

Who needs development centres?

An overview of OPS research findings presented at 2003's Occupational Psychology conference.

Typically, the difference between development centres (DCs) and assessment centres lies in the use of feedback. In selection, feedback is best practice. In a development context, it is the primary tool for enhancing the recipient's performance. But this relies on two assumptions:

- feedback raises self-awareness
- increasing self-awareness enhances work performance

Both sound perfectly reasonable, but are they really justified?

Fortunately, in general, the literature says 'Yes'. However, we also know that some people are more responsive to DCs than others. Recent research by OPS has highlighted ways to identify these people in advance. The key discriminating factor is self-awareness.

We took fast-tracked 'high-potential' managers from two leading global businesses. First we assessed their performance and self-awareness. Then we put them through a two-day DC that directly reflected their actual work environments.

Those who came to the DC as 'low performers' responded equally well regardless of how self-aware they were to begin with. For 'high performers', it was quite a different story. Those who started out self-aware showed significant performance improvements over the two days. However, high performers who lacked self-awareness saw little benefit.

So, where do we go from here? Well, these findings should help us spot less responsive participants before they arrive. This will help us plan suitable exercises and ensure that feedback style is tailored to the candidate.

The result? Greater ownership on their part, as well as a more effective development process for them, their team and their organisation.