

POLICE ASSESSMENT TESTING

Fourth Edition

POLICE ASSESSMENT TESTING

**An Assessment Center Handbook
for Law Enforcement Personnel**

By

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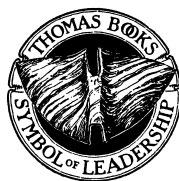
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PREFACE

During the past several decades, a number of informational texts have concentrated on participants in an Assessment Center process. Previously, virtually every article and/or book written concerning assessment centers in both the public and private sector has concentrated on the *development of* or the *administration of* the actual testing process. Experts conclude that of all the possible methods of candidate testing for promotion or hiring, the assessment center process is far more reliable in determining performance potential, because, unlike most single mode systems, an assessment process assimilates a number of “work-simulated” tasks that evaluate candidates in actual job-related situational exercises.

However, in most testing specialists’ schemes to develop a better and more effective measure of police candidates’ performance potential, one essential factor has been overlooked. This unexpressed factor is that a true assessment center is primarily an *administrative process* and generally measures an officer for a position in which he or she is not totally knowledgeable. This implies that the process *in and of itself* is unfair, because the potential candidates who are exposed to the administrative processes of the organization have a distinct advantage over the functional- or operational-level officer without such exposure. This then means that the score achieved between the two different employee categories will be reflective of on-the-job experience rather than an actual potential for positional performance.

This text was developed because of a need and an outcry from talented law enforcement personnel, who by their assignments are insulated from the exposure to the quintessential processes of the organization. The book’s content is the result of several years of experience and research to develop a specific text that would provide essential knowledge to all potential police assessment center candidates for

improved performance.

It is perceived that the material presented in this book will benefit any and all of this country's estimated several million or so potential candidates for police assessment testing. The basic material content of this text was tested during an assessment center training class taught by the author to police and fire department personnel at Pioneer Community College in Kansas City, Missouri and several seminars given in various states, with noteworthy results of knowledge gains and performances by the students.

J.L.C.

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When writing a book of this nature where essential information is gathered from countless sources, it is virtually impossible to formally acknowledge every contributor. However, special recognition should be accorded the entire staff of the Pioneer Community College of Kansas City, Missouri. The college's logistical allowances and research provisions aided greatly in the development of the text. Acknowledgment must be accorded the Kansas City, Missouri Police Department, who provided my initial exposure and insight into formal law enforcement assessment center processes.

Special appreciation is also given to characterization illustrator, Sergeant Robert Mesa (Retired) of the Kansas City, Missouri Police Department and to the Officers and staff of Assessment Preparation Training, Inc. (A.P.T.). The input and guidance of these entities is a tribute to the worthiness of this book and the professionalism of the individuals involved.

CONTENTS

| | <i>Page</i> |
|--|-------------|
| <i>Preface</i> | v |
| Chapter One | |
| INTRODUCTION | 3 |
| U.S. History of Assessment Centers | 5 |
| Value of Assessment Center Testing | 6 |
| Assessment Center vs. Question and Answer Eliminator Testing | 8 |
| The Evolution of Assessment Center Testing | 9 |
| Performance Rationale | 16 |
| The Role of Assessors in An Assessment Center | 19 |
| Chapter Two | |
| POLICE PROMOTION TESTING: LEGAL ACTIONS | 23 |
| Case Law Summaries | 25 |
| Overview | 35 |
| Chapter Three | |
| WRITTEN EXAMINATIONS IN A PROMOTIONAL | |
| PROCESS | 37 |
| Written Test Development | 40 |
| The Design and Utilization of Written Tests | 40 |
| Successful Test-Taking Strategies | 42 |
| Practical Suggestions for Studying for a Written Test | 44 |
| Chapter Four | |
| PROPER ATTITUDE AND APPROACH | 49 |
| Forming a Proper Attitude | 50 |
| Preparation for Assessment Center Participation | 53 |

Chapter Five

| | |
|---|----|
| TRADITIONAL SKILL AREAS ASSESSED | 61 |
| Dimensions: Basic to an Assessment Center Process | 62 |
| Importance of Displaying Each Dimension | 72 |

Chapter Six

| | |
|--|----|
| DEVELOPING PERFORMANCE STRATEGIES | 73 |
| Key Areas of Focus | 77 |
| Keys to Strategy Preparation | 80 |
| Summary | 82 |

Chapter Seven

| | |
|---|-----|
| PRINCIPLES OF HANDLING AN IN-BASKET | 85 |
| Structural Make-up of an In-Basket Exercise | 88 |
| Dominant “Skills Areas” in an In-Basket Exercise | 107 |
| How to Display the Dominant Dimensions During an In-Basket | 108 |
| Epilogue | 113 |

Chapter Eight

| | |
|---|-----|
| EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE IN GROUP EXERCISES | 115 |
| Importance of Group Exercise in Assessment Process | 116 |
| Types of Group Processes Used | 118 |
| Dominant “Skill Areas” in Group Exercise | 122 |
| How to Display the Dominant Dimensions During a Group Exercise | 123 |

Chapter Nine

| | |
|--|-----|
| EFFECTIVENESS IN AN ORAL PRESENTATION EXERCISE | 135 |
| What an Oral Presentation Exercise Measures | 136 |
| Types of Oral Presentation Exercises Generally Used | 148 |
| Dominant “Skills Areas” in an Oral Presentation Exercise | 159 |
| How to Display the Dominant Dimensions During an Oral Presentation Exercise | 159 |

Chapter Ten

EFFECTIVE HANDLING OF A COUNSELING SIMULATION EXERCISE 167

Basic Structure of a Counseling Simulation Exercise 171

Dominant “Skills Areas” in a Counseling Simulation Exercise 173

How to Display the Dominant Dimensions During the Counseling Simulation Exercise 174

Recommended Sequential Process for Conducting a Counseling Simulation Exercise 179

Chapter Eleven

EFFECTIVELY DOCUMENTING A PROBLEM ANALYSIS EXERCISE 185

What a Written Analysis Exercise Principally Measures 193

Structural Make-up of a Written Analysis Exercise 193

Dominant Dimensions in a Written Analysis Exercise 196

How to Display the Dominant Dimensions During the Written Analysis Exercise 197

Effective Decision-Making Process 200

Chapter Twelve

Practice Exercises for a Police Assessment Center (For a candidate’s awareness and application) 203

A Foreword on Work-Simulated Tests 206

Generic Assessment Center Exercises for a Primary or Secondary Leadership Position 210

In-Basket Exercise 210

In-Basket Exercise (Instruction Sheet) 210

General Information for Handling the In-Basket 250

In-Basket Exercise Guideline/Answer Key 252

Group Exercises 259

Leader Controlled Group Exercise (Instruction Sheet) 260

Information Sheet/Answer Key 260

Counseling and Interview Exercise (Instruction Sheet) 262

Counseling and Interview Exercise Guideline/Answer Key 264

Written Presentation Exercise 266

Written Presentation Exercise (Instruction Sheet) 278

| | |
|--|-----|
| Written Presentation Guidelines/Answer Key | 272 |
| Oral Presentation Exercise | 274 |
| Oral Presentation Exercise (Instruction Sheet) | 274 |
| Oral Presentation Guidelines/Answer Key | 275 |
| <i>Notes</i> | 277 |
| <i>References</i> | 279 |
| <i>Index</i> | 283 |

POLICE ASSESSMENT TESTING

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Assessment centers continue to be the most accurate testing procedure available and are the best method of determining who is better suited for a position or advancement. Many experts in the field of police testing for hiring and promotions conclude that **it is the ultimate process for measuring performance ability in a realistic setting**. Their opinion is apparently accurate, as the use of assessment center testing for hiring and advancement processes has steadily increased in popularity during the more than a half-century of its use. It is a human resource tool that incorporates “work simulation” into a methodology that best illustrates a candidate’s performance once the position has been achieved. However, before we attempt to systematically analyze an assessment center process in terms of **how a candidate should perform**, it is important to review the **history of assessment centers** in this country, its evolution and the **rationale** of why law enforcement personnel needs to prepare for participation in one. Principle to our clinical appraisal of assessment center performance is a clear understanding of what an assessment center process is. An assessment center is a methodology of providing the means that a law enforcement entity can use to identify the potential performance behaviors of candidates in a related job or task.

Assessment Center: Defined

“Assessment centers are often defined as a variety of testing techniques designed to allow candidates to demonstrate, under standardized conditions, the skills and abilities that are most essential for success in a given job.”¹ This clinically concise definition of an assessment

center presented by Dennis A. Joiner clearly establishes the premise upon which most work-simulated processes are developed.

The Task Force on Assessment Center Guidelines defines the assessment center as a testing process containing basic measures of actions founded on many factors and that knowledgeable assessors should use to gauge the candidates' performances. Also, the evaluated measures of candidates' performances are observed and documented for assessor discussion to determine the more effective participants in the work-simulated testing process. The determination of what makes up an effective assessment process is varied and highly dependent upon the nature of the work simulation being evaluated. Thus, an analytical appraisal of the tasks and a clinical analysis of the position of assessor is essential to our introduction to the Assessment Center Testing Process. The role of assessors will be discussed more comprehensively later in the chapter.

Work simulation is a term that most aptly applies to the essence of what an assessment center is, because the process is generally a number of performance-related exercises which resemble actual work activity, where a candidate should react. This simulated response of the candidate is then evaluated against the performance of other participants to determine which, potentially, will perform best in a real-life situation. Simply stated, **a police assessment center process is a measurement of job behavior in a simulated or controlled setting.**

The basic assessment center process is not a **question-and-answer** knowledge testing of technical skills or intelligence. It is a process whereby a candidate is evaluated on a personal ability to perform and an ability to **project** or **sell oneself** through job-related activity. Although an individual's personality and charismatic ability will somewhat affect assessment center scoring, it is the actual responses of the candidates that will ultimately decide who is best in an impartial and standardized process.

In our brief definitive discussion, it is appropriate to conclude that Gilbert H. Skinner summed it up best of **what an assessment center is** when he said, "An Assessment Center is a procedure for simultaneous measuring of several persons, performing a variety of simulated work exercises, with their behavior being observed and recorded by trained evaluators. Or more simply, the Assessment Center lets a per-

son try out for a job without the expense of being in the job for six months to a year.”²

U.S. HISTORY OF ASSESSMENT CENTERS

The basic use of the assessment center process as we know it today is reported to have had its initial beginning in the United States in the military during the World War II era. It has been documented that personnel from the Office of Strategic Service structured the concept for its use as a method of testing the performance ability of potential candidates. The basic perceptual purpose was to test the management abilities of incumbent’s personnel to determine each person’s potential for growth and development as a result of their personal traits and characteristics. This quantum leap in the determination of the potential of human resource value in actual work situations has proven to be **the summit of management’s attempts to develop the best work-related process possible of testing for promotions and hiring of new personnel.**

Despite the obvious benefits of the use of a “work-simulated” method of testing, the basic concept of assessment center usage did not achieve widespread use or recognition in private industry until the early 1950s when the work-simulated concept was infused into basic assessment center activities applicable to private industry. The primary endeavor credited with entrenching the assessment center process into private industry was the American Telephone and Telegraph study in 1956. The AT&T study reportedly focused on the assessment and development of junior management staff to determine the validity of the process’s results over the following four years. The study validated the results of the assessment center process and thus firmly established work-simulated testing as the ultimate gauge for accurately predicting a person’s performance in an actual work situation. Since the initial private industry study by AT&T, many other major companies and employers of this country have conducted significant studies, all of which has added in some measure to the validity and effectiveness of assessment centers as we know them today. It is estimated that an excess of 1,000,000 persons in more than 10,000 private companies and law enforcement agencies will participate in assessment center testing every year, with the number increasing in subsequent years.