

WHY WORKPLACE ASSESSMENT IS ESSENTIAL (TO PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT)

Issued by Perfect Word Consulting

Skills development has been acknowledged as one of the most important elements to drive economic growth in South Africa. Without it, the workforce cannot move forward. Yet, no matter how much is spent on the development of skills, it is not worth much if the results are not captured through measuring its effect – more commonly referred to as assessment. Without evaluating the impact (and shortfalls) of learning, it is impossible to determine where skills are still lacking and how to best address this issue.

As such, assessments that are in line with the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) are not only necessary, but essential. “This is most important,” believes Gizelle McIntyre, Director of The Institute of People Development (IPD). “Workplace assessment leads to real skills in the real world that can be measured and reported on, while training sets the foundation for the skill. Through a workplace integrated approach, the implementation of learning is evaluated, incorporating a real work-life component.”

It is part of human nature to learn through feedback. In this vein, assessment can actually be considered a real-world, powerful continuation of learning. “In the workplace we do not learn in order to be assessed, but we do learn while we are being assessed,” adds McIntyre. “Assessment is about checking whether someone can do something in the way that it is ideally envisioned to work.”

This definition may seem simple enough, but the reality is that there is an art to designing assessments that truly reflect the strengths and weaknesses of an individual, team or organisation. Although there are many ways to design customised assessments, and innovative techniques that can be applied, it is essential that the assessor or consultant doing the design work has the knowledge required to do so. Generally, this is the type of work that Learning and Development (L&D) professionals thrive on.

When considering the basic principles for assessment, there are 12 internationally accepted principles that should be followed. According to McIntyre; “One of the most important principles is *fairness*. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) defines this as neither disadvantaging *nor* advantaging someone. It is also essential to ensure that the assessment is measuring what it is supposed to measure, don’t waste time on irrelevant outcomes.”

Essentially, after the assessment, the assessor must have enough evidence/proof that the person knows, understands and practically applies the knowledge required in his/her

position *and* that the candidate can take that knowledge, understanding and application and transfer it into different situations. “The real world is never exactly the same every time,” confirms McIntyre. It’s also important to consider the manageability of the assessment; there’s no sense in creating an elaborate design that is so costly that no organisation would utilise it.

When creating a competency profile, remember that *any* skills can be assessed (with the correct design) but there must be a standard – something to measure it against. “Finding that a candidate is a good driver doesn’t really mean anything if the organisation is looking for an accountant.”

What most organisations fail to recognise is that assessment links very well with performance management. “When you teach the basic concepts of assessment to line managers and incorporate these elements into the Performance Management System, you are encouraging a competency profile on a completely different scale,” concludes McIntyre. “This is the missing link. Too many companies focus on ‘cool’ systems, software and rewards. At grassroots level, what they really need to do is realise that the bridge between where they are and where they want to be is assessment.”

- ENDS -

Boilerplate:

Founded in 1999, Workplace Skills Solutions t/a The Institute of People Development (IPD) strives to equip, prepare and certify practitioners to serve South Africa’s skills development strategy and facilitate the transformation of education and training. Over the years, IPD has become the preferred people development partner to most state owned and private enterprises in Southern Africa. For more information, please contact IPD at trainingenquiries@peopledev.co.za, on (011) 315 2913 or visit www.peopledevelopment.co.za