

# BEHAVIOURAL ASSESSMENT CENTRES

## **Are you on your best behaviour when tendering?**

Increasingly within the construction sector Behavioural Assessment Centres are being used as part of the tendering process to select contractors who possess not just the best technical skills but also the behaviours required for effective partnering.

This is an introduction to Behavioural Assessment Centres including some top tips for participants.



## Introduction

The nature of Behavioural Assessment Centres (BACs) is evolving. Assessment Centres are not new. They are commonly used to help hire the right person for a job by assessing candidates against agreed behaviours (competencies) that have been identified in advance. Increasingly within the construction sector BACs are being used as part of the tendering process to select contractors who possess not just the best technical skills but also the behaviours required for effective partnering. With major projects costing billions of pounds and running for a decade or more, it is of primary importance that clients choose contractors they can work well with and are trusted to work well with other contractors.

## BACs in Procurement

BACs are used as part of a tender process on similar principles to those used in individual recruitment: they comprise a series of scenarios mirroring in key ways those that will arise during the contract, aimed at eliciting the behaviours sought in a partner.

*“The design of the contract is as important as assessments.... the contract has to be an enabler, not a blocker and everything needs to be aligned to get the right outcome.”*

**Laing O’Rourke’s rail sector lead,  
Graeme Castle**

The participants will be assessed against pre-identified competencies by a number of trained assessors, who have a crucial role in remaining objective and need to have the appropriate experience and background. The competencies may also have been assessed through a Behavioural Interview or / and a client visit. BACs can be very powerful and beneficial providing all the elements have been put together correctly.

## Importance of Feedback

Feedback is an important part of the BAC process. Good BACs are a significant investment in time and resources by both client and contractor. Those companies that go through the process and are unsuccessful in winning the contract may feel wary about repeating the experience. However, pertinent, well-delivered feedback can be invaluable in building confidence and stretching their self-awareness and understanding of what clients are looking for in long-term partners in the 21st century. Unsuccessful bidders will be able to work on areas where there is room for improvement, as they are highly likely to bid for and be considered for other projects with the client as well as with other clients using a similar process.

*“You need to give as much feedback as you can as there is always the potential of a future relationship. We do ourselves a disservice if we don’t give feedback”*

**Environment Agency’s Peter Quamby,  
www.nce.uk , 26.11.15 New Civil Engineer**

**Collaboration and aligned cultures in long term contracts are vital to avoid disputes and loss of profit and loss of staff.**

*“The three surveys conducted by RIBA Enterprises’ National Building Specification (NBS) over the past four years show an upward trend in major issues arising: in 2011, 24% of respondents had a least one contract that went into dispute rising to 30% for 2012. The most recent survey shows a steep increase: 44% of respondents say at least one contract went into dispute in the past 12 months’*

**Construction Manager /  
January 2016.**

### Best Team for the Job

BACs help create high performing client/contractor teams. They encourage organisations to put forward their “best athletes for the job” not just in technical terms but in terms of behaviour as well. BACs help identify those that show the best capabilities to ensure a successful project where all objectives can be met.

### An Important part of the Procurement Process

Behavioural Assessment Centres used in tendering for contracts have been met with some scepticism.

*'You go along to a behavioural workshop and you're asked what your favourite colour is. Some says blue and everyone else agrees.'*

**Steve Farmer, Chief executive,**

**Mabey Hire, [www.nce.uk](http://www.nce.uk), 26.11.15, New Civil Engineer.**

*'.. when you know what you need to deliver you need to make sure you have the right capability and capacity in the team. So what mechanisms are there for assessing performance and identifying potential...'*

**Philomena Hayward,**  
**CIOB Column 2016**

Companies may have concerns that the client will choose the company they like the look of rather than the company who is best suited to carry out the work. This perhaps reflects the relative inexperience within the industry of using Assessment Centres in this way. It is important to remember that behaviours are key but are assessed alongside technical skills and experience: **both** are necessary. BACs are one element of the process. Crucially, the Behavioural Assessment Centre must be designed and delivered in line with best practice to ensure fair and optimal selection decisions and to avoid disputes and soured relationships further down the line.

### Our Top Tips for Participants

It is an exciting time for Behavioural Assessment Centres and what they can achieve. They will continue to be increasingly popular as part of contract tendering processes. A well-designed and delivered Assessment Centre is a highly rewarding experience for both client and tenderers. They will soon be accepted as being the norm, and as integral to a tender as the bid itself.

Working in collaboration with two global engineering and construction companies we have supported them in their approach to BACs by simulating the experience. This simulation enabled them to practice and be comfortable in the process, as well as understand how best to use the talent and experience of their team to full effect.



**We have produced the following top tips for participants on Behavioural Assessment Centres.**

## TOP TEN TIPS FOR PARTICIPANTS ON BEHAVIOURAL ASSESSMENT CENTRES



### BE YOURSELF

Do not try to be who you think the assessors want you to be. Showcase your talents – you are there for a reason. Do not overcompensate for what you perceive to be your weakness.



### LOOK FOR CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

Individually and as a team, review your performance during and after each exercise to draw out learning to apply straight away. Take each one as a new chance to shine and do not carryover any anxiety from previous exercises. Use a learning log to record your thoughts and assessor feedback.



### REMEMBER YOU ARE PART OF A TEAM

Be aware of those around you and your impact on them. Watch for their non-verbal feedback and signals. Be concise, do not "hog" air time.



### SET EACH EXERCISE UP FOR SUCCESS

Ask for clarification if unsure of what you are being asked to complete. Plan and manage your time. It can be easy to spend too much time on one aspect of the exercise.



### ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO HAVE THEIR SAY

You are there to help your colleagues shine as well. Find out and encourage their particular strengths, and take the opportunity to learn from them.



### BE AWARE OF LANGUAGE USED

If using company terminology be sure to explain what is meant. Use 'plain English' as much as possible.



### ARTICULATE YOUR IDEAS AUDIBLY AND CLEARLY

The assessors will not be able to give you positive marks for having a good idea in your head. Speak confidently about assumptions you are making. However, do not brain dump everything you are thinking!



### USE THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE TO STRETCH AND GROW

Whether or not you are successful, feedback from the Assessment Centre will help your team to focus on areas for improvement and development that will enhance your performance on the contract and in future Assessment Centres.



### BE AWARE OF YOUR BODY LANGUAGE AND POSITION

Be aware of your body language and position and the impact it may have on others, whether you are speaking or not. Don't turn your back on team-mates. Make eye contact with everyone, and always look engaged!



### PREPARE! FAMILIARISE YOURSELF WITH THE COMPETENCIES AND BACKGROUND MATERIAL

Be familiar with the bid and your CV. You may not have been involved in all areas of the bid. However, you may be involved in an exercise that refers to a particular section of the bid. You may have the opportunity to refer to previous projects during the Assessment Centre.