Selection of Employees for Retention or Lay-Off

Assessment Module

<mark>This document is currently under review</mark>

Date: March 30, 2012
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Canada

Selection of Employees for Retention or Lay-Off Assessment Module

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1. Introduction

The assessment and selection of employees for retention or lay-off (SERLO) process is different from an appointment process as all the employees involved in the selection already met the merit criteria for their substantive position, if the qualifications have not changed. At the time of their appointment, the employees were fully assessed against all the requirements of their position. The goal of the SERLO process is to differentiate between, the employees to be retained and, the employees to be selected for lay-off, all of whom had previously been found qualified.

As discussed in the PSC's [Guide on the selection of employees for retention or lay-off](#), the steps to be followed during a SERLO process are:

Step 1 - Determine the part of the organization that is affected

Step 2 - Identify the similar affected positions and employees

Step 3 - Determine the selection strategy

Step 4 - Review the merit criteria and determine the selection criteria for retention

Step 5 - Determine the assessment methods to be used, and assess the affected employees

Step 6 - Determine which employees are to be retained and which are to be laid off

Step 7 - Communicate results to employees

This module will discuss in more detail the assessment part of the SERLO process.

2. What is Assessment of Merit?

The *Public Service Employment Act* (PSEA) provides a definition of merit and grants Deputy Heads, and through them, managers, the discretion to establish the merit criteria that will be considered. The PSEA allows for a balance to be maintained between this discretion and the PSC's strong role in setting the framework that will guide the decision-making process. This framework includes the clear delegation of authority and strong accountability measures.

Several aspects of the PSEA are especially important in safeguarding merit and guiding its application. The **preamble** sets the goals of excellence, integrity and fair and transparent employment practices.

"Merit" is defined in the PSEA. Subsection 30(1) indicates that appointments to or from within the public service shall be made on the basis of merit and subsections 30(2) and (3) outline the components of an appointment made on the basis of merit, as follows:

• Everyone who is appointed must meet each of the essential qualifications, which include official language proficiency; and

- The manager may take into account:
  - qualifications that are considered an asset for the work, currently or in the future; o any current or future operational requirements and organizational needs that have been identified; and
  - the current and future needs of the public service, as determined by the employer, in deciding on the needs of their organization.

The essential qualifications, asset qualifications, operational requirements and organizational needs form the basis for the assessment of merit and are collectively referred to as the "merit criteria."

Section 36 of the PSEA permits the PSC or its delegate to use the assessment methods "that it considers appropriate to determine whether a person meets the qualifications". While there is broad discretion to choose the assessment tools, managers must respect the PSC's Assessment Policy.

The assessment of merit should be seen as a process and not just the administration of individual assessment tools. Assessment methods can include such tools as interviews, samples of previous work, simulations/situational exercises, written tests, assessment centres and reviews of past accomplishments and experience. These tools can be administered in a variety of ways, including but not limited to face-to-face interactions, by telephone and on-line. Additional information about the various assessment tools and services offered by the PSC is available on the Personnel Psychology Centre (PPC) Web site.

3. Review or Establishment of Merit criteria

Prior to the review or the establishment of the merit criteria, managers in charge of the SERLO process will have to choose a selection strategy and plan the assessment accordingly. The manager has the flexibility to determine the appropriate selection strategy, so depending on the situation, different options exist. Managers should consult with their HR advisor for advice on a selection strategy. Once the strategy has been determined, it can be used to make further decisions, such as reviewing and establishing the merit criteria, the appropriate assessment methods and the selection criteria. For examples of selection strategies, please refer to the PSC's SERLO guide.

As discussed in section 2 of this guide, there is more than one component to merit. The employees to be retained must meet each of the essential qualifications (this includes official languages proficiency) for the work to be performed. When a manager identifies a qualification as essential, the manager is stating that if an employee does not meet that qualification, the employee could not function in the position. This means that if five essential qualifications have been identified, then each one must be met. If a qualification is identified that is not essential to perform the work, then that qualification may be an asset for the work to be performed and, if so, it should be identified that way.

In addition, the manager may take into consideration qualifications that would be an asset for the work to be performed, currently or in the future, as well as any current or future operational requirements and organizational needs. Organizational needs may also include current and

future needs of the public service, as identified by the employer. The essential qualifications, asset qualifications, operational requirements and organizational needs, collectively referred to as the merit criteria, form the basis for the assessment of merit.

Integrated human resources (HR) and business planning are strongly tied to the current and future needs of an organization and those of the public service as a whole. The results of integrated planning can assist managers in identifying the essential qualifications and other merit criteria to be used in a SERLO process (for instance, organizational needs would result from integrated business and HR planning, rather than being established arbitrarily), as well as in considering assessment methods. HR advisors can assist with the planning of the assessment process and the choice of assessment tools by asking managers to reflect on a number of issues, such as:

- The operational context and whether the merit criteria that are identified are linked to the job, currently or in the future;

- The organization's business or strategic plan;

- Whether the merit criteria can be assessed fairly and in a transparent manner; and

- The assessment methods or tools that are most appropriate for the intended process and will assist in distinguishing between employees to be retained and those to be selected for lay-off.

3.1 Determine the selection criteria for retention

Prior to conducting the SERLO process, the manager should objectively establish the criteria they will use to select employees for retention. The selection criteria are based on the merit criteria being applied. It could be a strength in one particular merit criterion, or a combination of the merit criteria, and could vary from one position to another. The guiding values of fairness, access, transparency and representativeness must be respected when selecting employees for retention or lay-off.

The identification of the selection criteria will also guide the manager's decisions in regards to his/her assessment decisions. For example, considering that the selection decision will be based on specific selection criteria, it may be preferable for a manager to choose to have a more in depth assessment of those criteria in other to allow for a better distinction between the levels of qualification of each employee, instead of assessing them on a meets/does-not-meet basis.

Informing employees about the selection criteria early may avoid a misperception of personal favouritism.

4. Planning the Assessment

Once the merit criteria have been established and the selection criteria identified, the manager and the persons responsible for the assessment need to decide how the essential qualifications will be assessed, which of the other criteria will apply and be assessed for each position, as well as the most efficient way to proceed (some activities might be done in parallel, others sequentially).

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The objective of the assessment process is to determine that the employees selected for retention meet the merit criteria required to perform the continuing functions of their positions, based on the needs identified in the organization's business or HR plans. Appropriate assessment methods must be chosen or developed so the employees can be assessed against each merit criterion to ensure the right employees are selected for retention.

In the context of SERLO, several factors will affect the decisions regarding the assessment plan and process. Factors include:

- Are the merit criteria changing or remaining the same, and what are their relative importance? If there are no changes, as all affected employees were already found qualified in the past for each qualification that will be applied, an assessment strategy may be to draw from past assessments for several qualifications, while proceeding to a more thorough assessment regarding the criteria that are established as the selection criteria. If there are new criteria, the use of multiple, well-developed assessment tools may help provide a more complete picture of the employees' qualifications.

- Does the manager have thorough knowledge of the affected employees' performance and accomplishments in regard to the identified merit criteria? Depending on the situation, managers may, as supervisors of the affected employees, have a thorough knowledge of their performance and accomplishments in regard to the identified merit criteria. Such knowledge will probably guide the choice of assessment tools and assessment strategy. For example, a manager may decide to use his/her personal knowledge of the employees to assess some of the criteria through a narrative assessment. If the manager does not have knowledge of all the employees to be assessed, he/she may want to use, for those he/she does not know, a structured reference check to assess them or through employees self-reported examples of past performance and work-related achievements using a Career Achievement Record (CAR).

- How many employees will have to be assessed? For example if there are 80 persons to be assessed, a test that can be quickly administered and scored, such as a standardized multiple choice written test, may be chosen over an assessment tool that would require more time to develop, administer and score, such as an interview or simulation.

- What are the group and level of the affected positions? There are standardized assessments tools already available for different groups and levels - Annex 2 of this document provides a list of PPC assessment tools by level.

4.1 Choosing Assessment Tools and Methods

When choosing which assessment tools/methods are the most appropriate, managers must keep in mind that a SERLO process or an appointment process conducted under work force adjustment (WFA) circumstances may result in an increased level of stress on the affected employees.

Assessment methods must produce information that is relevant to all the merit criteria being assessed, while remaining appropriate to the specific SERLO context. The amount of information needed to assess an employee's competence with respect to a particular merit criterion depends on the nature and the importance of the criterion, as identified by the manager. The use of multiple, well-developed assessment tools generally provides more complete and valid

information. The integration of information from more than one source ensures a more complete and accurate picture of the employee being assessed.

Assessment methods are chosen or developed based on the type of information that they can provide. They must be able to produce results relevant to all of the qualifications being assessed. The amount of information needed to assess an employee's competence with respect to a particular criterion depends on the nature and importance of the criterion.

For example, in the context of a workforce reduction, with no changes in the duties, or to the merit criteria, a manager may choose to assess the selection criteria he/she identified for all employees being assessed using scales that will allow him/her to better differentiate between the levels of qualification displayed by employees. The rest of the statement of merit criteria (SMC) could be assessed on a "meets/does-not-meet" basis.

Ensure that there is a clear link between the qualifications and the assessment tools and methods used to assess them

The decision about which assessment tools to use should be based primarily on how effectively the tools assess the qualifications identified for the position within the specific context of the SERLO. It is critical that assessment tools measure the qualifications accurately and that they provide relevant information about the future performance of an employee on the job.

Assessment strategies should be developed with a clear understanding of the knowledge, skills, abilities and characteristics that are to be measured. It is strongly recommended that these qualifications be defined in some detail so that assessment tools can be designed or chosen to target the specific elements of these qualifications that are required for successful job performance. As a result, the link between the assessment tool and the targeted qualification will be clearly evident. For example, managers should ensure that an interview intended to assess problem-solving skills does in fact measure these skills.

Managers should also ensure that the scoring criteria for an assessment tool or method can be linked to, and effectively assess, the qualification that is being assessed. For instance, the scoring criteria for the previously-mentioned interview to assess problem-solving skills should include elements of problem-solving skills that are necessary to perform the duties of the target position effectively.

If job-related knowledge is included on the SMC, one would expect to find questions in, for example, the interview or on a knowledge exam that allow employees to demonstrate their knowledge. It would be inappropriate for an interview to include a question asking about a time when employees supervised staff members if the qualification "supervision of staff" was not evident in the SMC, unless the question's content assesses one of the other merit criteria.

Assessment instruments can be extremely helpful when they are used properly. While ensuring that each of the merit criteria is assessed at some point within the chosen set of assessment tools, it is vital that the merit criteria be assessed using an appropriate assessment method.

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Assessment Plan (or Rating Guide)

An assessment plan (or rating guide) that establishes a clear link between each merit criterion and the assessment tools that are chosen or developed should be prepared. The plan should outline:

- The merit criteria being assessed, how they have been defined and their relative importance, as applicable;

- The tools used to assess each of the merit criteria, (such as interview questions, reference checks, etc. - Annex 1 provides two examples of SERLO scenarios and their associated assessment plan, including a breakdown of the criteria assessed by each tool);

- The scoring criteria, such as correct responses to knowledge questions or expected behaviours in role plays, simulations, etc.;

- The assessment (or rating) scale - this could include numerical scores or narrative descriptors;

- How the assessment results will be used in the overall SERLO process;

- What **merit** criteria beyond the **essential requirements** will be applied and will need to be assessed;

- The selection criteria;

- Timelines for assessments;

- Assessment board members (where applicable) and contact names; and ☐ Clear definitions for each of the merit criteria.

Key message: A clear assessment plan will assist the manager in identifying employees for retention and managing the assessment process. It can help the others involved in the assessment process come to a common understanding about the meaning of the merit criteria and the assessment approach. In addition, a plan can be used to give feedback to employees or in a complaint before the Public Service Staffing Tribunal (PSST).

Factors influencing choice of assessment tools

As indicated earlier, the specifics of the WFA situation (such as: same positions or new positions, same merit criteria or new merit criteria) will influence the choice of assessment tools or methods. As a general guideline, to increase efficiency of the assessment, it is prudent to identify assessment tools that complement each other and that can assess more than one qualification. The use of multiple, well-developed assessment tools usually provides more complete and valid information. The integration of information from more than one source ensures a more complete and accurate picture of the employee being assessed. Conversely, a single well-developed assessment tool could be used to assess a group of qualifications. The choice of assessment tools can be affected by various elements, such as the:

- The length of time the employees have been performing the job;

- The manager's length of time in the position;

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- The manager's personal knowledge of the employees;

- Number of employees being assessed;

- Total number of qualifications to be assessed;

- Operational issues such as development or purchase costs of tools;

- Availability of standardized tests from the private and public sectors (Annex 2 provides a list of the PPC assessment tools by level);

- Quality and proven validity of available tools;

- Ease of administration;

- Availability of facilities for administering the assessment;

- Nature of the results that are provided;

- Speed with which results can be obtained;

- Amount of training required for assessors;

    Availability of experienced and competent persons to participate in the assessment process;

- Manager's comfort level with the use of proctored versus unproctored test administration;

- Chosen area of selection – for new positions that lead to an appointment process;

- Level and complexity of the position;

- Availability of assessment tools in both official languages;

- Adaptability of the tools for accommodation to various needs;

- Occupational group standards – whether there is a mandatory test to use; and

- Whether the tests in question require PSC approval (such as personality and intelligence tests).

4.2 Assessment Tools, Methods and Common Uses

There are various means of assessing employees. The objective is to identify the tools most likely to assist in predicting the future performance of an employee on the job. An employee's performance over a period of time and in various situations can be determined by using several sources and methods of assessment. This section of the SERLO assessment module describes the following assessment methods/tools (in alphabetic order):

Assessment centres

Career achievement record (CAR)

Cognitive ability tests

Job knowledge tests

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Narrative assessment

Performance appraisals

Reference checking

Review of past accomplishments and experience

Situational judgement tests (SJT)

Simulation/situational exercise

Structured interview

Each description includes the common uses of the assessment method and tools. In addition, this section also provides general tips for those developing and choosing assessment methods and tools.

Note that a manager's personal knowledge of an employee's qualification should be documented through a written narrative assessment or a reference check using concrete behavioural examples.

Assessment centres

The assessment centre approach is a unique and powerful method of identifying and developing management talent through the use of varied techniques such as individual and group simulation exercises and paper-and-pencil tests. Trained assessors observe and evaluate the persons' performance during the various exercises. Results of the assessment centre provide an integrated picture of the persons' strengths and weaknesses. These results can be useful in identifying those with the potential to be leaders and managers, in planning the training and development of such people and in selecting the appropriate person for a given management position.

Common uses

- Assessment centers allow for the assessment of multiple qualifications simultaneously.
- They are usually used after other tools, in order to limit the number of persons scheduled for the labor-intensive assessment centre process.
- In appointment processes, they are commonly used for more senior level positions.

Career achievement record (CAR)

A CAR is a standardized tool which assesses competencies through self-reported examples of past performance and work-related achievements. A template that includes the definition of each competency being assessed as well as the behavioural indicators underlying each competency is provided to employees. Employees fill out the questionnaire by describing in a structured manner past achievements which best illustrate how they have demonstrated specific competencies in

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the context of their work. Employees are also asked to provide the name of a person who can validate each achievement described.

Common uses

- Commonly used to screen people in an appointment process prior to an interview.

- It typically assesses 4 competencies.

- The CAR is easy to administer to a larger group and can be used as a substitute for reference check when examples provided are validated; however, it can be time consuming for employees to complete.

Cognitive ability tests

Cognitive ability tests assess the ability to use reasoning skills to solve problems required for officer level positions.

Common uses

Usually used for appointments to officer level entry positions.

- Easy to administer to a large group and are cost effective.

- Such tests may be appropriate in WFA situations where the merit criteria assessed are new for the remaining jobs or in situations where new jobs are created and an appointment process for these new jobs is run.

- However in WFA situations where the qualification is not a new merit criterion, assessing employees' ability to use reasoning skills with such a test may be seen as inappropriate since the employees may have been doing the job for several years and the manager probably has personal knowledge of their skills.

Job knowledge tests

Job knowledge tests consist of questions designed to assess technical or professional expertise in specific knowledge areas. Job knowledge tests evaluate what a person knows at the time of taking the test.

Common uses

- Best used for positions requiring specific job knowledge on the first day of the job (i.e., where the knowledge is needed upon appointment to the position);

- Depending of the WFA situation, such tools may be less appropriate since often the employees to be assessed have been doing the job for several years and could even have been considered in the past as subject matter experts in the development of such tools to staff positions at their level.

Narrative assessment

A narrative assessment describes how the employee being considered for the target position has demonstrated the relevant merit criteria in their past work and experience. The detailed text must be thorough and provide clear evidence supporting the selection decision. They are usually completed and signed by a manager who is familiar with the work of the employee being assessed. Having supervised the person's work, the manager can attest to the person's experience and accomplishments and can comment, in concrete and behavioral terms, about the person's demonstration of the merit criteria. In the context of WFA, a manager or an assessment board member's personal knowledge of the employee's qualifications should be documented through a narrative assessment or a reference check.

Common uses

- A narrative assessment could be useful in situations where a manager knows all or several of the employees being assessed and the number of employees is relatively small.

- In WFA context, it can also be useful in situations where the use of other tools might be perceived as unnecessary considering that the manager probably has personal knowledge of the qualifications of the employees to be assessed.

Performance appraisals

Performance appraisals require care in their use. The approach here is to review the available information and to identify that which is relevant to the qualification(s) being assessed. This is often difficult to do because:

- The information is not specific enough.

- The information is geared towards the meeting of goals rather than the qualifications that were involved in meeting these goals.

- The performance of the person may have been evaluated in a context that is quite different than that of the position being staffed.

- Performance appraisals may not be available for all persons.

Despite these potential problems, performance appraisals can provide useful information, especially when it is supported by information derived from other sources. It is important, however, that clear links be made between the information extracted from performance appraisals and the qualification(s) assessed.

Common Uses

- Performance appraisals are seldom used in the context of an appointment process since the appraisals are usually done for a job different to the one being staffed.

- In the context of WFA, performance appraisals may be seen as a good source of information if they relate to the position for which the assessment is conducted, as long as they can be clearly linked to the merit criteria being assessed.

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Reference checking

Reference checking is one of the most useful sources of information about an employee's past performance or accomplishments. Reference checks should be structured for the best results; for instance, using a written questionnaire that is completed by the person providing the reference (referee). Facts, descriptions, relevant incidents and behavioural examples are elicited from referees who have had the opportunity to observe the employee by, for example, having worked closely with them over a period of time. The person responsible for conducting the reference check could then follow up in a telephone or personal meeting to obtain additional information.

The document entitled Structured Reference Checking: A User's Guide to Best Practices provides in-depth information on this topic.

When conducting reference checks, managers are required to obtain employee consent when conducting reference checks with referees from outside the public service. Although no such consent is required when referees are within the public service, it is recommended that the manager exercise due diligence and inform the employee prior to contacting such referees unless there is a reason not to do so.

Common uses

- Reference checks are usually used in the final stages of a multiple-hurdle assessment process when deciding among a handful of finalists.

  Although the reference check may sometimes be the only source of information on a given qualification, it is most often used to corroborate, clarify, or add to information that has already been gathered.

- Reference checking may be used to assess knowledge, abilities, skills, personal suitability or other qualifications.

Review of past accomplishments and experience

Many methods are available to collect information about an employee's accomplishments and experience: application forms, "track record" interviews, self-reports, résumés, performance appraisals, reference checks, transcripts, samples of previous work, interview questions and personal knowledge on the part of managers or assessment board members. The most useful information indicates to what extent (in terms of depth and quality), in the past, the employee has demonstrated the qualification being assessed. This information could be especially useful in SERLO situations where the manager knows the employees being assessed and where the use of interviews or other tests might be perceived as unnecessary.

Common uses

- Commonly used at the beginning of a multiple hurdle assessment process, prior to other assessment tools (such as structured interview) for both entry level positions and more senior positions.

- In the context of WFA, these methods could be used to complement the manager's personal knowledge of the employees being assessed.

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Situational judgement tests (SJT)

SJT questions are hypothetical and challenging situations that one might encounter at work, and that involve working with others as part of a team, interacting with others, and dealing with workplace dilemmas. Persons are presented with a description of a work problem or critical situation and are asked to identify how they would handle it.

Common uses

- Typically assess judgement required for solving problems in work-related situations.

- They can be developed for a variety of positions, including officer positions.

- They are easily administered to large group and are cost effective (the SJT offered by the PSC can be administered in paper and pencil or on-line).

Simulation/situational exercise

Situational exercises or simulations place persons in realistic situations which require them to demonstrate job-relevant qualification(s). The content of the simulation exercise may be derived directly from actual work settings or may be designed in a more general manner by presenting situations and problems which are not specific to a particular work situation. Simulations can include individual or group exercises. Such tools include interactive simulation (administered face-to-face) and in-basket exercises (written test).

A notable characteristic of situational exercises is that persons must demonstrate, at the time of the assessment process, actual performance of the job and job tasks.

Common uses

- Best used for positions for which the measured competencies are highly critical for successful performance on the job.

- Usually used when there is a limited number of persons to test, and only a small number of prospective persons to assess are expected to have the needed competencies.

Structured interview

Different approaches can be taken with the structured interview, depending upon the type of information required. Some interviews are like job previews in that the persons are placed in a simulated scenario and asked to respond as they would on the job. Other interviews are like knowledge tests, with the questions and answers given orally. Still other interviews are like reference checks, where persons provide information about their past experiences, strengths and weaknesses.

A structured selection interview involves more than just asking the same questions of all persons. In order to be called "structured", an interview must have three characteristics:

- Questions are rooted in the duties and responsibilities of the position.

- Questions are developed systematically to tap specific qualifications.

- Answers are evaluated against established criteria.

Interviews developed to include the above characteristics are more effective in identifying competent persons. The document entitled Structured Interviewing: How to Design and Conduct Structured Interviews for an Appointment Process provides additional useful information and tips on structured interview format and content.

Common uses

- Structured interviews are usually used late in the assessment process as a final assessment.

- They are used in situations where the pool of persons to assess is moderate or small in size, as it can take more time to administer.

Tips for those developing and choosing assessment methods and tools

- It is important to develop new questions periodically because when questions are recycled over a long period of time, the employees may start to pre-plan a response, as opposed to giving one that truly indicates how they would react;

- A well-planned, structured interview is recommended over an informal approach because the same questions are asked of all employees and the overall process remains consistent;

    Combined methods of assessment, such as using an interview and a reference check to assess a particular merit criterion may produce a more accurate picture if these methods are well-developed; the different sources can highlight similar results across assessment methods or bring to light inconsistencies in behaviour or performance;

- Different methods can be used to elicit information (for instance, past accomplishments can be assessed through track record interviews or reference checks or both);

- Even though an employee may not have performed a task in the past, this does not necessarily mean that they are not capable of performing it. Simulations or situational questions may help in these circumstances;

- Where possible, new assessment tools could be tested on a small group of individuals who are not involved in the process to ensure that the procedures are clear, the proposed time for employees to complete the assessment is adequate for its complexity, the questions are fair and unbiased and the content assesses the relevant merit criteria;

- The assessment results obtained through another process can be used if the assessment measures the same merit criteria at the same level (see Section 7 on Portability of Assessment Results);

- Depending on the qualifications to be assessed, managers may consider using take-home tests. These tests can be a valid measure of an employee's qualifications, in part depending on the nature of the qualifications being assessed and the work context in which they will be applied; and

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- When administering unproctored tests, the persons responsible for the administration of the assessment tool should ensure that the identity of the employee taking a test is verified and that cheating is discouraged. Those responsible for the assessment should then proceed with a proctored assessment of the same qualification(s) to validate the results of the unproctored testing to ensure that selections are made on the basis of merit.

4.3 Assessment Board

Depending on the specifics of the situation, a manager may choose to create an assessment board because it is more efficient or because they would like to increase the appearance of impartiality. An assessment board can be comprised of members from outside the organization. For example, board members could be from other organizations or the private sector, and the board could involve different persons at different stages of the assessment process. The role of the assessment board is to assess employees against the merit criteria, as determined by the manager, and to provide the manager with the information required to make selection decisions.

Whenever they involve other persons in the assessment phase, managers should discuss the merit criteria with the other parties involved to ensure a shared and accurate understanding of the requirements of the position. To minimize any potential problems that may arise, they should also set out their expectations of everyone involved.

When many employees must be assessed or tools must be administered in various locations, the same persons may not be responsible for assessing all employees. In such cases, managers should ensure that steps are taken to carry out the assessment of all employees in a consistent manner. To do so, all of the persons responsible for the assessment could be briefed through a conference call prior to the commencement of the assessment process. It is also helpful to send an information package (containing, for instance, job-relevant information and assessment procedures and guidelines) beforehand to all of the persons responsible for the assessment.

Considerations when the manager and other persons are involved in the assessment process

When managers are involved actively in the assessment of employees or are assisted by an assessment board or other persons, they can help ensure that assessment and selection decisions are free from bias and do not contribute to systemic barriers by:

- Asking designated group members and people from diverse backgrounds to participate in the assessment process;
- Ensuring that these persons have been sensitized to bias-free assessment;
- Consulting with the PPC or referring to the PSC assessment guides (such as the Assessing for Competence Series);
- Determining the appropriate activities to be carried out by each person, based on assessment tools;
- Ensuring that the relationships among employees, assessment board members and those responsible for the assessment do not bias the selection process or appear to do so;

- Having more than one member be responsible for assessment; and

- Ensuring that all assessors have the necessary competencies, including language proficiency, required to ensure a fair and complete assessment.

Early in the assessment planning phase, managers need to determine which other persons are well-suited to assist with various elements of the assessment process. These choices should be based on sound reasoning and should be linked to the competence, skills and knowledge that each person can contribute. Some considerations might include:

- Engaging the help of persons who are familiar with the position being filled or the staffing process (e.g. subject matter experts, supervisors, people with extensive knowledge of the position being filled, HR specialists, etc.);

- Soliciting persons who have experience or training with the kinds of assessment tools that are chosen or the work to be performed (such as public- or private-sector assessment specialists);

- Choosing assessment experts or persons knowledgeable in assessment-related issues (such as PPC staff, HR specialists, private sector consultants, other managers and staff with extensive assessment experience, etc.); and

- Choosing or developing assessment tools or methods that effectively assess the essential qualifications and other applied merit criteria and ensuring that they are linked to the requirements of the position being filled.

Any persons, including managers, who are responsible for portions of the assessment process, should document the reasoning underlying their comments, ratings and observations with concrete examples or evidence. When persons other than the manager are involved, they should then provide this written information to the manager so that the manager can finalize the process and make selection decisions to retain certain employees. In so doing, the manager can ensure that the results were achieved using comparable and objective criteria. All of this information should be retained in the SERLO process file.

To support managers in equipping themselves to meet the challenge of maintaining a diverse federal workplace through inclusive assessment that does not create systemic barriers, the PSC has produced the Guidelines for Fair Assessment in a Diverse Workplace: Removing Barriers to Members of Visible Minorities and Aboriginal Peoples.

5. Accommodation

Providing information in a timely fashion to employees regarding the assessment methods or tools that will be used is in line with the guiding values of fairness and transparency, as well as the PSC *Policy on Assessment* and will allow employees the time to adequately prepare for the assessment. It will also allow sufficient time to arrange for accommodation should an employee request it and to discuss the particulars of the employee's case (for example, obtaining medical documentation or involving a specialist, such as an accommodations specialist from the organization or the PSC). It is not necessary for employees to self-identify in order to request accommodation during the SERLO process, since accommodation is not limited to designated groups. Accommodation applies to anyone who is protected from discrimination on the grounds specified in the *Canadian Human Rights Act* (section 2)*.

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As mentioned earlier, assessment methods should treat all employees in an equitable and non-discriminatory manner and the assessment must be designed and implemented without bias, political influence, personal favouritism and should not create systemic barriers. Equitable assessment does not necessarily require the use of the same assessment methods or sources of information for all employees; rather, methods or tools can be adapted to the specific situation.

In some circumstances, equitable assessment will require the modification of usual procedures.

The manager should ensure that the use of different assessment methods or sources of information for different employees provides an accurate assessment and that the information gathered from these different methods or sources is comparable. For example, the modification or accommodation should not alter the level or the nature of the qualification being assessed. In addition, accommodation in assessment methods or tools should not give an undue advantage to the employee receiving the accommodation.

There are limits to accommodation; for example in circumstances where the qualification being assessed is a bona fide occupational requirement (BFOR), it may not be possible to adapt a tool (e.g., a visual acuity test for a pilot).

The document "Guide for Assessing Persons with Disabilities" produced by the PSC provides a framework of principles and recommended procedures which those in charge of designing testing accommodations can use in handling specific cases.

6. Assessment of Qualifications and Other Merit Criteria

The manager must ensure that the employees selected for retention meet each of the essential qualifications and the manager's selection may also "have regard to" the other merit criteria established at the outset - the asset qualifications, operational requirements and organizational needs.

While employees to be retained must meet each of the essential qualifications and all the other merit criteria that are applied, this does not mean that all the other criteria must be applied in every case or in any particular order. Managers have the flexibility to apply the selection criteria to select the employees who are to be retained within the context of the continuing positions. So, although employees being retained must always meet each of the essential qualifications, the manager may apply and assess first an asset qualification, an organizational need or an operational requirement before assessing the essential qualifications if it is more efficient to do so.

However, as provided by section 38 of the PSEA, persons with a priority entitlement are required to meet the essential qualifications only. This means that if the manager, who is conducting an appointment process for new positions, has established any of the other merit criteria, the manager could not apply them to select from among the surplus employees.

Essential qualifications may be assessed on a "meets/does not meet" basis, and this would be appropriate when assessing some essential qualifications, for example, education. However, when a qualification has been identified as a selection criterion, the level at which an employee meets that qualification would likely be the deciding factor in a SERLO process. If strength in a

particular qualification, such as writing ability, is to be used as a selection criterion for the selection for retention, it will be very difficult to differentiate the level of qualification between employees if they are only assessed on a "meets/does not meet" basis for the qualification.

Consistency in Assessment

Those responsible for the assessment should ensure that the assessments for any given process are conducted in a consistent manner across employees. As a result, the information collected can be integrated fairly to determine the merit of each employee. Consistency in assessment begins with the provision of timely assessment-related information to employees and ends with the placement of this information in the SERLO file.

To increase the consistency of the assessment process:

- Provide the same assessment-related information to all employees, at each stage of the assessment process so that they have a common understanding of what will be asked of them;

- Identify and define the merit criteria that will be included in the SMC. For each one, try to include any effective and ineffective behaviours that the persons responsible for the assessment will be looking for during the scoring or rating process;

- To help with the assessment, ask employees to fill out a template that allows them to understand and clearly describe the information required. This will increase the uniformity of the information provided and reduce the need to ask employees for additional information;

- Those responsible for assessment should meet with the manager to have a common understanding of each of the merit criteria and how they will be used to make selection decisions;

- Use standardized assessment tools, if possible. When standardized tools cannot be used, use structured tools (such as structured interviews or structured reference checks) to minimize procedural differences among employees;

- For any other tools, develop an administration guide to ensure that all employees are given the same time to prepare for and complete the assessment, are provided the same instructions and are treated consistently throughout the tool's administration. If interviews or role plays are administered, provide scripts or standard instructions to the person(s) interacting with employees;

- Provide a marking template that includes the desired elements of employee responses and discuss it with all assessors;

- Provide training to administrators and assessors on the specific tool(s) used;

- Ideally, the same persons should score or assess the entire set of employees on a given assessment tool to ensure that scoring or assessment criteria are applied consistently. With large volumes of employees, however, the same persons may not be able to participate in the assessment of all employees for a single assessment tool. In these cases, it is helpful for at least one person to participate in all of the assessments and rotate the remaining persons. When various persons are involved, it is wise to meet to obtain agreement on scoring techniques and discuss how to handle ambiguous areas; and

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- If the assessors are varied, ask persons with extensive knowledge of the position being filled or of the assessment tool being used to review all or some of the work of the remaining assessors. This person can bring any scoring inconsistencies to the attention of the other assessors as they occur.

While it is important to maintain a consistent administration, assessment and scoring approach, specific circumstances may lead to a deviation from the assessment method or format that is provided to other employees. The PSC Guide for Assessing Person with Disabilities provides guidance on how to use alternate approaches or altered assessment tools, while ensuring that the assessment of the merit criteria remains comparable across employees.

7. Portability of Assessment Results

In specific cases, assessment results from previous assessment process can be used in a current process. There are many benefits and risk factors that need to be considered before deciding whether or not to do so. Before making a decision to proceed with a new assessment or to use previous assessment results, the manager should consider factors such as:

- The quality of the assessment tools used, the amount of information that can be obtained about them and the achieved results;

- Whether the tools used to gather previous results accurately assess the merit criteria they were designed to assess;

- Whether the tools are sufficiently comprehensive to offer a complete picture of the merit criteria for the current process or whether additional tools will be necessary;

- Whether the qualification formerly assessed and the qualification of the current position to be filled are equivalent in terms of depth and breadth (for example, Action

  Management can have different meanings, depending on the level and nature of the position);

- Whether the tools were standardized or non-standardized and the expiry date of the results;

- Whether the tools were administered, scored and interpreted properly in the previous assessment process;

- The continued relevance of assessment tools over time (they should reflect current knowledge and skills);

- The length of time that the results will remain valid and whether employees' skills may have deteriorated over time;

- Whether the validity period of the assessment results has been communicated;

- Whether employees have had opportunities to enhance their qualifications; and

- The degree to which the previous results from another organizational context are relevant in the current one.

8. Assessment Documentation File

The reasons for a SERLO decision must be documented. This documentation will help to ensure fairness and transparency and also reinforces the manager's accountability for decisions. This documentation will be useful when explaining to employees the SERLO decision, or in providing information during an investigation or in a complaint at the PSST.

Given that the assessment tools and processes form the bases upon which SERLO decisions are made; organizations must maintain files that fully reflect how the assessment process was managed and how the assessment tools were used to make the selection decision. This includes those files managed by a service provider outside the department or agency.

It is recommended that files contain, among other things, the work description for the position being retained, the SMC, the assessment plan, copies of the administered tools (where possible) as well as employee results. Completed employee answer booklets, in the case of written tests, and the notes of assessors or assessment board members, should also be kept. It is prudent to keep copies of, or have ready access to, any communication with employees about any portion of the assessment process. Documents to be retained also include the medical, professional and personal information that is gathered in order to provide assessment accommodation. Any of these documents could be required for audit, investigation and monitoring purposes, and to facilitate discussion with employees and proceedings in complaints to the PSST. The PSC's Staffing File Documentation Checklist provides a list of recommended documents to retain in files.

Annex 1 – Two situation scenarios

A-Situation of workforce reduction, with no change in duties or to the merit criteria.

In the example of situation 1 of the SERLO guide, a manager has to assess 14 affected employees who have worked with him/her for at least two years, and are performing well in their positions. Of those 14 affected employees, 12 will be retained.

The manager's review of the merit criteria indicates that:

- while the work remains the same, the employees will need to work with less supervision; and

- the work unit will continue to produce written documents that must be clear, concise and accurate.

The manager establishes the following as essential qualifications:

- education in accordance with the applicable qualification standard;

- experience in the work the team is currently performing;

- official language proficiency - bilingual CBC/CBC;

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- ability to interpret the act and regulations the team is responsible for interpreting;

- written communication skills;

- oral communication skills

- interpersonal skills;

- initiative; and teamwork.

After the manager's review of the existing and future work, the manager decides to use the following selection criteria:

- to ensure that high-quality written documents are produced, the level at which an employee demonstrates a strength in written communication will be used as a selection criterion for six positions;

- to ensure the continuing provision of quality advice to clientele, the level at which the employee demonstrates a strength in the ability to interpret the act and regulations the team is responsible for interpreting will be used as a selection criterion for four positions; and

- as there will be less supervision, the level at which an employee demonstrates strength in initiative will be used as a selection criterion for the remaining two positions.

The manager decides to assess the identified selection criteria using tools and scales that will allow him/her to better differentiate among the level of qualification displayed by employees. The remaining qualifications will be assessed on a "meets/does-not-meet" basis.

The manager has determined the assessment methods to be used to assess each merit criterion, as follow:

Assessment Plan Table

	Tools				
Qualifications	**Review of employee's file**	**Manager's personal knowledge / Narrative assessment**	PSC - Written Communication Test (WCT)	**Reference Check**	**SLE**
Essential Qualifications					
Education	Yes				
Official language proficiency - bilingual CBC/CBC					Yes

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Experience in the work the team is currently performing		Yes			
Ability to interpret the act and regulations the team is responsible for interpreting		Yes			
Interpersonal Skills		Yes		Yes	
Initiative				Yes	
Teamwork		Yes		Yes	
Oral communication		Yes			
Written communication			Yes		
Proficiency in first official language		Yes			

The assessment process proceeds as follows:

- employees are asked to identify any accommodations they may require for the PSC standardized Written Communication Test (WCT) – employees who already have valid results for the WCT are welcome to submit them (these results will then be confirmed by the HR advisor with the PSC) - employees who need to be assessed using the WCT are assessed;

- the manager completes a review of the employees' files and completes a written narrative assessment based on the manager's personal knowledge;

- employees are asked to provide the name of two referees for a reference check, and reference check questionnaires are sent to the two referees;

- the manager liaises with the HR advisor to obtain from the PSC each employee's latest SLE test results; and

- For those employees who do not already have valid SLE results at the level required, the manager liaises with the HR advisor to make the arrangements to administer the SLE test.

Upon completion of the assessments of the 14 employees, all are found to meet each of the essential qualifications.

In accordance with the original selection strategy, the manager selects for retention the following 12 of the 14 employees:

- the six employees with the greatest strengths in written communication, as assessed by the PSC's standardized WCT;

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- of the remaining eight employees, the four employees with the greatest strengths in the ability to interpret the act and regulations the team is responsible for interpreting, as assessed by the manager's personal knowledge based on past performance; and

- of the remaining four employees, the two employees with the greatest strengths in initiative, as assessed by the standardized reference check questionnaire.

The remaining two employees are selected for lay-off. They will be informed in writing of the selection decision and of their opportunity to complain to the PSST. They also should be invited to discuss the decision with the manager.

B- Situation of workforce reduction, with all positions to be eliminated and new positions to be created, and with new merit criteria

In the example of situation 4 of the SERLO guide, the manager holds a meeting with the employees to explain that all the positions will be eliminated and explains that three new positions have been created.

The manager determines that an appointment process will be conducted to fill the new positions before the identification of the affected employees for lay-off. The affected employees are advised of the internal advertised appointment process. They are also informed that the area of selection has not been restricted, as the organization's policy does not allow for this. However, an organizational need has been established that targets affected employees.

The appointment process is conducted. The assessment methods to be used to assess each merit criterion are as follows:

Assessment Plan Table

	Tools				
Qualifications	**Curriculum vitae**	**PSC - Written Communication Test (WCT)**	**Interview/ Simulation**	**Reference Check**	**SLE**
Essential Qualifications					
Education in accordance with the applicable qualification standard	Yes				
Official language proficiency - bilingual CBC/CBC					Yes

Experience in analyzing strategic corporate impacts of project and policy proposals	Yes			Yes	
Experience in preparing annual corporate reports and presentations	Yes			Yes	
Ability to interpret the act and regulations the team is responsible for interpreting			Yes		
Ability to work within a team environment as well as with minimal supervision			Yes	Yes	
Ability to work under pressure, establish priorities and meet strict deadlines			Yes		
Ability to communicate effectively verbally and in writing		Yes (written)	Yes (verbal)		
Ability to effectively deliver oral presentations			Yes		
Effective interpersonal skills			Yes	Yes	
Proficiency in first official language		Yes *	Yes *		
Organizational Need					
Placement of affected employees	This must be confirmed by the organization's HR.				

☐ *Since these tools do not only assess language proficiency, if the employee asks to be assessed in his second official language for the written test and the interview, additional questions that will only assess the first language proficiency will be asked at the end of the interview.

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Following the assessment of all candidates, three affected employees are appointed to the new positions.

The manager informs the remaining affected employees that they are being identified for lay-off. There is no opportunity for recourse to the PSST under section 65 of the PSEA. However, affected employees who participated in the appointment process have recourse to the PSST, pursuant to section 77 of the PSEA.

Annex 2 – Personnel Psychology Centre – Tests by level

Tests for administrative support level

Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation Test (GSPAT-120)

General Competency Test: Level 1 (GCT1-207)

Office Skills Test (OST-200)

Office Skills Test - (Filing-201)

Office Skills Test - (Arithmetic-202)

Office Skills Test - (Checking-203)

Office Skills Test - (Coding-204)

Office Skills Test - (Vocabulary-205)

Office Skills Test - (Following Directions-206)

Tests for officer level

Appointment Framework Knowledge Test (AFKT-901)

General Administration Test (GAT-380)

General Competency Test: Level 2 (GCT2-314)

General Intelligence Test (GIT-310)

General Intelligence Test (GIT-320)

Human Resources Consultant Simulation Exercise (410) Situational

Judgement Test (SJT-318)

Written Communication Proficiency Test (WCPT-351)

Written Communication Test (WCT-345)

Tests for management level

Assessment Centre for the Identification of Middle Management Potential (IMMP)

Identification of Paths to EX (IPEX)

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Managerial In-Basket Exercise (810)

Middle Management Situational Exercise (MMSE - 840)

Middle Manager In-Basket Exercise (820)

Middle Manager Simulation Exercise (757)

Program Advisor Simulation (758)

Senior Managerial Simulation Exercise (861)

Simulation Exercise for Senior Executives, Level 03

Simulation for the Identification of Senior Management Potential (862)

Simulations for the Identification of Leadership (SIL)

Simulations for the Selection of Executives (SELEX)

Supervisor Simulation Exercise (428)

Team Leader Simulation (445)

Other

Candidate Achievement Record

Reviewing past accomplishments and experience

Structured Selection Interview

For more information on PSC tests, please call 613-992-9741 or send an email at ppc-cpp@psccfp.gc.ca.