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Individual and Organizational Assessment Tools, Including Assessment Center Methodologies

The marketplace offers a variety of assessment tools that can facilitate the process of career planning and talent management by identifying individual strengths and improvement opportunities. These tools can also identify characteristics important for an organization's growth. In most situations, multiple assessments are used. The need for multiple assessments is related to the complexity of the construct being measured. For example, an assessment center approach may include a group exercise, a structured interview, a case study with written tasks, and a personality assessment. The key to using such assessment tools is to know the purpose of the tool, the validity and reliability of the evidence that supports it, and the inferences that are appropriately drawn from them. It also is important to know the weaknesses of a particular tool to avoid misuse.

Learning Objectives:

- ☑ List two types of multi-rater feedback tools and define each.
- ☑ Discuss the key differences between personality inventory instruments and personality tests.
- ☑ Identify the purpose and benefits of career profiles.
- ☑ Define the purpose of leadership assessments and list two types of leadership assessments.
- ☑ Summarize the issues associated with administering assessments, including validity, reliability, fairness, special accommodations, and legal issues surrounding testing.

Human Resource Audits

The *human resource audit* is one component of a succession planning system, building on the identification of successors and addressing the assessment of employee mobility to various positions. The audit identifies whether employees at various levels should stay in their current positions or if they should move to other positions and distinguishes key development strategies. It also helps designate pools of employees qualified for specific positions.

Each manager conducts a human resource audit by reviewing each direct report, including his or her

- time in current position
- performance
- readiness for advancement
- potential to move to a new position
- development required.

Having a plan in place ensures that all employees are reviewed whether they are potential future leaders or not, alleviating management's concern that succession planning is a selective program that ignores the development of certain employees.

If the system is linked to a staffing process, managers must then collect information on recommended next positions. A job-function code (such as sales, legal, human resources, and so forth) combined with salary information can help locate candidates for open positions in other parts of the organization. In this way, a person who is not a natural successor in his or her own unit could be considered in another part of the organization.

Figure 5-1 depicts a *succession summary* worksheet that can be used by the manager of a unit to choose successors.

Succession should be supported by performance appraisal programs or other means of providing viable, dependable employee skill information. With high-quality assessment information, managers can provide employees with effective development for future assignments. The following sections explore human resource assessments and audits.

Multi-Rater Feedback

Using multiple reviewers, or *multi-rater feedback*, is effective. In such a process, at least two levels of management review the employees and agree on their candidacy for specific positions. This evaluation process may be warranted under the following conditions:

- Manager judgments or experience levels are weak.
- There is a shortage of identified talent.
- The organizational culture supports structured programs.

Figure 5-1. Example of a Succession Summary Worksheet

Succession Summary

The position is listed first on the form because it is the focus of the planning process. Some optional pieces of data can be collected on the incumbents and replacements, such as Social Security or other employee identification numbers that are used in computer systems for retrieval of information. (International organizations often have employees who do not have Social Security numbers, so they would have to develop a numbering system.)

A job-function code identifies the type of job that an incumbent occupies or can fill in the future. This code is helpful if the system is expected to do candidate searches for similar positions. The probability of vacancy (PV) rating alerts the organization if a manager will be leaving in less than one year. The successor(s) are listed on the right of the form with their potential (PO), readiness (RE), and performance (PR) ratings.

Division: _____
 Department: _____
 Unit: _____

RATING MANAGER (Manager of Unit)	JOB FUNCTION CODE _____ SUCCESSION NAMES	PV	PO	RE	PR
POSITION: _____	(List candidates in order of preference.)				
NAME: _____	1. NAME: _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
ID# _____	ID# _____				
	2. NAME: _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
	ID# _____				
	3. NAME: _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
	ID# _____				

DIRECT REPORT POSITIONS	JOB FUNCTION CODE _____ SUCCESSION NAMES	PV	PO	RE	PR
POSITION: _____	(List candidates in order of preference.)				
NAME: _____	1. NAME: _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
ID# _____	ID# _____				
	2. NAME: _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
	ID# _____				
	3. NAME: _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
	ID# _____				

NOTE: If you do not have an ID# for a person on the list, please contact your personnel or human resources representative for assistance.

PROBABILITY OF VACANCY	POTENTIAL	READINESS	PERFORMANCE
1. Within 12 months	1. Advance 2-3 levels	R. Ready now	1. Exceptional
2. Within 1-2 years	2. Advance at least 1 level	F. Ready 1-3 years	2. Exceeds expectations
3. Beyond 2 years	3. Move to a lateral position	Q. Promotability within 5 years is questionable	3. Meets expectations
		? Too early to evaluate	4. Does not meet expectations
			X. New in Position

JOB FUNCTION CODES	09 Data Processing	16 Publications
01 Finance/Accounting	10 Library	17 Technical
02 Contracts Administration	11 Purchasing	18 Technical Support
03 Sales	12 Material Handling & Distribution	20 Airplane Operations
04 Account Management	13 Facilities & Plant Maintenance	21 Manufacturing Managers
05 Public Relations & External Affairs	14 Communications & Administrative Services	23 General Managers & Executives
07 Human Resources	15 Executive Support & Planning & Business Development	40 Legal
08 Security		

Source: Buckner and Slavenski (1993).

During the career planning process, assessments may be used in development planning. Two examples of multi-rater feedback instruments include 360-degree evaluations and assessment centers.

360-Degree Feedback

A *360-degree feedback* evaluation is a questionnaire that asks people—superiors, direct reports, peers, and internal and external customers—how well an employee performs in any number of behavioral areas. These raters should know the employee, and they should have opinions that the organization respects. Sometimes the employee also will want to rate himself or herself as a personal benchmark.

The rationale behind such a broad and well-rounded evaluation is simple: Upper management does not always see aspects of an employee's performance that others in the organization see.

This instrument is a questionnaire of statements, questions, or behaviors that users rate along an assigned scale (for example, "very satisfied" to "very dissatisfied"). These items are usually grouped together under category headings, and they usually discuss specific actions employees do or should do. Most instruments also include space for open-ended responses.

Assessment Centers

The term *assessment center* is a catch-all term that can consist of a variety of exercises. Assessment centers usually include oral exercises, counseling simulations, problem analysis exercises, interview simulations, role-play exercises, written report or analysis exercises, and group exercises. Assessment centers allow candidates to demonstrate more of their skills through job-relevant situations.

Assessment centers provide extremely accurate measures of performance and capability. Organizations using assessment centers have seen a high degree of predictability of employee success at more senior levels. These tools can be used for selection or development purposes, but the trend is more toward development.

Personality Type

When working with assessments, two terms are often used: personality inventory instruments and personality tests. What is the difference?

A *personality inventory instrument* provides an accurate picture of a person's personality type and indicates personality preferences. WLP professionals need to be adequately trained in their proper administration, scoring, and results interpretation for further planning.

A *personality test*, however, is usually a less formal and less accurate version. These tests can often be found on the Internet for generic, public use.

Many WLP professionals use personality inventory instruments because they address personality differences, information-processing styles, social interaction differences, and instructional preferences and can yield useful learner profiles. Two types of personality inventory instruments are the Myer-Briggs Type Indicator and the DiSC Personality Profile.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

The *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)* is one of the most widely used personality assessment instruments. Katherine Briggs and her daughter Isabelle Briggs Myers based their work on that of Swiss psychologist Carl Jung. The MBTI was *not* designed to assess level of maturity, degree of motivation, state of mental health, or level of intelligence.

DiSC

Based on the 1928 work of psychologist William Molton Marston, the *DiSC Personality Profile* uses a four-dimensional model in an assessment, inventory, and survey format. The results indicate dominance (direct and decisive), influence (optimistic and outgoing), supportiveness (sympathetic and cooperative), and conscientiousness (concerned and correct).

Career Profiles

A *career profile* is used in connection with a resume—a summary statement that highlights a person's work history and skills and competencies. This document is an excellent place to start to map a career path and to keep it on track. In an organization, it is a useful tool as a baseline record to map a path to a new position or career change.

Leadership Assessments

Leadership assessments identify developmental needs of current and future leaders at all levels in the organization. The assessment process helps organizations identify potential and helps employees develop career plans. These assessments may take several forms, including simulation-based or role-play-based assessments focusing on foundational, vital leadership skills such as decision making, delegating, gaining commitment, and coaching.

Issues to Consider When Administering Assessments

When developing and administering assessments, WLP practitioners should keep several considerations in mind, including validity, reliability, fairness, special accommodations, and legal issues.

Two terms a WLP practitioner may hear frequently in evaluation circles are *validity* and *reliability*. When reporting the results of an evaluation, a practitioner may be asked how he or she knows that the data is valid or the measures are reliable. Knowing these terms will help a practitioner respond intelligently. But more important, understanding these concepts can help practitioners construct better evaluation instruments such as questionnaires and tests.

Validity

Validity means measuring what the instrument was intended to measure. For example, if a group of e-learning participants misinterpret the intended meaning of a particular test question, the resulting data would not be valid. Verifying the validity of an evaluation instrument can involve complex statistics. Without the assistance of a statistician, the most practical way to improve the validity of evaluation instruments is to solicit feedback from SMEs. Practitioners should ask SMEs and participants to review each question with a critical eye. Practitioners should also administer the instrument to test subjects and compare their test results and perceptions of the questions' meanings with the intended meanings.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the ability to repeat the same measurement in the same way over time. Stated in a different way, reliability is concerned with the accuracy or precision of the instrument. Certain types of data are inherently reliable, such as a person's age. When evaluating this type of data, practitioners can feel confident that they will get reliable results every time. Other more subjective types of data can be much less reliable. Scientifically determining the reliability of an instrument requires that it be administered to a sample of subjects and undergo statistical analysis. Without scientific intervention, practitioners can still attempt to improve reliability by considering the types of data being measured and carefully wording questions to increase the likelihood that participants will respond consistently. Practitioners can also assess consistency by evaluating responses over time.

Fairness

If an assessment is to be used to qualify a person for a specific job, outside expertise often evaluates the test for **fairness**. The *Handbook of Psychological and Educational Assessment of Children* notes that fairness is a lack of bias, equitable treatment in the testing process, equality of outcomes of testing, and an equal opportunity to learn (Kamphaus and Reynolds 1990). The American Psychological Association offers a complete listing of fairness criteria that mirrors these basic principles.

Special Accommodations

When conducting assessments, WLP professionals must remember that civil rights legislation includes several implications to be considered for people with disabilities.

The most recent federal legislation to affect employers is the ***Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)*** of 1990. This act prohibits discrimination in employment, public services, transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications services against persons with disabilities.

Legal Issues Surrounding Testing

The employer bears the burden of proof to demonstrate that any given requirement for employment is related to job performance. The federal courts still evaluate any job requirement for job relatedness throughout the HR management and development cycle.

A potential legal problem for practitioners and their organizations occurs whenever a measure used for a significant employment decision, such as selection for a training program, is discriminatory. The question decided by federal courts is to what extent such a procedure has an “adverse impact on the hiring, promotion, or other employment or membership opportunities of members of any race, sex, or ethnic groups will be considered to be discriminatory...unless the procedure has been validated.” (29 Code of Federal Regulations, Section 1607.3)

In the context of HRD, a decision to select someone for a training program is a test. For example, an interview to determine eligibility for a training opportunity is just as much a test under the law as the requirement to pass a pencil-and-paper assessment for verbal fluency for entry into an organizationally sponsored program.

Organizations may have an occasion to use testing in the training arena as a support for other organizational decisions. For example, the selection of employees may be based on criteria (posttest scores) generated from the training environment.

One legal question that needs to be addressed is to what extent pre-employment tests are based on successful completion of the program, or whether some other criterion, such as job performance, should be required by test developers.

✓ Chapter 5 Knowledge Check

1. Multi-rater feedback involves a process in which at least two levels of management review employees and agree on their candidacy for specific positions. Which of the following types of multi-rater feedback uses a questionnaire to ask superiors, direct reports, peers, and other internal and external customers how well an employee performs in a number of behavioral areas?
 - a. Assessment centers
 - b. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
 - c. Leadership assessments
 - d. 360-degree feedback
2. Which of the following issues affects the development and administration of assessments and is concerned with the ability to repeat the same measurement in the same way over time?
 - a. Reliability
 - b. Validity
 - c. Fairness
 - d. Central tendency
3. The ADA guarantees an individual with a disability the right to a job for which he or she is applying.
 - a. True
 - b. False
4. Which of the following is best described as a component of succession planning that identifies whether employees should stay in current positions or move to other positions?
 - a. Assessment centers
 - b. Leadership assessments
 - c. Multi-rater feedback
 - d. Human resource audits
5. Assessment centers can contain a variety of exercises for employees to demonstrate skills through job-relevant situations.
 - a. True
 - b. False

6. Which of the following uses a four-dimensional model in an assessment, inventory, and survey format to indicate several characteristics, including dominance and optimism?
 - a. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
 - b. DiSC Personality Profile
 - c. Career profiles
 - d. Leadership assessments
7. Which of the following is concerned with measuring what was intended to be measured?
 - a. Fairness
 - b. Reliability
 - c. Validity
 - d. DiSC
8. In the context of HRD, a decision to select someone to attend a training program is considered a test.
 - a. True
 - b. False

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