

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Can a Candidate Effectively Prepare
for a Promotional Assessment Process?**

**An Administrative Research Paper
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research paper is to determine whether or not an administrative job candidate in the law enforcement profession can effectively prepare for a promotional assessment center process. There is a lingering myth throughout the law enforcement profession that a candidate cannot effectively prepare for promotional processes. One must first understand what an assessment process is. An assessment process is a method used by most law enforcement departments to determine ones ability to react or respond to a specific incident. This author utilized surveys, personal interviews, internet articles, and books to substantiate the fact that a candidate can prepare themselves for an assessment center. The findings of this research paper support the hypothesis and determined that the major key to a successful assessment process is having a complete understanding of the process. Candidates who believe that they possess the key qualities to become supervisors within their departments must prepare themselves for promotional processes by utilizing all resources available.

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INTRODUCTION

It is the belief of the author that candidates for a promotional process can effectively prepare for an assessment process with positive final results. The keys to a successful assessment center performance (for any candidate) rest in effective preparation and being familiar with content knowledge. The preparation for an assessment process is ultimately a decision that must be made exclusively by the candidate. The candidate must first determine the true meaning of an assessment. The candidate must then take the initiative to thoroughly investigate the job description for the position they desire to be promoted to. Having a thorough understanding of what the job entails can be beneficial to both the candidate and the law enforcement field. The candidate must decide upon the initial announcement for a promotional process if they are willing to challenge themselves by dedicating quality time to prepare for the assessment.

The candidate must be honest about their abilities (or lack of ability) in order to organize and evaluate pertinent information related to specific topics regarding the job they are testing for. A candidate's failure to accept their weaknesses and make improvements in their more ineffectual areas can lead to the theory that they are not supervisory material. There is also the possibility that a candidate may find it necessary to seclude themselves from distractive elements within their lives that could interfere with their opportunity to become promoted to a higher rank.

Through research, this author will demonstrate that candidates who have the desire to promote and seek success in the promotional assessment process will take the necessary steps to achieve this goal by properly preparing for the process. This

research will further illustrate that the final results of candidates who have taken the time to learn the dimensions and contents of practical exercises like subordinate issues, in-basket and tactical incidents, perform better than their counterparts who fail to properly prepare. It is very beneficial for a candidate to be familiar with an assessment center and be willing to use any helpful resources made available to them. Many candidates underestimate the amount of dedication required to be successful in such an endeavor. This research will also confirm that there are many resources (at no cost or for various fees) available for candidates who are serious about being successful. This author utilized several books, articles, interviews, surveys, and a collective number of personal and professional perspectives to support facts sustaining that preparation for assessment processes can have positive end results. Experts in the human resource field have also conducted studies by targeting individuals who have either been assessors or candidates in assessment processes have also authored books and articles used in this research. The purpose of this research is to develop a source of reliable information that may assist those who have an interest in promoting to higher ranks, realize that their success in promotional processes depends upon their preparation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Assessment processes were actually developed during the World War I by the German military. These processes were intended to reflect actual conditions and the candidates were placed in stressful activities that ranged from field problems to interrogations (More & Unsinger, 1987, p.4).

In recent years, due to the elevated educational requirements and the competitiveness of promotional processes throughout the country, an increased number of resources (not limited to books and periodicals) have evolved. Many candidates and organizations have come to realize that assessment processes are a proven method of actually testing a candidate's operational and administrative knowledge in a series of work-related exercises. Due to assessment processes being mainly standardized, most available information for these processes are similar.

For over twenty years, David Wyman, CEO and President of Wyman and Associates Human Resource Consultants, has developed numerous assessment processes for police departments and private organizations throughout the United States. Wyman believes a successful candidate is one who is best prepared.

A candidate must become familiar with two areas of the process. Those being, the meaning of an assessment center and what are the dimensions? The core concept in assessment process is simulation. Assessment centers allow candidates to demonstrate job related measurements of performance or work characteristics in job simulated exercises, replicating the important situations that occur during employment. It is extremely important that the exercises simulate the important conditions and contexts that occur within the target job descriptions. Furthermore, a candidate must become completely familiar with the behavior dimensions of the job and the assessment center. They must also prepare themselves to participate in subordinate and high risk tactical incidents that will be conducted during these processes.

Successful candidates must be able to problem solve on various levels that lie within the job that they are seeking. Thriving candidates must possess a level of

competence in order to adapt to the technical knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform assessment center tasks at a high level of proficiency (Caldwell, 2003, p.3).

Preparation for the assessment center begins long before the candidate's contact with assessors. The candidates normally underestimate the amount of preparation required to be successful. According to Cam Caldwell (2003), "the guidelines clearly state that candidates should be fully informed about the assessment center process prior to the testing process" (p.3). Caldwell talked about a municipality in Utah that provided candidates with a detailed written summary of its promotional process. The process outlined the upcoming promotional process, which allowed the candidates to review prior to the process. Candidates were also provided a copy of the updated job description that was used to describe the job criteria, and also carefully detailed the dimensions that were being targeted. By doing this, the candidates were given the opportunity to formally ask questions about the process and to review the information as a group.

Deputy Chief James Hawthorne has been involved in assessment processes both as an assessor and a candidate. Hawthorne believes that role playing, monitoring calls for service, keeping abreast of current events, yearly training, job-knowledge, asking supervisors the right questions, volunteering to be part of committees, "what if" games, and a desire to be the best are qualities needed to be successful in the assessment process.

Many private organizations and law enforcement organizations have developed curriculum and programs geared toward preparing candidates for promotional assessments, have also become popular. Human Resource experts who believed there

was a need to develop a resource to assist those who desired to promote within the public safety ranks. The International Chiefs of Police website link describes the assessment center process as a powerful technique for promotional decisions. It further states that observing a candidate's behavior in simulations of on-the-job challenges, offers in-depth information concerning candidate's strengths and weaknesses.

Several police associations have facilitated mock-assessment centers for their members who are planning to participate in upcoming processes. Texas Peace Officers Association and African American Peace Officers Association of Arlington (Arlington, Texas) are two police organizations in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex that have observed positive results with these processes. Leaders in these organizations, as well as their members, are advocates of mock assessments. Many members of these organizations have been promoted since participating in organized sessions.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Limited (KSA, Ltd), has a motto that it is proud of, "Training Tomorrow's Public Safety Leaders Today." The company services are geared toward smaller groups of candidates for more hands-on training. Candidates who engage in this training are allowed to demonstrate their understanding of the link between the job dimensions and their personal skills and abilities to see the connection to the new job. The smaller groups allow KSA to focus on the local needs, policies and procedures and direct the candidate's attention to these areas.

METHODOLOGY

Can a promotional candidate effectively prepare for an assessment process? This author is a proponent of thorough assessment preparation. The hypothesis of this research is to determine whether or not those who effectively prepare for promotional processes have a better opportunity to be successful. Several articles, books and

personal interviews were used to find the opinions of experts directly involved with assessment processes. Many experts have very strong opinions regarding the chosen topic, which tends to support that preparation is necessary for success.

The methodology used to determine the hypothesis will be a survey distributed to members of various departments statewide who have participated in assessment processes as an assessor or as a candidate. These participants will be asked a series of questions related to their specific departments and the promotional processes facilitated by their departments. The applicants will be asked questions regarding their direct involvement with assessment centers. A total of 13 surveys will be distributed to participants who work for departments ranging in number of personnel from 15 - 2900. Additionally, several law enforcement professionals, police associations, and human resource experts will be interviewed to provide additional views on the aforementioned hypothesis.

FINDINGS

Prerequisites for successful performance in promotional assessment processes depend on identifying the underlying job dimensions (More and Unsinger, 1987). Organizations should be obligated to present information promotional processes available prior to the assessment process so that participants will be informed on what to expect. This information should be in an announcement format. The announcement should consist of the objective, the selection, the choice, the staff and qualifications, the materials, the results, the feedback, who is eligible, and how the final score will be assessed. The manner in which the initial announcement is presented can contribute to a candidate's success in the process. If a candidate understands the process from

the onset they will know how to properly manage their time, and what direction to take in the initial preparation process.

A total of 11 surveys (84%) were completed and returned by the chosen applicants. The average number of years of service of the participants is 14.5, and the average survey participant was the rank of Lieutenant. Participants in this research strongly believed that a candidate can effectively prepare for a promotional assessment process with positive results. This research showed that assessors, candidates and human resource experts strongly agree that preparation is the key to a successful performance in the assessment process. The survey used to collect one part of the hypothesis was distributed to an array of law enforcement supervisors who have either been; directly involved in a promotional process as an assessor or candidate or have known individuals who have participated in the aforementioned manner. A series of questions were introduced to the participants of the survey. The figures (listed below) illustrate: the percentage of participants who have actively participated in an assessment process (figure 1); the percentage of participants who have participated in assessment process as an assessor (figure 2); the percentage of participants who believe that a candidate can actively prepare for an assessment process (figure 3); the percentage of participants who have been asked by candidates to assist them with assessment preparation (figure 4); and the percentage of participants who would pay for some form of assessment preparation course (figure 5).

Figure 1

Participants who have participated in assessment processes as candidates

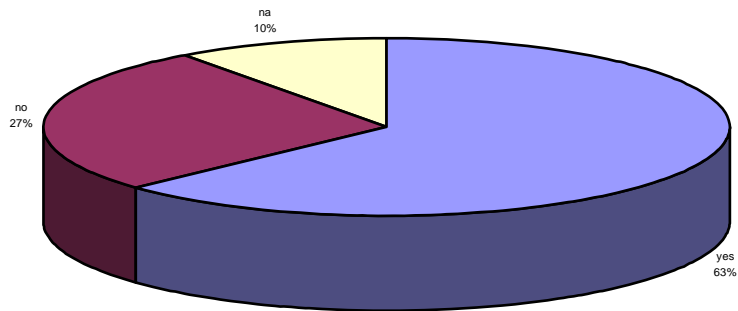


Figure 2

Participants who have been involved in assessment processes as assessors

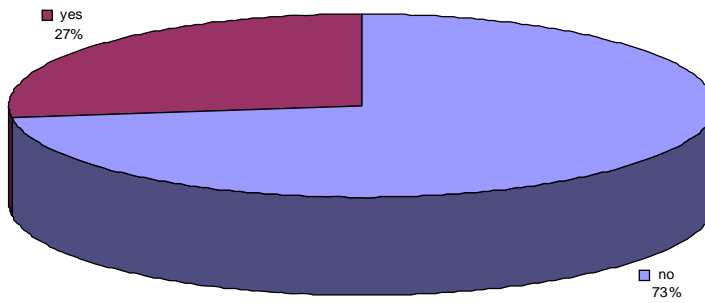


Figure 3

Participants who believe a candidate can effectively prepare for an assessment process

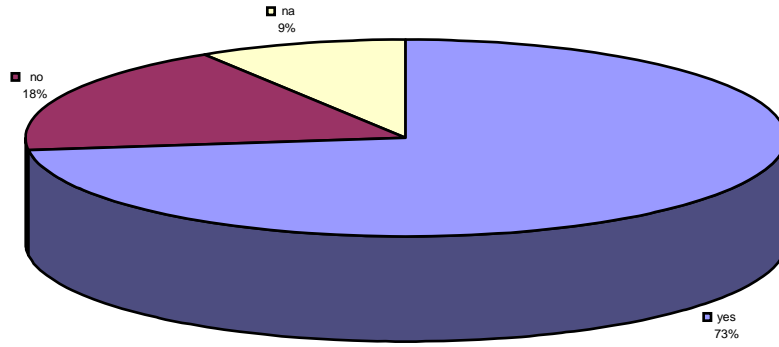


Figure 4

Participants who have been asked by a candidate for assessment process preparation assistance

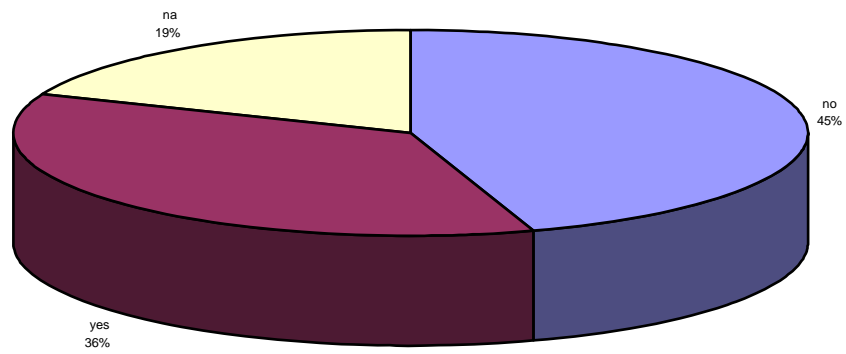
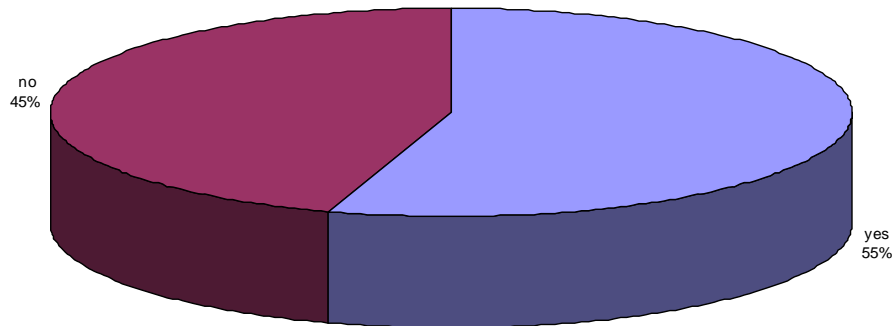


Figure 5

Participants who would pay for some form of assessment process preparation



A majority of the participants were familiar with assessment processes. This survey does illustrate that many of the participants have not been asked by candidates within their departments for any types of assistance. Furthermore, this research showed that participants strongly believe that the request for assistance and the use of proper materials can place a candidate in a position to be promoted.

Candidates who develop the ultimate hunger for a position and seek assistance from mentors, peers and other pertinent outside sources tend to perform better in assessment processes (D. Wyman, personal communication, February 3, 2006). The police profession requires certain abilities, skills and qualities from each rank. It is the responsibility of each candidate to thoroughly absorb and retain the nomenclature of these skills prior to their quest to promote. Not only is it the duty of the organization hired to facilitate these processes to conduct a job analysis, the candidates should also

be prepared to conduct a thorough evaluation of the selected dimensions, which can lead to ones determining their suitability for the job (More & Unsinger,1987, p.10). Candidates who realize what is required to prepare can effectively develop an edge on the competition. He also believes that a serious candidate must be willing to accept constructive criticism and allow themselves to be critiqued by these resources. David Wyman believes that successful assessment candidates must participate in some type of assessment orientation. Participation in an orientation can allow a candidate to become familiar with the assessment process.

Preparation for a promotional process has been compared to preparing for a race (J. Hawthorne, personal communication, March 22, 2006). The candidate who trains the hardest, with substance and vigor, will come out the winner. Candidates failing to utilize all of the obvious resources often do so without speaking to those who have been directly and indirectly involved with assessment processes. Those who are not afraid to put forth the extra effort and are persistent in their quest to learn about the process routinely perform at a higher level. For example, Hawthorne failed to take his first assessment process seriously and the final results indicated this. When he finally decided to become a student of the process, become adequately prepared by admitting his weaknesses and study various applications of successful assessment center applications, he was promoted, to both Sergeant and Lieutenant. He also used this philosophy to prepare for a formalized Deputy Chief's assessment process.

Many candidates rely on significant scores from the written part of a promotional process to provide them with adequate ranking within the process. However, on the one hand, the results of a written test only weighs 20-30% of the final promotional

process and is not considered a true measurement of a candidate's ability to handle subordinate and tactical incidents they may encounter on daily basis as a supervisor. On the other hand, the assessment center normally weighs 70-80% of the final promotional process. With this being the case it is imperative that candidates take the time to review the overall process. Wyman further states that a serious candidate is prepared to apply policies and operational strengths during assessment processes to achieve an extra advantage on their competition.

Many companies offer assessment preparation courses and mock assessment centers to the serious candidate. Although many of the processes are costly (average \$395), many candidates believe that cost is worth the experience that they receive prior to entering the unknown. The personal duty of quality assurance involves constantly sharpening the saw, or improving one's professional skills about assessment center processes. Reading available assessment process literature, talking with related experts within the law enforcement field, attending conferences, participating in mock centers, and taking special courses are among the ways that this can be achieved (Caldwell 2003 p.8).

Many police associations polled members in attempt to determine why they were performing poorly in assessment processes. The results showed that many of the members were intimidated by promotional processes. Additional research showed that many of the members had no understanding of what to expect during promotional processes, how the process was conducted, and what steps to take to prepare for the process. Many of the members would receive the announcement, sparsely review the announcement and set the information aside until the day of the assessment.

After realizing why their members were performing poorly many police organizations begin to organize mock promotional assessment processes for its members. Two police departments within the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex begin facilitating mock assessment approximately five years ago. Setting up a mock assessment is tedious and requires maximum cooperation from both the facilitators and the candidates. The processes are set up to be as “real as it gets”. Numerous scenarios which include; in-basket, subordinate issues, and tactical incidents are used in the process. Prior to the start of the mock assessment process an 8-10 week introduction to the assessment process is conducted. Each member who has signed up to participate in the process must attend a minimum of 80% of the classes. The classes are scheduled to not conflict with the work schedules of the participants. Both stated that the candidates have to make a strong commitment and sacrifice off duty jobs and some personal commitments to participate. In the early stages of the process the candidates are asked why they wish to promote and what they contribute the department as a supervisor (A. Malik & T. Baker, personal communication, March 29, 2006).

The mock assessment process allows the candidates to see what they will be facing during the actual process. The candidates are allowed to interact with assessors who are familiar with the process. These assessors provide honest and open criticism of the candidate’s performance, by actually scoring them by using assessment center criteria. The process is video taped and the candidate is provided with a copy of the tape. These mock processes have resulted in numerous members within both the

Dallas and Arlington Associations being promoted, or ranking in higher positions on promotional lists.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

Can a candidate effectively prepare for a promotional assessment process and be successful? The hypothesis of this research discusses whether or not a candidate who effectively prepares and uses all of their available resources has a better opportunity to be successful and possibly be promoted. This author believes that the research conducted concludes that methods of effective preparation can lead to successful outcomes for promotional assessment candidates.

Law enforcement professionals, along with human resource experts, both provided theories and beliefs regarding what steps should be taken by a candidate who desires to be successful in promotional processes. The information that each law enforcement professional provided clearly advise that candidates must obtain a complete understanding of the mechanics of the process and thorough understand of what the job description is. The mechanics that are being described are the assessment dimensions and interactive scenarios.

It was important that the data collected for this research be specific in order to substantiate the hypothesis. The data obtained in this research also clarifies the need for those who have successfully participated in assessment processes to assist in the development of candidates who are preparing for similar processes. In reviewing materials for this topic with the exception of personal interviews, articles, and surveys, this author discovered minimal books directly related to this topic. There are several organizations that are directly involved with assessment preparation, but the majority of the books related to assessment processes dealt with the specifics of setting up

assessment processes and not the candidate's preparation. Through the research, this author determined that many law enforcement professionals and organizations recognize that law enforcement is being considered a profession instead of merely a job, requiring top-notch candidates for upper management positions. Subsequently, many organizations should invest time in developing programs to assist supervisory candidates in becoming successful in their quest to become promoted in the field of law enforcement.

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APPENDICES

Can a candidate effectively prepare for a promotional assessment process?

Please answer the following questions pertaining to promotional assessment processes and return survey to Keith Humphrey. Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

1. HOW LONG HAVE YOU WORKED FOR YOUR CURRENT DEPARTMENT?
2. HOW MANY SWORN PERSONNEL DOES YOUR DEPARTMENT HAVE?
3. WHAT ARE THE SUPERVISORY RANKS WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION?
FOR EXAMPLE: CHIEF, ASSISTANT CHIEF, DEPUTY CHIEF, CAPTAIN, ETC.
4. IS THE PROMOTIONAL PROCESS FOR THE AFOREMENTIONED
POSITIONS APPOINTED OR PART OF AN ASSESSMENT PROCESS?
5. DOES YOUR DEPARTMENT CONDUCT AN ASSESSMENT PROCESS FOR
PROMOTIONS? IF NOT CAN YOU EXPLAIN WHY?
6. WHAT ARE THE COMPONENTS OF YOUR DEPARTMENTS ASSESSMENT
PROCESS?
7. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS CONTRIBUTES TO
THE ENTIRE PROCESS?
8. HOW DOES YOUR DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCE PROMOTIONAL
PROCESSES?
9. HAVE YOU EVER PARTICPATED IN AN ASSESSMENT PROCESS?
10. IF THE ANSWER TO THE PREVIOUS QUESTION IS YES, WERE YOU AN
ASSESSOR OR A CANDIDATE?

11. A CANDIDATE HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN A PROCESS? PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR OFFICIAL RANKING FOLLOWING EACH PROCESS
12. IF YOU WERE A CANDIDATE, WHAT METHODS DID YOU UTILIZE TO PREPARE FOR THE PROCESS?
13. DO YOU BELIEVE THE ASSESSEMENT PROCESS THAT YOU PARTICPATED IN CAPTURED AN ACCURATE ACCOUNT OF THE POSITION YOU TESTED FOR?
14. WOULD YOU PAY TO PARTICIPATE IN A STRUCTURED ASSESSMENT ORIENTATION?
15. HAS ANYONE IN YOUR DEPARTMENT REQUESTED YOUR ASSISTANCE IN PREPARING FOR AN ASSESSMENT PROCESS?