



Improving Management Promotion Decisions for the Valuation Office Agency

Case Study

The Context

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) is an executive agency of HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) with 85 offices spread throughout England, Wales and Scotland employing around 4,300 people. The purpose of the Agency is to provide property valuations for business rating and council tax, together with statutory and non-statutory property valuation services and advice to ministers. Like many government departments and agencies the VOA is staffed by highly skilled professionals with a reputation for technical excellence and impartiality. Also in common with many other departments and agencies the VOA has been faced with continuing demands to raise quality standards coupled with greater efficiency in operational delivery.

The Challenge

The Valuation Office Agency has long recognised the need for effective leadership and management to achieve its mission and business plan. To this end, the VOA has endeavoured through appropriate assessment methods to identify those professionals with the potential to successfully fill increasingly demanding management roles.

After some experimentation with the assessment centre method, a need for a more standardised approach with the twin goals of enhancing both accuracy and fairness in identifying candidates suitable for advancement was identified. There was also a need to increase the face validity of the assessments for candidates by designing realistic simulations of the management tasks and demands. The involvement of senior managers in assessment and feedback was also required.

The Solution

At the outset we began planning with the VOA Project Board for a series of 17, 8-person assessment centres to be held through the following quarter. In meeting this requirement, we:

- Built on the existing competency model to sharpen definitions and clarify the behavioural indicators
- Advised on the re-design of the application form to include a competency-based sift
- Designed two suites of bespoke 'day-in-the life' exercises for candidates for advancement to each of two management levels (Band 2 and Band 1)
- Trained 32 senior managers in assessor and feedback skills
- Facilitated the conduct and review of 17 assessment centres
- Conducted an evaluation of both process and outcomes



Case Study

The two-stage sift and assessment centre process delivered the targeted number of people for the advancement pool. All candidates received written feedback and the opportunity to explore this feedback with their nominated VOA assessor.

We have continued to support the agency in the design and delivery of assessment centres, introducing a number of innovations and adaptations to meet changing demands. These include:

- Design and facilitation of Development Workshops which involved the application of both psychometric and 360 feedback to provide a wider context for continued development planning
- Revisions to the competency model to meet changing business focus and the need to ensure consistency with the Professional Skills for Government model
- Regular design of new exercise suites to ensure fairness for all candidates, with greater involvement of VOA managers in the design process to ensure fidelity of simulations
- Adaptations to the process to meet the needs of candidates with disabilities
- Continuing evaluation of the assessment centre process

To date, we have worked with the VOA in assessing over 450 candidates through nearly 60 assessment centres and we are continuing to work with the agency to identify new cohorts of managers and leaders.

The Benefits

The VOA has succeeded in deploying more rigorous methods for selecting those with high potential for management and leadership roles. This has been achieved through a process that is seen by both candidates and senior management as fair and open. Those who succeed in the assessment centre (not always at the first attempt) are consistently found to make the transition to larger management roles more quickly and with greater success than before, some rising rapidly to executive level.

There have also been a number of additional benefits of the consistent application of this process. These include:

- Enhanced and shared understanding by senior managers of the skills and qualities necessary to succeed in management roles within the VOA
- Clearer communication of the skills and qualities required for advancement to management positions to candidates
- Greater preparedness and recognition of the need for continuing development among promoted staff
- Improved assessment, appraisal, feedback and development support skills among senior managers

Interest has been shown in this work by other government departments and VOA's approach has been written up in a Cabinet Office Case Study and various conference papers.