

On the Cutting Edge of Assessment!

- by Erica Myburgh

**Wisdom is knowing what to do next;
Skill is knowing how to do it;
And virtue is doing it.**

- David Starr Jordan

Assessments are here to Stay

Does the term "Assessment" or "testing" conjure up vivid imaginations of pre-exam jitters and uncontrollable anxiety? No need, Assessments are professional and informative – even fun! Assessments are gaining increased impetus in the labour industry and recruiters, employers and individuals alike benefit considerably by this discipline. Nowadays Assessment interventions operate on a different level and aim to contribute long-term value to your business, your people, and your occupational setting.



Do Competency Assessments and Evaluations make a difference – adding value to your business and its people?

The truth is, business can be a festival but only to the wise. Everything about business comes down to people. People are an integral part of business and need to be managed with wisdom. And if knowledge is the only elegance we can apply, it stands to reason that the dynamics of Assessments need to be comprehended. There is no knowledge that is not power. Just think about it - where in business can we escape the impact of human aptitude, human creativity, human commitment, human inability, human frustration, and human despair?

What is Assessment?

Assessment interventions are tests, exercises or questionnaires which measure cognitive, behavioural and personality constructs of an individual. In the corporate world, Assessments that are based on a framework of specific job-related competencies, provide a context for understanding the individual in a holistic perspective. A number of Assessment tools can measure a number of constructs to create an in-depth profile about the person.

Ralph Waldo Emerson aptly articulated, "What lies beyond us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." That's exactly where Assessment instruments bear the stamp of excellence – they elicit a person's abilities, values, motivations, interests and preferences. Once these have emerged, informative decisions can be made regarding a person's compatibility to a position, career direction, the need for development, etc. Unknown to most, Assessments have a wide range of applications, such as candidate selection, as well as organisational development, career development, capacity building, skills training, change management, team development, performance management and promotional processes.

Success has many fathers, failure has none. The measure of success is not whether you have a tough problem to deal with, but whether it's the same problem you had last year. Are you surprised when employees do not fit job criteria or fail to learn from training programmes? Well, most people learn geology the morning after the earthquake. The hardest thing in the world is to think - and to be prepared. Let's think. Do you have the best person-profile fit in your company? What exactly do you require from an employee, from a job position, from a training outcome? How much do you spend on replacing, re-training or transferring employees who do not meet job requirements? Would it help to know that Assessment could assist in streamlining your business where it really matters?

Criteria for Assessment

It is not the length of Assessment, but the depth of Assessment that determines its value. The greatest homage we can pay to Assessment is to use it. Assessment instruments are the path of the assessor to his work. Having said that, one of the first requirements for a successful Assessment model is an innovative approach and sound methodology. Where instruments are designed and customised specifically for a certain industry or client, they clearly have a greater advantage for the end user. Tests need to be applicable, pragmatic and progressive. The focus should be on valid applications, culture-free modules and reliable results. To gain trust, aspects such as consistency and transparency should be incorporated in all modules. Also, check if value-added deliverables and multi-dimensional initiatives are in place.

Indeed, applications which are sophisticated yet uncomplicated, and reports which are inclusive yet easy to interpret, will increase ease of use, buy-in and commitment among users. Instruments should be credible and cutting-edge, and administered by experienced professionals at all times. In the final analysis, it is outcome and results that count!

Are you stuck on the same tests year in and year out? Do Assessment interventions make little or no difference to your selection, management and development processes? If so, consider using professionals who will strategically develop Assessment measures to meet specific needs in your organisation. And appoint experts who will administer a carefully selected battery of tests in alignment with detailed job profiles and customised competency blueprints. At the end of the day, you want significant information with accurate results.

Another important criterion to consider is an Assessment model that can generate both qualitative and quantitative results. First, a thorough qualitative analysis will ensure that results are personalised and that an individual's competence is portrayed by way of a narrative, integrated report. Second, a scientific quantitative analysis will ensure that specific job-related competencies are measured accurately and translated into quantifiable results.

Professional support and personal attention are key contributors to success. Assessment workshops should be managed by qualified practitioners who facilitate individuals and groups, the latter being more time- and cost effective. Ensure that practitioners provide insight to clients and feedback to participants, during as well as after workshops. On a final note, it's always a good idea when practitioners offer further development and capacity building after Assessment interventions to ensure continued support and monitoring of assessed individuals.

Assessment is an Opportunity

Employers learn from the past, but plan for the future by focusing on the present. That's where talent is. Assessment is a powerful opportunity for empowerment - for employer and employee alike. It offers the opportunity to discover talent, apply aptitude, and develop shortcomings. However, this opportunity is often missed by most because we expect it to beckon us with beepers and billboards - and it is dressed in overalls and looks like work!

If we keep doing what we're doing, we're going to keep getting what we're getting. Trying to fix a square peg in a round hole is cumbersome and costly. By and large, by necessity and by experience, employers have learnt to capitalise on the merit of Assessments. The bottom line is, experienced assessors with sound instrumentation can add considerable value to business.

Everything that worries us about Assessments can lead us to an understanding of ourselves. Let us treat our employees well; treat them as if they were real. Usually they are. The same goes for Assessments; they can make a real difference in the workplace. Assessors aren't trying to make another you. One is enough. Actually, they wish to scatter joy, and not pain, around people. Their work is to detect and decipher those marvellous assets deeply hidden in a person and bring those to the surface, so that both employer and employee can benefit by these valuable virtues.

Every man has his own vocation; Talent is the call.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson



**When we learn to trust Assessments,
every heart will vibrate to
that iron string.**

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