Comprehensive Assessment Process for Selecting Management Trainees
CSX Transportation
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Presentation for 36th International Congress on Assessment Center Methods

Background

- Interest expressed in improving the selection process for all external Operations Management Trainee Programs (MTP)
  - Better fit desired with railroad environment
  - Greater leadership and influence skills needed

- Comprehensive assessment process designed leveraging assessment center model

- Implemented improvements beginning with Spring 2010 hiring cycle
Recruit & Select Talent

Management Trainee Program (MTP) Applicants (~10,000 apps received twice/year)

Pre-screening Questions Applied in ATS

Resume Review & online assessments (~400)
Recruiter phone screen (~250)

Assessment Center (~150)

Consensus meeting (~60)

Hired into 7 month training program

Procedural Changes

Past State:
- 1-hr structured interview
  - 8 -10 questions
  - Resume review
- 3 person panel made hiring decision on basis of the interview & resume
- Less than 15 minutes for candidate questions

Current State:
- Whole-person assessment
  - Cognitive & behavioral tests
  - Leadership Interview
  - Fit Interview
  - Role play exercise
  - Leaderless group discussion
- Increased visibility to hiring managers
  - 8 people assess candidates in 4 different exercises
  - Consensus meeting in which all are discussed
- Realistic job preview
  - Candid Q&A with recent trainees
### Dimension X Exercise Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CSX Competency</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Assessment Tools</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Resume</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thought Leadership</td>
<td>Problem-Solving &amp; Information-Seeking</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Decision-Making &amp; Judgment</td>
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<td>Planning &amp; Organizing</td>
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<td>People Leadership</td>
<td>Oral Communication &amp; Listening Skills</td>
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<td>Teamwork &amp; Interpersonal Skills</td>
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<td>Leadership &amp; Influences Others</td>
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<td>Self Leadership</td>
<td>Stress Tolerance &amp; Adaptability</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Safety Orientation &amp; Situational Awareness</td>
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<td>Results Leadership</td>
<td>Initiative &amp; Achievement Drive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical Leadership</td>
<td>Technical Aptitude &amp; Learning Agility</td>
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#### Comprehensive Assessment Process

- Additional and enhanced behavior-based tools were used to assess requirements critical to job success
- Improved process allows increased visibility over candidates as they perform in multiple job-related situations
- Candidates receive a realistic job preview of the railroad environment
- Highly coordinated event with up to 10 concurrent activities
**Assessors**

- Assessor panels consist of 2 members
  - 1 HR professional & 1 Hiring Manager
  - No panel assesses the same candidate twice
- Majority of assessors return each hiring cycle to ensure consistency
- Assessor training refreshed at each hiring cycle
  - Videos used to practice rating and calibration
  - Effective interviewing tips provided
  - Cautioned against rater bias
- Informal interactions with candidates are avoided

**Realistic Job Preview**

- Are we a “fit” for them?
- Provides an introduction to the industry, the organization, the frontline operations manager position, and the training experience
- Candidates may “self-select” out of the process before we spend time and money on a poor match
**Enhanced Structured Interviews**

Two 30-min structured interview panels with different emphases

- **Leadership Interview**
  - Previous leadership experience
  - Coaching others’ performance
  - Problem-solving & analysis
  - Change management & innovation
  - Fostering cross-departmental collaboration
  - Manage execution and drive for results

- **Fit Interview: Are they a "fit" for us?**
  - Understanding of the environment
  - Addressing unethical behavior
  - Customer Service
  - Technical aptitude
  - Safety orientation
  - Learning agility

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**Role Play**

- Candidates play the role of a new manager meeting with a Union worker who distrusts management

- Goal is to stay calm under pressure, build rapport, and emphasize accountability

- Behaviorally anchored rating scales used to measure:
  - stress tolerance, decision-making, leadership, communication and interpersonal skills
**Leaderless Group Discussion**

- Candidates play the role of committee members who must work together to develop an implementation plan.
- Over time natural leaders emerge who are effective at influencing others, demonstrate innovation, or lead through process management.
- Behaviorally anchored rating scale measures:
  - initiative, teamwork, leadership, persuasiveness, communication and interpersonal skills.

**Consensus Meeting**

- Ranked scoring matrix prepared in real time.
- Candidates are sorted by highest to lowest overall assessment rating.
- All assessors participate in candidate discussion facilitated by HR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Role Play Exercise</th>
<th>Group Discussion</th>
<th>Fit Interview</th>
<th>Leadership Interview</th>
<th>Standardized Tests</th>
<th>Overall Assessment Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jane Doe</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Doe</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Quality of Hire

- Supervisor evaluations collected 4 months post-placement
  - Fit
  - Task Proficiency
  - Team Member Adaptivity
  - Initiative Taking
  - Overall Performance

Special thanks to Mark Ehrhart, Psychology Professor at San Diego State University, whose team monitors our training pipeline and administers quality of hire surveys ongoing.

Implications

- Predictors uncorrelated with each other
- Criteria highly correlated
  - Managers consider fit and initiative taking to be synonymous with each other, and overall successful performance 4-months post placement ($r = .96$ to $.98$)
- No negative impact on protected groups
  - Increased visibility and fairness of selection process positively impacts diversity
**Business Impact**

- Candidates report being impressed with the importance and resources placed on hiring

- 87% of raters reported feeling they could better determine an external candidate’s fit with CSX

- 87% of raters reported having more confidence in our ability to select future leaders

- Supervisor evaluations of trainees’ quality of hire 4-months post placement is related to their overall assessment rating \( r = .39 \)

**Future Directions**

- Develop alternate forms of each behavioral exercise

- Enhance training

- Enhance consensus

- Weight the predictors based on their relationship to job performance

- Assess retention benefits and ROI