy to conclude whether the potential candidate has demonstrated them or not.

3. Designing the Selection Center (schedule, tools, evaluation sheets, etc.)

At this stage, appropriate exercises are designed to assess each of the 5-7, non-negotiable or critical qualities required for the role under consideration. These exercises can either be designed or selected from the readily available exercises or tools. Normally, exercises like the inbox, group discussions, presentations, role plays, competency based interviews, etc., are used. The choice of the exercises depends on the level (junior, middle or senior) of the roles identified.

4. Building a pool of internal assessors

An internal team of assessors is



normally trained in the selection process. This ensures that the process of conducting selection centers can be taken up independently by the in-house team, as and when there is a business requirement for additional manpower. Assessors are normally a mix of HR professionals and line managers. As a part of the training, they are given important inputs on the qualities to look out for in potential candidates, interviewing techniques and the process of observing, recording, classifying and evaluating.

Implementing the actual Selection Center

Once the Selection Center is implemented, assessors prepare a short one-page report on the candidate. It would have the scores on the desired competencies as well as their positive observations and comments on areas where the candidate is found lacking. The final list of shortlisted/selected candidates is compiled based on the pre-determined criteria as shown in exhibit 1.

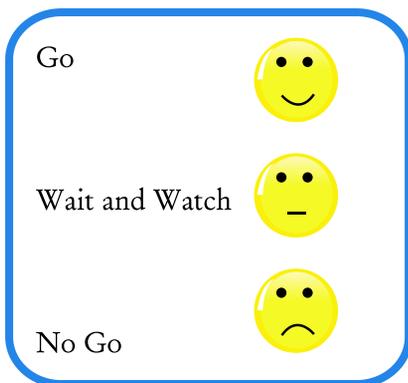


Exhibit 1:
Simplified version of report

Advantages of using Assessment Center-based selection process:

Ensures that right people are occupying the right 'Crucial positions'.

Greater objectivity during the hiring process and fewer selection errors in both Type 1 (wrong hire) and Type 2 (rejecting the right person).

Higher validity in the selection process.

Assesses the most relevant competencies and reduces biases.

Some experiences of implementing Selection Centers

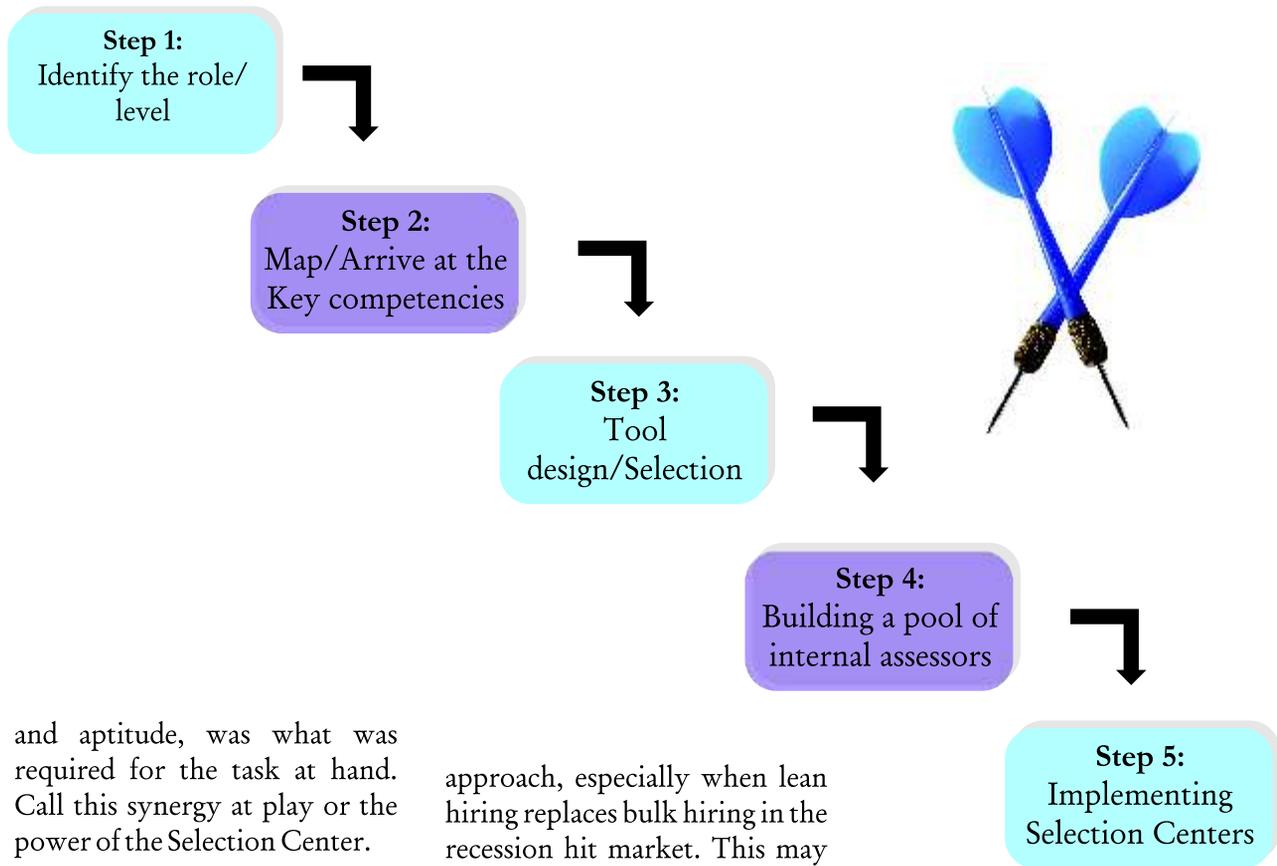
A well know retail organization wanted to strengthen its selection process while hiring team members in their stores across the country. The requirement was for retail sales professionals with key qualities of interacting well with customers as well as managing back-end store operations. As many of the retail sales professionals would eventually grow into managerial positions in the future, the organisation wished to ensure it was investing in the right talent. With these objectives in mind, a selection center was designed and a group of potential candidates went through the Selection Centers. The Selection Center was internally seen as an innovative

and unique method, especially in the retail industry, for hiring entry level employees. Wherever required, the Selection Center was administered bilingually, to make sure that the right candidate was not rejected solely on language grounds.

This unique experience coupled with the practicality of the approach helped select the best candidates with the right knowledge, skills and attitude from the target group. This approach continues and the days ahead will bring in more adopters of Selection Centers in the retail space.

A well known automobile manufacturing company wanted to select candidates with the right attitude at their plant. Since this company encouraged diversity selection from different parts of the state, the tools designed for them by TVRLS also needed to rise to address the issues of mobility and ease of use for the assessors. TVRLS came up with tools and processes that resembled plug and play approach-offering ease and flexibility of use. One year into this program, the line managers shared informal feedback that the Selection Centers brought in candidates whose fitment with the job was much higher than previous attempts. While this is only one side of the story, on the other side the selected candidates were also happy and satisfied because they had the knowledge, that their energy





and aptitude, was what was required for the task at hand. Call this synergy at play or the power of the Selection Center.

Key Learnings:

Selection Centers are force multipliers, since right hiring brings in stability in the workforce, solving half of the productivity equation. This significant gain will have a cascading effect in improving performance at all other corporate spaces.

Selection Centers can cater to all segments of the workforce and become a robust and reliable

approach, especially when lean hiring replaces bulk hiring in the recession hit market. This may be a great relief for those hiring in tough times.

Selection Centres can also be used effectively for integrating/ selecting contracted employees to the company payrolls.

This serves as a more scientific process to screen trainees/ apprentices and transition them into the organizational mainstream.

“I am easily satisfied with the very best.”
Winston Churchill

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ASCENT

Scaling-up Enterprises

Harsh Mariwala
 Founder - ASCENT
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 TO SCALE – UP !
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A non-profit expression of Harsh Mariwala's Personal Social Responsibility to enable growth-ready entrepreneurs accelerate their Scaling-up journey

ASCENT offers a unique and powerful 'self-help' platform through the formation of **Trust groups** of 10 Entrepreneurs each who will meet regularly.

Each Trust Group comprises non-competitive, diverse groups of entrepreneurs

ASCENT will support TRUST-GROUPS with

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Insights – Knowledge & Inspiration

Enablers – Investors, service providers, mentors, etc.

No Membership Fee - groups will bear their own logistics costs

We have launched with 10 ASCENT groups from Mumbai and Pune, and over the next few years scale up ASCENT to a much larger size pan-India.

Key Facts on first ASCENT - 101 Members

- 3,200 Crs Aggregate revenue
- 50 Lacs – 420 Crs - Revenue spectrum
- 13,000 total Employee Base
- 40+ diverse Industries
- 55 : 45 Manufacturing to Service ratio
- 30% Family Businesses

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