

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ASSESSMENT CENTRES & DEVELOPMENT CENTRES ?

The type of centre can vary between the traditional assessment centre used purely for selection to the more modern development centre which involves self-assessment and whose primary purpose is development. One might ask the question 'Why group assessment and development centres together if they have different purposes?' The answer to that question is threefold. Firstly, they both involve assessment and it is only the end use of the information obtained which is different i.e. one for selection and one for development; secondly, it is impossible to draw a line between assessment and development centres because all centres, be they for assessment or development naturally lie somewhere on a continuum somewhere between the two extremes; thirdly most assessment centres involve at least some development and most development centres involve at least some assessment. This means that it is very rare to find a centre devoted to pure assessment or pure development. The issue is further confused by the political considerations one must take into account when running such a centre; it is common practice for an assessment centre with internal candidates to be referred to as a development centre because of the negative implications associated with assessment.

It is easier to think about assessment centres as being equally to do with selection and development because a degree of assessment goes on in both. Development centres grew out of a liberalisation of thinking about assessment centres and it is a historical quirk that while assessment centres were once used purely for selection and have evolved to have a more developmental flavour the language used to describe them has not. Another problem with using the assessment-development dichotomy is that at the very least it causes us to infer that little or no assessment goes on in development centres. While you will hear centres being called assessment or development centres remember that assessment goes on in both and so to some extent at least they are both assessment centres. The end result of this is that it is not possible to talk about assessment or development centres in any but the most general terms. It is more useful to talk about the constituent parts and general processes involved in each. In these terms we can identify a number of differences between assessment and development centres that one might typically find:

Assessment centres usually

- have a pass/fail criteria
- are geared towards filling a job vacancy
- address an immediate organisational need
- have fewer assessors and more participants
- involve line managers as assessors
- have less emphasis placed on self-assessment
- focus on what the candidate can do now

- are geared to meet the needs of the organisation
- assign the role of judge to assessors
- place emphasis on selection with little or no developmental feedback and follow up
- give feedback at a later date
- involve the organisation having control over the information obtained
- have very little pre-centre briefing
- tend to be used with external candidates

Development centres usually

- do not have a pass/fail criteria
- are geared towards developing the individual
- address a longer term need
- have a 1:1 ratio of assessor to participant
- do not have line managers as assessors
- have a greater emphasis placed on self-assessment
- focus on potential
- are geared to meet needs of the individual as well as the organisation
- assign the role of facilitator to assessors
- place emphasis on developmental feedback and follow up with little or no selection function
- give feedback immediately
- involve the individual having control over the information obtained
- have a substantial pre-centre briefing
- tend to be used with internal candidates

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