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Assessment Centres have long been proven as the most effective recruitment tool. This is because they are made up of different exercises, each of which is a valid measure of job performance. It is the additive effect of all these exercises, technically called incremental validity, that makes assessment centres so useful as predictors of success.

To get the best out of an assessment centre depends on preparation. Designing the exercises in order that they allow the candidates to demonstrate the behaviours to be assessed requires considerable technical expertise and experience. Assessors need to be trained in observation and able to record what they see without any ambiguity or bias. Rating sheets need to be unambiguous and be used to ensure observations are recorded in a timely way. All this work and preparation, however, can be a complete waste of time when objectivity is not included in the final leg of the process - the wash-up discussion.

In our work with organisation we have seen assessors and managers who are careful to be objective in their evaluations. They adhere to the process and score the candidates against the indicators. Similarly, we have seen instances where popular candidates, do not score as well as predicted against the indicators and for some managers this is untenable. We have heard, "but their presentation was so good" or "...But I really like him/her". This is where personal bias comes to the fore and starts to undermine the objectivity of the whole process.

The other issues are around scoring. All assessors should be totally in tune regarding the scoring of candidates against indicators. Any kind of inconsistency from centre to centre or from recruiting team to recruiting team can undermine the validity and reliability of the process.

So what can we do to make the wash-up session more effective?

- Appoint a chair person - preferably someone not involved in the process - to manage the discussion

- Use the same method for all centres to monitor scoring: either calculate the scores by adding them together or find an average

- Be clear about what is the pass/fail mark and adhere to it without exception

- In situations, where a candidate is borderline or has performed inconsistently, look at the scores again. The chair should facilitate a discussion with the relevant assessors so that they provide clear evidence of what they have observed. Once the chair is satisfied, then the pass/fail mark is awarded.

- Going through an assessment centre can be a nerve wracking experience for candidates. One of the benefits for them should be that they receive some feedback from their performance and some tips about what they could do differently. Usually the wash-up is the place where the majority of the feedback is given so whoever is responsible for giving feedback should ensure that the notes made by the assessors include useful feedback and that this is passed on to successful and unsuccessful candidates.