



Exercise Effect:
Aspirations of a
Consistent Candidate
Experience

Jo Parkes

Introduction

1. Group exercises provide an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate competencies such as influence and persuasion, communication and teamwork along with a number of other core skills required in the real world but just how effective are they? and how easy is it for one candidate to derail the whole group?
2. Whilst there have been a number of investigations into exercise versus dimension variance in Assessment Centers, this paper summarizes research of group scores gathered over 18 months to identify if competency scores most strongly correlate with those attained in other exercises or those of fellow candidates in the group.

The Assessment Centre

1. The organization the assessment center was run for operates through nine regional teams in England.
2. It is one part of an overall selection process designed to select consultants who offer advice to businesses on international trade.
3. This study is based on the 150 candidates attending between March 4th 2014 and July 30th 2015.
4. Attendance varied from 3 to 6 candidates per center.
5. Candidate Demographics:
 1. Represented a cross section of nationalities
 2. Varied greatly in age
 3. Most having at least several years working in a related field to the role
 4. Gender ratio approximately 2:1 Male to Female

Measurement Matrix & Rating Scale

	Case Study	Group Discussion	Role Play	Presentation
International Business Awareness	✓	✓	✓	
Client Focus and Service	✓		✓	✓
Developing and Maintaining Relationships		✓	✓	✓
Communicating	✓	✓		✓
Influencing and Selling		✓	✓	✓
Planning and Organisation	✓			✓
Analytical Thinking and Problem Solving	✓	✓	✓	

Rating Scale	Description
6	Strong: positive evidence displayed to a very high standard with no negatives.
5	Good: mostly positive evidence displayed, with only minor negative evidence demonstrated
4	Benchmark: more positive than negative evidence was demonstrated
3	Some development required: positive evidence weak or outweighed by negative evidence
2	Significant development required: mostly negative, with only minor positive evidence demonstrated
1	Poor performance: few redeeming features – no/very few positives displayed

The Exercises

1. Group discussion:

1. 15 minutes to study a brief privately and summarize thoughts
2. 30 minutes in a group meeting
 1. The objective is to produce agreed upon response to a number of tasks.
 2. All candidates receive the same brief which affords some flexibility as to the number of candidates required.

2. Case study:

1. 40 minutes to work through a brief and prepare for a discussion on their findings
2. 25 minute meeting to discuss findings with a member of the assessment team
 1. Discussion covers identification of the strengths, weaknesses and relative unknowns of a potential client, review capability and readiness to successfully infiltrate a given target market and prepare an action plan to progress the business.

The Exercises

3. Role play:

1. Candidates are provided with a brief around 1 week ahead of the assessment center
2. 35 minute meeting with a potential client.
 1. The objectives of this meeting include establishing credibility, gaining the confidence and trust of the client, exploring any business issues and agreeing specific ways in which the candidate can help the role players business.
3. 15 minutes to produce an accurate visit report.

4. Presentation:

1. 30 minutes to study the brief and prepare
2. 10 minute presentation promoting the benefits to potential clients of using their services.
 1. The presentation should include potential opportunities, issues and risks for the given client sector
3. 15 minute question and answer session from the 'audience' played by an assessor.

Analysis Approach

1. Correlations were established between every candidates competency rating (totals and individual) and exercise total as well as assessment center totals for every competency rating in order to identify where correlations may be stronger between competency sub ratings, exercise sub ratings or candidates.
2. To compensate the variation in candidate numbers, total scores for each competency were pro-ratad.
3. Correlations were also clustered and averaged at an exercise level so that higher level comparisons could be made between candidates individual scores and assessment center scores as a whole.
4. Note: Whilst every effort is taken to remove bias, it should be noted that depending on timetables which vary to account for attendance of between 3 and 6 candidates at any given assessment center, assessors will have on occasion assessed candidates more than once and exercises will have been marked by more than 1 assessor during some of the assessment centers. The group exercise is the only exercise where we can be confident that all assessors are involved.

Analysis Findings

1. AC: refers to total scores (pro-rata) achieved by all candidates for a given competency.
2. Individual: refers to scores of a particular individual achieves for a given competency in a given exercise.

Measure (±)	Correlation
0.0 to <0.1	None to Weak
0.1 to <0.3	Modest
0.3 to <0.5	Moderate
0.5 to <0.8	Strong
0.8 to <0.9	Very Strong
0.9 or above	Extremely Strong to Perfect

		CASE STUDY		GROUP		PRESENTATION		ROLE PLAY		TOTAL	
		AC	Individual	AC	Individual	AC	Individual	AC	Individual	AC	Individual
CASE STUDY	AC	0.42	0.23	0.30	0.15	0.25	0.10	0.21	0.08	0.43	0.19
	Individual	0.23	0.71	0.14	0.33	0.12	0.31	0.09	0.31	0.18	0.57
GROUP	AC	0.30	0.14	0.67	0.35	0.12	0.04	0.15	0.07	0.37	0.19
	Individual	0.15	0.33	0.35	0.71	0.06	0.20	0.07	0.12	0.18	0.45
PRESENTATION	AC	0.25	0.12	0.12	0.06	0.55	0.32	0.22	0.10	0.42	0.21
	Individual	0.10	0.31	0.04	0.20	0.32	0.80	0.08	0.34	0.18	0.58
ROLE PLAY	AC	0.21	0.09	0.15	0.07	0.22	0.08	0.70	0.34	0.43	0.20
	Individual	0.08	0.31	0.07	0.12	0.10	0.34	0.34	0.83	0.18	0.57
TOTAL	AC	0.43	0.18	0.37	0.18	0.42	0.18	0.43	0.18	0.49	0.25
	Individual	0.19	0.57	0.19	0.45	0.21	0.58	0.20	0.57	0.25	0.69

What is indicated here is that the exercise returning the greatest internal consistency of an individual's scores is the role play. This also returns the greatest internal consistency of scores in terms of assessment center totals. The lowest internal consistency at individual level is seen in the case study.

Summary of Results

1. In all exercises, there is greater correlation between the individual's scores across the other competencies in that exercise than between the equivalent scores from the other candidates at their assessment center.
2. There is a moderate correlation between an individual's group score and that of the assessment center as a whole but this is also seen in the presentation and the role play. As such, the results would **not** suggest that the group exercise goes well or poorly for all candidates as a whole.
3. The group exercise appears to correlate least well with the other exercises whilst the case study correlates with the rest the most. This may be due to the group exercise having the greatest degree in variance as the number and nature of candidates will differ between assessment centers whilst the other exercises have controls in place to ensure a greater level of consistency.
4. The only exercise that does return a moderate level of correlation with the group is the role play, as the group and role play exercises share the greatest number of competencies (4 of the 6 reviewed), this goes some way to compensate for the variance in the candidate experience in the group exercise.

Conclusion

1. There was not a single rating where a greater correlation was seen between that rating and the assessment center average for that rating over the individual's exercise or competency rating as a whole.
2. The greatest correlation between competencies (across all exercises) was 0.86 (between International Business Awareness and Analytical Thinking).
3. The lowest correlation was 0.56 (between International Business Awareness and Developing and Maintaining Relationships) and the competency which correlated least well with all others was Planning and Organizing.

To Summarize:

1. This study demonstrates that whilst the group exercise is the exercise which correlates least well with the other exercises and competencies, it does not appear to demonstrate a greater level of exercise effect than any other.
2. As such, it is the conclusion of this study that whilst participating in a group environment, it is the individual who will have the greatest impact on their competency ratings rather than the others in their group.