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Group exercise – Chosen Island

Tutor Guidelines

Student recruitment

October 2013



Tips for use

This exercise has been designed to help you to simulate the type of group assessment which could be used in assessing students as part of a recruitment process.

It's essential that you take the time to read through these materials in order to prepare for this session. Please note that these materials are not to be used for actual recruitment and assessment purposes but to give candidates an idea of what they could expect and how best to prepare themselves for an assessment centre.

Only PwC trained and approved Assessors who are registered with PwC Assessment Services may assess using this exercise.

This exercise cannot be used for more than six participants in one group.



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Preparation

Before you run this session, it's important to thoroughly read the information provided. To ensure the exercise runs smoothly, you'll also need to prepare the room and check all the materials.

Background Context

A group exercise is used by PwC as part of our assessment centre. This stage of our process usually follows successful completion of an online application form, a combination of numerical, verbal and/or logical reasoning tests, and sometimes a telephone interview.

A group exercise allows us to observe how people perform when working in a team, which is an essential skill we look for in everyone who joins us. There's no specific preparation students need to do for this part of the assessment process, however this exercise is designed to help familiarise them with how it feels to be in a group assessment situation.

How it works

We give candidates a pack of information and ask them to use it as a team to come up with solutions to a range of business issues. The nature of the information pack and the task will vary and may include different elements depending on the position applied for, but we're looking for in students to engage with business issues whilst working collaboratively with others.

The group exercise allows students to demonstrate communication and influencing skills, teamwork, their ability to manage a project and deal with changing priorities.

We may ask students to take part in an individual exercise depending on the size of the assessment centre and/or the location they've applied to. The individual exercise assesses the same skills as the group exercise but they'll interact with a trained assessor rather than other candidates.

This simulation session will last approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes, including a 15 minute debrief session and is designed to provide students with an insight into what they could experience in a recruitment process. No prior preparation is required by students for this simulation or our assessment centre group exercises – they're encouraged to use the information provided and not to draw on their existing knowledge of any of the topics covered.

Running this exercise with your students

It's up to you how you choose to position and run the exercise – everything included within the pack provides you with the kinds of information and materials we'd use to run a group exercise at an assessment centre; however you may decide to run this as an interactive group discussion rather than simulating an assessed situation.

Prompts and notes to debrief the session with your students are included at the end of this guide and we'd encourage using these to hold a short group discussion following the exercise.

As the exercise simulates students taking on the role of a 'business advisor', we would recommend this session is run in conjunction with the 'Who Are PwC?' skills session and lesson plan in order to provide students with



some context. A presentation, speaker notes and lesson plan for this session are included within the PwC Teacher Toolkit.

Setting up the room

In order to run this exercise effectively, we'd recommend you do the following before the session:

- Ensure you've thoroughly read this guide, as well as the candidate brief and student handouts.
- Ensure that all the materials which the candidates will use are unmarked.
- Have a professional (preferably digital/countdown) timer to hand. *Using a mobile phone to time an exercise would be avoided at an assessment centre.*
- Place a notepad, two pencils and a calculator on the table for each candidate.
- We'd encourage you to observe the candidates and debrief as a group after the exercise on how they interact together. This should be based on yours and their own observational comments rather than your assessment of their ability, response to the task or how they have performed. There is no 'right answer' to this simulation and in a real assessment situation we would evaluate candidate's performance against a number of different criteria.
- Place a Candidate Brief in each place where you would like the candidates to sit.

Guide to this administration script

This section provides a script for you to use when running this exercise.

To simulate a standardised assessment environment, you should read all of the text which is in boxes, verbatim (i.e. word for word). If you choose to run the session in a more interactive way, you should highlight to candidates that it would feel quite different in an assessment environment.

- Text which appears in **bold** should be given emphasis.
- Actions which you need to take are shown in **Burgundy colour** and are not enclosed in boxes.

Welcome

- **Once the candidates have entered the room, advise them to sit at their allocated seats – indicated by the names on the notepads at each place.**
- **Let them make themselves comfortable (e.g. if they wish to remove their jackets or pour a glass of water, allow time for them to do so).**



- Each observer/tutor should then give a brief introduction of their name and role, as well as providing the context to students for the exercise using the background information provided in this guide. At this point you should position how you're planning to run the exercise i.e. whether you're simulating an assessment environment or talking through it as a group example. You may also choose to pause the session at various points to discuss your observations with the group – this would not happen in an assessment environment but may be beneficial to their learning.
- Ensure that all candidates are seated and looking at you before you begin to read the script.

Please ensure that your mobile phones and any other communication devices are switched off before we commence this exercise.

- If necessary, allow students time to do this.

Briefing

You do not need to make any notes at this stage. All the information you will need to refer to during the exercise is provided for you in your booklets.

I now will read the exercise introduction to you.

Please open your Candidate Briefs to the first page and follow as I read aloud.

- Check that all students have opened the briefs and are ready to follow along.

The information presented in this exercise brief is fictitious. Nevertheless, during the exercise you should treat all the material as you would in a real situation.

You are permitted to use a calculator during this exercise if you wish.

Please do not make any markings on this booklet as it will be used again.

- Check that all students are following.

Your task

This exercise has two parts.

Instructions for the first part – Individual preparation

- You should imagine that you're working as a business advisor. Each of you has an Internal Email. This describes the task you'll undertake for a potential new client, Chosen Island.
- You're also provided with general information regarding the task.
- Finally, you each have a separate page which provides you with additional information to consider in making recommendations.

- Each candidate should have one item of unique information – check that they all have this.



- You'll have **20 minutes** in which to read this information and **prepare individually, in silence**, for a group discussion.

You should manage your preparation time to ensure that you have key points to contribute to the group discussion.

- Paper, pencils and a calculator have been provided for your preparation.
- You may also keep this briefing document throughout the exercise for reference.

Instructions for the second part – group discussion

- As a group, you'll then have **30 minutes** in which to discuss the information available and formulate recommendations in response to the brief.
- You should base your contribution on the information provided to you, and not on any prior knowledge.
- You're asked not to appoint a group leader or a note taker and you should all contribute to the discussion.
- All members of the group share responsibility for the final recommendations to be made.
- **You should manage the time yourselves** and ensure that by the end of the exercise you have reached a conclusion on what to communicate to the Team Leader.

Are there any questions?

- Look up and allow any candidates who have questions to ask them. As far as possible provide answers by repeating the instructions which have been supplied, clearly.
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- You now have 20 minutes to prepare, **individually and in silence**.
- Please do not write on your Candidate Brief. Rough paper has been provided for you if you would like to make notes.
- **Now turn over the page and begin.**

- Start your timer for 20 minutes.

Handling disruptive students

For advice on how potential candidate disruptions would be dealt with in an assessment, please see the notes in the next section of this guide.

Group discussion

- After exactly 20 minutes, say:

- That is the end of your preparation time.

- You'll now be moving on to the group discussion.

- Check that all candidates have stopped working.

During group discussion please remember:

- The group is asked NOT to appoint a formal chairperson or note-taker.
- Please ensure that you share your information with the group.
- You should also ensure that all of your team mates have an opportunity to share their point of view.
- Please speak clearly, so that you can be heard.

Are there any questions?

- Look up and allow any candidates who have questions to ask them. As far as possible provide answers by repeating the instructions which have been supplied, clearly.

- You now have 30 minutes for your group discussion.

- ***Please begin.***

- Start your timer for 30 minutes.

- **After a total of 28 minutes** in to the discussion, if the group is still discussing the brief, say:

- You now have two minutes remaining to conclude your discussion.

- After exactly 30 minutes of discussion time, say:

- That is the end of your discussion time.

- Thank you for participating.

- Please place all of your materials, including any used note paper, in the centre of the table now.

- Allow candidates time to do this.

Note: It is particularly helpful for you to have an understanding of the assessment exercise content.

Caution: Remember that students do not have extended or repeated access to the exercise materials as you will have done in preparing the session. Often it's easy for you to pick up the links in the materials or see a pattern emerging after you've used the materials repeatedly, so please be mindful when debriefing, that students won't have as deep and meaningful a view of the materials when they have had only a small portion of time to collect their thoughts.



Handling disruptive students

If a candidate is noisy or disruptive at the planning stage, or if candidates begin to consult with one another or you, interject:

Your preparation is to be done individually and in silence.

If a candidate enquires about the exercise content or particular words or terminology, respond:

You have been provided with all the information required to complete the task successfully.

If a candidate requests specific information or queries whether additional information is available, e.g. 'Are these figures actual figures or estimated?' respond:

Any information which is not provided could be established at the meeting with the potential client next week.

If a candidate/the group enquires about the time they have remaining, respond:

You were/The group was advised to manage your/their own time.

If the group assign a note taker or use a flip chart, say immediately:

Please remember: The group is asked NOT to appoint a note taker. It would likely have an impact on the contribution that they're able to make to the group's discussion.

If the acoustics in the room are letting the group down and/or Assessors are battling to hear the Candidates' contributions, ask them to speak up:

Please remember: We'd like **all** of you to speak clearly so that **we** can hear you and assess you fairly.

Debriefing the exercise

In order for your students to get the most learning from this exercise, you should spend some time with them discussing and debriefing on their experience. We'd encourage you to observe the candidates during the exercise and encourage group discussion on how they interacted together.

This should be observational comments on the behaviours they demonstrated rather than your assessment of their ability, response to the task or how they have performed. You may also wish to debrief the content of the business issue, although the focus should be on how they interact rather than coming to a 'right' answer.

The key areas we'd recommend you cover during the debrief are included as prompts below:

Do you remember why employers use these kinds of assessments?

A group exercise is used by PwC as part of our assessment centre. This stage of our process usually follows successful completion of an online application form, a combination of numerical, verbal and/or logical reasoning tests, and sometimes a telephone interview.

What do you think employers are looking for when you do these kinds of assessments?

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How did you find the exercise today?

Get a general sense from the group of how they found the experience and probe as to why this was.

What did you find the most challenging?

Key themes to pick up here: time pressure, lots of information to take in, managing different personalities within the group, differences of opinion about the solution, not being clear on what they're trying to achieve.

For each challenge they describe, encourage them to think about strategies for dealing with it.

What did you feel you did well?

Key themes to pick up here: examples of building relationships with each other (e.g. addressing by name), including everyone in the discussion, active listening, taking responsibility for calculations, taking responsibility for time management, coming to a shared conclusion, building on the ideas of others.

What do you think you could now work on to better prepare yourself for an assessment situation?

No specific preparation is required for these exercises, but it helps to know a bit about what to expect, to remain calm under pressure and know how to manage time effectively. It may also be useful to students to reflect on how they work with other people and be mindful of this. Finally, they should refresh themselves on what an employer is looking for from the exercise and be thinking about how they're demonstrating this.

What did you notice about how you interact with others?

Encourage students to pick out any bad habits– highlight that these can creep in when under pressure but ask them how they might manage this if asked to complete the task again.

Encourage students to pick out examples of good interaction which they'd like to see when they work in a team– highlight these are the areas to focus and build upon and ask how they might do this.

How did you respond to being under time pressure?

Explain that often tasks in the workplace are subject to time pressure, which is why it's really important that you're able to prioritise and manage your time effectively. Talk through how the students used their reading time and their strategies for managing time within the task.

What do you think will help you perform well in this exercise?

The simulation allows students to demonstrate communication and influencing skills, teamwork, their ability to manage a project and deal with changing priorities. As an employer, we are looking for their grasp of a business issue however, the way in which they've come to their response is just as important. Therefore, the manner in which they work with others is as important as the content of what is said.

You should end the session on a positive note, with the key message being that candidates are now all much more aware of what it could feel like to be in a group assessment situation, so should take confidence from this.