

Comparing assessment and development centres with talent and learning centres

	Assessment Centre	Development centre	Talent and learning centre
Purpose	To assess for promotion, recruitment or inclusion/exclusion in other organisational processes	To identify development needs and provide feedback	To increase potential and performance over the short, medium and longer term
Role of assessor	Observes, and evaluates participant behaviour against appropriate template. With other assessors determines pass/fail outcome. Not expected to provide feedback to participants. Relationship with participants formal and distant.	Observes, and judges and assesses participant behaviour against appropriate template. Determines development needs and dispenses feedback in the context of the development template. Relationship with participants more informal but procedural and hierarchical.	Observes participant in the context of the appropriate template. Assembles observations into data that participants integrate with their own, and peer, observations and conclusions. Works as a coach with participant encouraging them to reach their own conclusions on accomplishment, potential and development needs. Requires intimate and trusting relationships with participants.
Role of participant	Required to be fully engaged in centre activities but passive in the assessment process. Interaction with peers mainly confined to centre activities.	Required to be fully engaged in centre activities but passive in the assessment process. Interaction with peers mainly confined to centre activities.	Required to be fully engaged in both centre activities and the assessment process. Self and peer review, assessment and feedback central to overall process.
Style	Often lacking in transparency e.g. briefing restricted to timetable of events, capabilities not disclosed etc. Emphasis on performance - delivering the goods in the prescribed circumstances.	Transparency varies according to culture of organisation; e.g. briefing may be more detailed and participants will typically know the capabilities under test. Emphasis on building the prescribed capabilities.	Full transparency - participants receive full briefing, pre-workshop activity often involved, the capability framework and its organisational context are explicit. Emphasis on risk taking, experimentation and learning.
Content	Built around core capabilities for the role. No pre-centre preparation	Built around core capabilities for the role. Pre-centre preparation often includes diagnostics	Built around core capabilities for current and future roles. Range of diagnostics including completion of 360° questionnaires
Feedback process	Minimal feedback. Usually restricted to an explanation of where the participant performed well and not so well	Most work done by assessor. Focus on modifying and/or reinforcing behaviour.	Most work done by participant. Focus mainly on self-assessment of capability and building capacity for learning, development and change.