



THE INSIDE STORY

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Finding and developing potential in organisations is a must. And effective internal assessment schemes can result in committed staff who are focused on the future

Good leaders are crucial to the success of an organisation. This is an accepted view, demonstrated by the salaries paid to the best. But poaching talent to fill these roles is expensive. The challenge, therefore, is to become good at seeking out potential and developing it anywhere you can find it.

Our work with clients uses a three-step process to meet this challenge. Step one is to identify, articulate and measure a clear, people-focused leadership model; step two is to design and run assessment programmes; and step three is to design and implement post-assessment programmes – training, coaching and self-development – that support people in their development.

We recently compared the use of assessment centres across 31 UK organisations with case studies from 10 of Europe's largest and most profitable organisations. This has enabled us to identify "best practice" and draw some key conclusions.

What surprised us was how effective the respondents believed their programmes were: they overwhelmingly reported that their organisations and the participants were satisfied with them. They were also unanimous in their view that internal assessment centres had a positive impact on leadership capability. They believed the centres let staff focus on the importance of developing their skills in line with the organisation's success criteria and clarified what these criteria were. They also felt the centres emphasised the organisation's commitment to developing its people, which led to improved motivation and retention.

To achieve these benefits, assessment schemes should be positioned as the starting point of a journey and followed up using co-ordinated self-development, training and coaching.

Internal assessment programmes can act as a major change agent,

helping to instil corporate values and the brand and embedding culture change, especially where the organisation is aiming to establish people-focused leadership styles. Many of the case-study organisations used their assessment and post-assessment programmes to emphasise that "being a good people manager is part of the organisation's DNA". This probably explains why most respondents reported the involvement of line managers as observers, assessors, coaches or developers. This involvement also ensures the schemes maintain business relevance.

For example, Diesel, the clothing brand, emphasises that "everyone in the organisation is important to us". Diesel and many others in our analysis stressed that assessment programmes should be used to develop *all* participants, not just high-flyers. And almost everyone viewed succession planning as a useful tool – demonstrating that organisations are using assessment programmes to develop, focus and motivate all their people and nurture future leaders.

We found the approach to assessment centres and the methods used were common to most countries in Western Europe, but rolling them out internationally seemed to work best when they were adapted for cultures and languages.

It is clear that a well-crafted internal assessment programme is effective both for the organisation and the participants. Raised self-awareness will enable an individual to become the person they want to be and help the organisation to achieve a committed and skilled workforce that is focused on delivering its future plans.

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