Using the simulations within assessment and development centres

Choosing simulations and competencies

The activities have been designed to simulate jobs in which people are required to handle information and draw conclusions, make individual or group decisions, communicate and influence others, and plan and run projects – in other words, most managerial and professional roles. Two sets of competencies are provided but you can also use your own.

When choosing which simulation(s) to use, we recommend that you pick those which have storylines that are most unlike the normal experiences of candidates. For example, don’t choose the Hospital Trusts Merger for participants who work within hospitals. Opting for the unfamiliar will give all candidates an equal chance of demonstrating their potential rather than measuring existing job knowledge. It also avoids the risk that candidates will unwittingly demonstrate bad practice because this is what they have observed in the workplace.

Running the simulations

We have provided detailed programme management notes that will tell you how to run each of the activities within each of the four simulations. You can of course run them in sequence if you wish. You can also mix and match – for example, you may choose to have candidates prepare and hold an initial meeting to agree on a project from one set, then have them read the background materials from another set and run a group planning session based on that, and finally give them the pre-prepared plan from yet another set and have them run the related project. You can also
intersperse the activities with presentations and/or report writing if this would match the competencies you wish to access.

Note that some of the documentation related to each set:

- Provides overviews of events, etc., and is therefore to be seen only by you and the assessors;
- Is scheduled for distribution to participants after the simulation has started but may be given to them earlier if they ask for the information.

Timings and levels of difficulty are indicated in the programme management notes. These are estimates; you will need to adjust them to suit the levels of competence of your specific participants. You can also alter the level of difficulty by giving candidates more or less time; if you do this, remember to make a note of it so you can be sure you are treating subsequent groups of participants consistently (or are taking it into account during the assessment process if and when some participants finish more quickly than others).

The Gower Assessment and Development Centre

The four sets of simulations here were developed by Julie Hay, who is also the author of The Gower Assessment and Development Centre. If you already have that manual (or any volume from it), you will find that the documentation now provided can be used in the same way. A set of the documentation, using the same coding system as for The Gower Assessment and Development Centre, is included on the enclosed CD-ROM. The types of activities here include:

- RECOMMENDATION – meetings where participants have conflicting aims;
- CONTINGENCY – activities where interruptions must be handled;
- PLANNING (new to this manual) – meetings at which participants must run a (group) planning session;
- COMBINED – which refers to using the simulations described above in a set rather than as a stand-alone activity.

Please note that this manual is entirely free standing. There is no need for you to acquire or refer to material from The Gower Assessment and Development Centre. We have reproduced here all the documents you are likely to need – including an explanation of the coding system, participant reports and assessor guidelines.
Using the simulations for training purposes

The activities have been designed to simulate jobs in which people are required to handle information and draw conclusions, make individual or group decisions, communicate and influence others, and plan and run projects – in other words, most managerial and professional roles. We have made some suggestions as to which training content the various activities might relate but you can of course also determine your own skill sets that you wish to reinforce.

When choosing which simulation(s) to use, we recommend that you decide whether participants would be better served by a ‘storyline’ that is like or unlike their normal experiences. If you choose storylines that are close to the participants’ experience, this will make the activities seem more relevant; storylines that are outside their experience will provide more opportunity for participants to make their own decisions rather than following custom and practice (which may not be best practice!). For example, choose the Hospital Trusts Merger for participants who work within hospitals if you want to reinforce the direct application of the learning – but opt for unfamiliar settings if you want participants to develop their skills at handling ambiguity.

Running the simulations

We have provided detailed facilitation notes that will tell you how to run each of the activities within each of the four sets. These take you through a set in sequence, complete with reminders about optional presentations or progress reviews. You can, of course, also mix and match – for example, you may choose to have candidates prepare and hold an initial meeting to agree on a project from one set, then have them read the background materials from another set and run a group planning session based on that, and finally give them the pre-prepared plan from yet another set and have them run the related project.

Timings and levels of difficulty will depend on factors such as the ability of participants and the time you allow them for each stage. We suggest you start by
allowing up to 30 minutes for each individual activity and up to 45 minutes for each meeting, plus of course some time for reviews or presentations if you wish to have these. These are estimates; you will need to adjust them to suit the levels of competence of your specific participants. You can also alter the level of difficulty by giving candidates more or less time; if you do this, remember to make a note of it so you can be sure you are treating subsequent groups of participants consistently.