

Identifying Exceptional Talent and Guiding Development

How Verizon Engaged Managers in a Robust Assessment Center



The Business Opportunity

Assessment centers are considered by many to be the top-shelf solution for assessing, selecting, and developing organizational talent. However, while acknowledging the benefits of the methodology, organizations have begun to push back on the time commitments, cost, and resources required to implement and administer assessment centers. In addition, it is difficult to maintain the reliability of the application when implementing traditional centers across multiple locations.

In the telecommunications industry—where assessment centers have their deepest roots—there was a call to respect the foundation and legacy of traditional assessment centers while pushing forward towards the future of leadership development.

Facing this challenge, Verizon partnered with Fenestra Inc, a premier provider of virtual assessment centers recently acquired by BTS. An assessment center using state of the art technology was designed to engage Verizon's managers and achieve the following objectives:

- **Increased scalability.** Assess 200 managers within a nine-month period.
- **Afford distributed delivery.** Conduct assessments at over 20 locations.
- **Decrease cycle time.** Complete an assessment cycle, including candidate scheduling, assessment, decision-making, and feedback, within a two-week period.
- **Offer standardization and control.** Maintain centralized control, standardization, and consistency.
- **Increase role fidelity.** Provide an assessment experience that closely resembles the responsibilities, challenges, and the modes of communication commonly used at Verizon.

- **Lower cost.** Deliver assessments at a fraction of the cost of a traditional assessment center.
- **Increase stakeholder involvement.** Provide controlled but readily available access to organizational stakeholders to 'observe' activities, and access assessment-related data and feedback.
- **Enhance evaluation and developmental guidance.** The goal was to assess and provide individuals with tailored feedback on 10 leadership competencies to help them better prepare for promotion opportunities.

The Business Solution

Implementing the virtual assessment, Verizon was able to successfully identify outstanding talent and provide guided development for second-level managers. Web technology was used to create scalable, cost-effective, engaging, and highly realistic 'day-in-the-life' job tryouts that were locally delivered, while assessors and clients participated and fulfilled their roles from multiple locations in the U.S. as well as in India.

A leadership assessment program for second level managers, the bench for Director-level titles, was administered to 200 high potential managers across the United States and India. The program was comprised of multiple steps including prework, assessment, and coach feedback with developmental guidance.

Pework. Nominees received a computer generated invitation and completed pre-work online during the two weeks leading up to the assessment program. Each nominee was asked to complete an on-line career accomplishment record (CAR) which included self-ratings on each of the assessment competencies critical for success in the targeted role as well as reflections on their career aspirations and goals. The CAR was later used to facilitate coaching and developmental planning discussions. Participants also had an opportunity to review background information about the director role, the simulated region, personnel, and other important information prior to the assessment.

The Business Simulation. Participants engaged in a four-hour simulation of the director position. Stimuli material and exercises were developed based on interviews and evaluated to ensure representation of the targeted Director position. During the job simulation, participants engaged in an interactive, in-box environment, reviewing provided information, responding to email, and providing business recommendations. Participants also had scheduled and unexpected meetings with simulated peers, direct reports, administrative support, and supervisors.

Evaluation. Assessors evaluated and provided competency ratings for each exercise. The competencies evaluated were identified through a thorough job analyses and subject matter expert input regarding exercise-competency linkages.

Debrief and integration. At the end of the simulation, the participant met with an assessor-coach to discuss the rationale for and perceived outcomes of their decisions. Later in the day, three assessors reviewed the day's activities and evaluations and provided individual ratings for each critical competency. An integration discussion among the assessors was facilitated by a lead assessor to reach consensus on competency ratings and overall readiness. This process was also supported using web-based flipcharts and conference calling.

Coaching and feedback. Participants were sent flash reports summarizing the consensus ratings. The flash reports were followed by feedback and coaching discussions with assessor and coaches. After the feedback coaching sessions, detailed written feedback reports with specific behavioral examples summarized the evidence for the ratings as well as specific developmental activity recommendations.

The Solution Benefits

For Verizon, the outcomes resulted in:

- **Scalability, centralized control and distributed delivery.** The key factor impacting the scalability of traditional assessment centers is the need to bring numerous assessors and candidates to a single location to conduct the assessment. In this technology-enhanced assessment center model, both internal and external assessors were able to perform their roles virtually, with no travel involved and limited facilities to coordinate. Required facilities consist only of an empty office with a computer, a phone, and a printer.
- **Cycle time.** The weeks or months of planning typically needed for traditional centers are reduced to just a few days due to the benefits of all participants working from their own location in a virtual environment. Additionally, scheduling constraints are greatly reduced as is the time spent in the actual assessment.
- **Fidelity.** Job-related behavioral simulations were a cornerstone of the project. Jobs in global, technology-enabled organizations feature a reliance on phone, email communication, and web-based tools and resources. Assessments that consist of email and phone based interactions have a high degree of content and face validity. Technology also provides opportunities to personalize the materials and enhance realism.
- **Cost.** The technology solution offered significant cost savings over traditional centers.
 - **No center needed for assessment.** Local delivery utilizing Verizon facilities eliminated the need for event planning costs and associated travel and entertainment expenses, which has been estimated at \$2,500 per participant.
 - **Less administration.** The administrative cost burden was also reduced as huge printing requests and other paraphernalia did not need to be produced nor shipped.
 - **Economy of action.** An economy of action for assessors was a welcome by-product. Assessors found themselves with extra time and more availability to participate in assessments.
- **Stakeholder involvement.** Technology also allowed for easy access and permission-based security to ensure only the relevant people have access when and where necessary.

Virtual Assessment Delivers Real Results

Survey information from both participants and supervisors was collected in an effort to track and evaluate the impact of the program. Some highlights from the data include:

- 94% of the participants would recommend the assessment to others
- 97% of the participants report receiving useful and helpful feedback
- 100% of the participants report improvement in at least one competency area as a result of the assessment and development program
- 95% of supervisors found the program helpful in developing their direct reports
- 100% of the supervisors report that the assessment was accurate in identifying strengths and development opportunities for their direct reports

The success of the virtual assessment center program led to additional assessments the following year as well as the potential launch of a new program for VP-level assessment.

About BTS

BTS focuses on the people side of strategy, working with leaders at all levels to help them make better decisions, convert those decisions to actions and deliver results. At our core, we believe people learn best by doing. For 30 years, we've been designing fun, powerful experiences™ that have profound and lasting impact on people and their careers. We inspire new ways of thinking, build critical capabilities and unleash business success. It's strategy made personal.

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