

ASSESSING MANAGEMENT COMPETENCE

People in management or senior technical, administrative or professional jobs frequently perform tasks that are regarded as 'productive'. Other people, or the same person on other occasions, will perform a similar task differently and achieve an acceptable outcome. Assessing whether people performing such tasks are competent depends on having:

1. Clearly defined standards of performance, as in a performance objective.
2. Relevant criteria specifying evidence a person should provide to confirm their competence.
3. Methods for assessing the evidence.

Although here we are concerned with how to assess competence, it should be noted that this can only be done when performance standards and relevant criteria are available. Management competences may be assessed in a variety of ways, some of which are similar to methods used elsewhere in the assessment of practical and/or cognitive skills, and by employers when selecting or evaluating staff. The following is a list of methods suitable for assessing competence using both work based evidence and activities to generate evidence upon which to make a judgement.

Assessment Centre

Assessment centres are used to judge competence using simulation exercises and other off-the-job assessment techniques. They employ observer-assessors and are used for staff selection, promotion, or development. In one programme sampled in the survey, an assessment centre used for recruiting graduates was adapted for use in assessing competences. There were five simulation exercises designed to allow managers to demonstrate behaviours associated with five basic management competences. Each exercise was intended to demonstrate several behaviours and competences. There were two group exercises, a presentation, an in-tray exercise, and an interview simulation. Several assessors observed the managers' behaviours from which they inferred competence.

Assignment

An assignment consists of any problem-solving exercise set with clear guidelines and specified length. While assignments are difficult to define precisely, they are more structured and less open-ended than projects. Assignments may deal with real work problems or with hypothetical questions. In the programmes surveyed assignments were normally presented in written form.

Case Study

Case studies, consisting of a description of an event concerning a real-life or simulated situation, usually as a text, a video, a picture or a role-play exercise. People are assessed as to their competence in analysing the situation presented, drawing conclusions and making decisions or suggesting courses of action. This method of assessment may be carried out with individuals or small groups.

Group Exercises

These are designed to simulate situations where managers meet and work together. There can be various formats:

- Competitive where individuals are in competition with each other for something, say a limited budget, and therefore have to utilise their negotiating and influencing skills to get what they want;
- Co-operative where individuals have to work together as a team to achieve a group goal;
- Leadership where one person in the group is nominated to be leader for a particular task.

Interview

The personal interview is probably the oldest and best-known means of eliciting information directly from managers. An interview can be two-way, providing managers with the opportunity to question the interviewer. It is most widely used to generate evidence of process-based skills.

Interview Simulation

These exercises can be designed to simulate interview situations in which the manager typically finds him/herself (e.g. staff counselling, disciplinary interview, selection). Assessors can observe how competent the manager is at dealing with staff in these situations.

In-tray Simulation

In-tray simulations are designed to accurately simulate the contents of a manager's in-tray. Managers work through the contents, make decisions and take appropriate action. An in-tray exercise is particularly useful in gaining evidence on planning, organising and prioritising.

Log-book/Diary/Personal Journal

A self-report technique in which managers generate evidence of their performance, progress, experiences, attitudes and personal feelings in an on-going situation.

A log-book can, if properly structured, provide a useful means of assessing the progress of a manager's achievements or performance. To be effective, it should have a clear specification and give guidance on how essential information is to be recorded.

Portfolio

The portfolio owes its derivation to the artist who presents a selection of his/her work to the prospective employer to demonstrate his/her ability. For managers a portfolio might include a business plan, a marketing plan, an investigative report, an extended CV, a video of a presentation or an interview conducted, etc. The purpose is to present evidence of the manager's performance.

Presentation Exercise

These are used to provide evidence of oral communication, interpersonal, and analytical skills. They provide the opportunity for managers to put forward their ideas in a face-to-face situation and to demonstrate their ability to persuade the audience to their point of view.

Project

Projects have the following characteristics:

- Are more comprehensive and open-ended than assignments;
- May be tackled by individuals or by a group;
- Usually involve a significant part of the work being carried out without close supervision;
- Involve less direction from a third party.

All projects involve the following stages:

1. Planning the project.
2. Devising the investigation strategies.
3. Conducting the investigation.
4. Analysing the results.
5. Reporting on the conclusions.

Role-play

In role-play, managers are presented with a situation, often a problem or incident, which they then have to respond to, by assuming a particular role. The enactment may be totally unrehearsed or they may be briefed in a particular role to be played. Such assessment is more open ended and person centred than simulation and can be used to assess a wide range of the behavioural and interpersonal skills required in the world of work.

Self-report Techniques

A self-report technique is any form of assessment in which managers generate the necessary evidence of their performance, experiences, attitudes and personal feelings in an ongoing situation.

Simulation

A simulation is a structured practical exercise with specific objectives involving the organisation and completion of a particular task, which is product - or resource - based that seeks to simulate real-life conditions. To be effective, simulations must succeed in recreating the atmosphere, conditions, and pressures of the real situation.

Written Examinations

Written examinations are a traditional form of time-constrained, summative assessment. They may be closed or open book, seen or unseen, examinations.

Written Exercise

These are used to provide evidence of analytical ability and written communication skills, e.g. the ability to impart information and ideas accurately and precisely when communicating in writing; the ability to construct a clear, logical and persuasive argument; the ability to present issues and problems in a broad perspective.