

Assessment Centres : Identifying Potential and Developing Competency
edited by Nitin Sawardekar, published by Response Books, New Delhi, 2002;
183 pages, Price not mentioned.

Assessment Centres, which use multi-factor, multi-technique, and multi-observer methods to measure human competency, is recognisedly one of the most reliable methods used to date. In today's globally competitive market place, survival and growth of an organisation depends much upon how an organisation is able to continuously bridge the gap between essential competencies needed and what it actually possesses - as the business environment and with it the competencies required change constantly.

The book begins with an insightful quotation from Confucius¹: "Listen to what a man says and observe what he does. How then will you not know what he is." – which sets the tone for subsequent discussions. Divided in thirteen chapters, the book covers the entire subject, from defining what is an Assessment Centre and how is it different from any set of psychometric tests or instruments used, to describing how to organise it and train the prospective assessors.

In the first three chapters, the author gives a conceptual overview of an Assessment Centre, purpose of having them and how they help measuring key competencies required by a particular organisational context. The next three chapters (Chapters 4-6) cover the aspects concerning designing of an Assessment Centre in an organisation, including preparation of competency compendium and the exercises, keeping in view its possible diverse uses like selection, potential appraisal and assessment of developmental needs. Chapter 7 deals with training of assessors and Chapter 8 with the implementation issues like selection of participants and assessors, and infrastructural needs. The essential steps in the process of assessment like observation, recording, classification, rating, and integration are covered briefly in Chapter 9. The next chapter deals with the output of an Assessment Centre, format in which the report is prepared, and how an effective feedback can be delivered to a participant. The last three chapters (Chapters 11-13) devote on how the

organisation can benefit from valid and purposeful use of Assessment Centre feedback data. The author concludes with an argument that various costs associated with installation and running of Assessment Centres are more than compensated for by the benefits, both tangible (like avoiding the financial costs associated with wrong selection) and intangible (like, better match between the person and the role), that they bring to the organisation.

The author, who is an ex-Armed Forces Officer, had the opportunity of working in the field of competency assessment in a number of leading private sector organisations - after retiring from the Armed Forces where he was involved in a similar role. His long experience in the field has helped him to cover the entire gamut of activities relating to Assessment Centres with great clarity. His enunciation of the concepts are theoretically accurate, precise and at the same time easily comprehensible. His hands-on experience lends a high degree of authenticity to his description of the process of implementation. All in all, a very competent effort to popularize an important concept in Indian context.

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Tirthankar Roy, *The Economic History of India, 1857-1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 318 pages. Price Rupees 395.

The Cambridge Economic History of India, Volume II (CEHI, 1983) edited by Dharma Kumar has been an invaluable reference work for students and researchers alike. However, its exhaustive coverage and detailed analysis has meant that most undergraduate and postgraduate students of Indian history have found the volume unwieldy. They have had precious little choice though. While there have been innumerable books dealing with the minutiae of the evolution of the Indian economy under British rule, most deal with specific periods, sectors, or regions, and fail to provide a broader perspective.

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