

Assessment Centers for Program Evaluation: Assessing Student Academic Achievement

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Background



NORTH CENTRAL ASSOCIATION
OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS
COMMISSION ON INSTITUTIONS
OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- # North Central Accreditation requires assessment of student academic achievement
 - Must be beyond course grade level
 - Should be linked to learning objectives of the program
 - Information collected should be used to make improvements in content of courses or methods of instruction

Background

Some bad ideas

- Give students a multiple choice test
 - ...it won't take students long to take the test
 - ...a commercially prepared test designed for assessment of the major can be purchased
 - ...can collect data quickly and easily, and can compare to test's national norms

Background



- # A dead end
 - ETS Business Test had only a few questions in our major, written by someone else
 - How do use the data to improve our teaching?
 - Students are not required to take the test, or required to do their best
 - Low student motivation produced scores from 90th percentile to 5th percentile

Background



- # Another approach, another dead end
 - Have students in the advanced courses learned what we expected them to learn from the introductory courses?
 - Created *Surveys of Student Preparedness*
 - Faculty evaluated general level of knowledge of introductory material of the entire class
 - Bad leniency bias, we teach everything well

Where do we go from here?

- # Focus Group of graduating seniors
 - To determine what kinds of assessment activities would be value added for them
 - This would increase their motivation and give us better information

What is a Focus Group?

- # A guided discussion on a defined problem area
- # Students provided their perceptions of several assessment options:
 - # Student portfolios
 - # Paper and pencil tests
 - # Assessment Center
- # Positive reactions to Assessment Center method

Assessment Center to Assess Student Academic Achievement

Positives for Students

- Confidential feedback outside the classroom
- Opportunity to apply skills they have learned in a realistic setting
- Less test anxiety

Positives for the Program

- Opportunity to observe managerial behaviors
- Ability to see if students integrate concepts/skills across courses

A new application of the Assessment Center Method

Assessment Center

- Performance Appraisal
- Leaderless Group Discussion
- Job Analysis
- Selection Interview

Students from *Advanced HRM* or *Research Methods* course

- Approximately 20 students per year

Assessment Center Exercises

Performance Appraisal

- Students role play a manager interviewing an employee whose performance has been satisfactory in the past, but lately declined
- Students must focus on the problem behavior and develop a performance improvement plan



Assessment Center Exercises

- # Performance Dimensions (3 point scale)
 - Asking relevant questions
 - Mean = 2.2, SD = 0.6
 - Giving employee positive and negative feedback
 - Mean = 2.4, SD = 0.8
 - Focuses on performance improvement as a joint problem solving opportunity
 - Mean = 2.2, SD = 0.9

Assessment Center Exercises

Leaderless Group Discussion

- Labor relations negotiation problem, setting bargaining strategy
- Role is member of the management team, vice president with major responsibilities in HR



Assessment Center Exercises

Performance Dimensions (Check sheet)

- # Asked questions
- # Voiced opinions
- # Contributed to discussion
- # Refocused group to agenda
- # Interrupted (negative impact)
- # Attempted to influence
- # Attempted to lead

Mean = 11.5, SD 8.3, Range 1-25

Assessment Center Exercises

Job Analysis

- Students watch a videotape of lobster fishermen doing their job and being interviewed about their job
- Students write the job description (job tasks) and job specification (knowledge and skills required)



Assessment Center Exercises

Job Description

- Job tasks, conditions of work
- Mean = 2.9, SD = 1.7, Range 0 - 5

Job Specification

- Knowledge, skills, abilities
- Mean 1.9, SD = 2.1, Range -2 - 5

Assessment Center Exercises

Selection Interview

- Role is applicant for Human Resources Assistant
- Essential tasks of the job capture aspects of the curriculum
- Interviewer was HR professional or MBA student with management experience



Assessment Center Exercises

Selection Interview

- Overall rating for the Job (5 point scale, Unsatisfactory \leftrightarrow Superior)
- Mean 4.0, SD = 1.0, Range 2 - 5

Surprising Findings

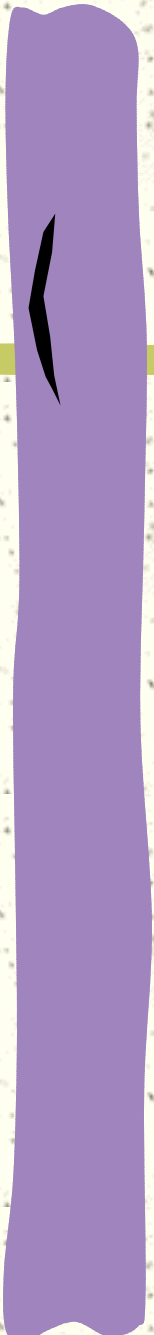
- # Seeing students perform in a different (non-classroom) environment was sometimes alarming
- # Assumptions about what they carried away from the classroom:
 - Concept generalization
 - Retention beyond the classroom

Assessment for Program Improvement

Feedback Loop

- The purpose of assessment is to collect information to get ideas for how to improve the content of course, or methods of instruction
- Also gives feedback to students on their performance in the assessment center





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