Best Practices for Using Group Assessments for Selection

As federal departments and agencies strive to innovate in staffing and assessment, they’re showing increased interest in the use of group assessments for selection. This document provides human resources specialists and hiring managers with key considerations and best practices in the use of group assessments for selection based on merit.

What are group assessments?

Group assessments typically assess the ability to interact and work with others in a problem-solving setting. They can also assess other competencies, such as:

- communication skills
- critical thinking
- initiative
- decisiveness
- influence and persuasion
- interpersonal skills
- leadership potential

There are 2 main types of group assessments:

- leaderless group discussions
- group interviews

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaderless group discussion</th>
<th>Group interview</th>
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<td>Candidates are grouped together and given a limited amount of time to discuss or resolve an issue with no other instruction or intervention from the assessors observing them</td>
<td>Candidates are grouped together and interviewed simultaneously as they take turns responding to interview questions</td>
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<td>Both types of group assessments can be used to assess the same competencies that are typically assessed in the traditional one-on-one structured interview</td>
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<td>When candidates are given opportunities to react to each other’s responses, group interviews and leaderless group discussions can both assess interactive competencies</td>
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What does the research say?

Leaderless group discussions

- Research clearly shows that a well-designed leaderless group discussion can predict job performance
- Leaderless group discussions can demonstrate how candidates lead and influence others, and may also demonstrate how candidates deal with unpredictable events and adapt to them
Group interviews

- Although there has been little research on the effectiveness of group interviews outside the field of education, evidence shows that group interviews can be reliable and predictive of performance.

- However, one study showed that the one-on-one interview format is a better predictor of performance than the group interview format.

- Candidates perceive the group interview format as more unfair and inappropriate than the one-on-one interview.

What are the benefits of leaderless group discussions and group interviews?

- They provide information on a range of competencies and are particularly effective for assessing interactive competencies.

- The interactive setting offers a unique perspective of candidates’ competencies and gives assessors a chance to observe them in action.

- When well-planned, they can be cost-efficient for organizations needing to quickly assess many candidates.

To maximize the benefit of group assessments, they must be carefully planned and structured to ensure they are inclusive and provide valid, reliable and fair measures of performance. Read on to learn about the best practices for designing a group assessment.

**Best practices for effective leaderless group discussions and group interviews**

- **Ensure that your group assessment is related to the job and uses realistic scenarios**
  - This will enhance candidate buy-in and increase the validity of the tool.

- **Ensure assessors can multitask and collect information from several candidates at once, through careful planning and training**
  - Assign no more than 2 candidates per assessor.
  - Consider place cards and assigned seating to ensure assessors have a clear view of their assigned candidates.

- **Allow enough time and have clear instructions so that candidates have equal opportunities to demonstrate their competencies**
  - Some candidates may be reluctant to interrupt other participants, which could result in collecting incomplete information.
  - Providing clear instructions and sufficient time reduces barriers in assessment by making it easy for each candidate to participate.

- **Consider limiting the size of your group to 4 to 6 candidates**
  - This makes the exercise worthwhile and ensures you’ll collect enough information on each candidate.

- **Determine an order or rotation to improve the quality and originality of responses obtained in group interviews** (for example, if the same candidate is always last, they may have fewer ideas to contribute to the group’s responses)
  - This increases fairness by ensuring all candidates have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their competencies.

- **Think about solutions to manage the stress levels of candidates who may feel more self-conscious in a group setting**
  - Provide ahead of time information about the exercise and the competencies that will be assessed.
  - Consider an ice-breaker or other type of introductory exercise to increase candidates’ comfort level.
How are other organizations implementing group assessments?

**Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat** used group interviews to assess a large number of candidates in a short period of time (5 candidates per interview)

- An ice-breaker exercise helped establish a positive climate and reduce stress
- The order of candidate responses rotated, so each candidate had the opportunity to be first when answering their assigned questions (3 competencies each)
- Although the group interviews were longer compared to an individual interview, assessors reported that the extra time allowed the candidates to “reveal their true nature” and showed how they would behave in a teamwork environment

**Environment and Climate Change Canada** used a leaderless group discussion for senior management positions to assess a large number of candidates at the interview stage

- 4 to 6 candidates worked together to resolve a fictional, but realistic environmental problem, and were assessed on 4 key leadership competencies
- Before the discussion started, each candidate had the chance to present how they planned to resolve the problem
- 3 Directors General participated as assessors and focused on 1-2 candidates that were assigned to them for observation and note-taking
- Assessors reported that the leaderless group discussion played a significant role in selecting very competent senior managers

**Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada** developed a group exercise to assess detailed and job-related behaviors that were difficult to capture using other assessment methods

- They developed a teamwork exercise where candidates were paired up and given 3 hours to work on a realistic data analysis request from a client
- At the end of the group exercise, the assessors met with the candidates individually to ask a question related to client service
- The exercise provided assessors with detailed examples of behaviors and a clear demonstration of how the candidates would interact with others when working under pressure
- Candidates appreciated the realistic approach used for the group exercise and reported being less nervous than in other types of assessments as they became entirely devoted to their tasks and thus, less self-conscious
- Assessors believed that this type of group assessment did not prevent the more timid candidates from fully demonstrating their competencies

Want help implementing a group assessment?

The Public Service Commission’s Personnel Psychology Centre offers:

- free consultation and guidance to help you develop and use a group assessment
- tailor-made assessment tools on a cost-recovery basis
- simulations for leadership development which include a group assessment:
  - Simulations for the Identification of Leadership
  - Identification of Middle Management Potential

For more information, contact us at 819-420-8671 or by email at cfp.cpp-ppc.psc@canada.ca.