

# Determining Competence through Behavioural Interviewing

A workshop for HTAN presented on 25 March

## Introduction

Behavioural interviewing has been a recommended technique for selection interviewing for some years now. Unstructured selection interviewing has always been notoriously poor in guaranteeing a good outcome. Using the structure and rigour of the behavioural interviewing technique it has been found (and confirmed by academic research) that far better outcomes can be achieved than by use of unstructured interview techniques.

It is based upon the premise that *the best predictor of future performance is past performance*.

### References:

Janz, T. (1982). Initial comparisons of patterned behavior description interviews versus unstructured interviews. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 67(5), 577-580

Orpen, C. (1985). Patterned behaviour description interviews versus unstructured interviews: a comparative validity study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 70(4), 774-776.

## The RPL/RCC Interview

The same principles of behavioural interviewing have been found to be useful in structuring and conducting RPL/RCC interviews. Both selection interviews and RPL/RCC interviews have similar objectives – to find out if the candidate is able to do the job required.

## Recognition (RPL/RCC) Techniques

Usually, more than one method of evidence collection is required to infer competence through an RPL/RCC process. Figure 1 describes the common approaches used.

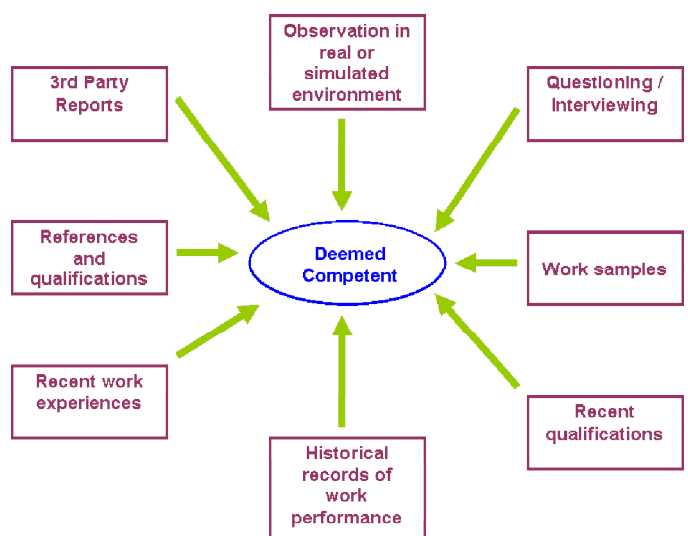


Figure 1: Methods used in gathering Recognition evidence.

The exact form of the processes and procedures that the assessor uses for Recognition will depend on the context in which the process takes place. This will include the location, purpose and circumstances of the candidate.

### **Rules of Evidence**

When evidence is being assessed it is critical that the assessor ensures that it meets the established rules of evidence.

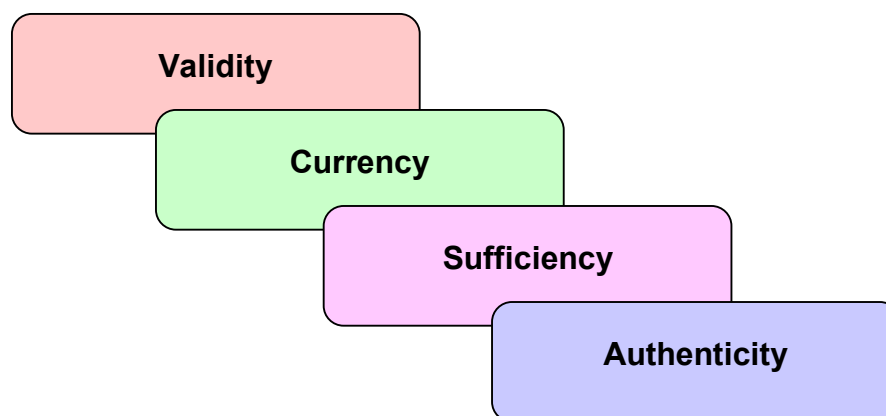


Figure 2: Established rules of evidence.

**Validity** – The assessor needs to ensure that the evidence provided by the candidate directly covers the unit(s) of competence for which they are seeking recognition.

**Currency** – While historical evidence can be used to confirm competence, it is critical that appropriate evidence is obtained to show that the candidate is *currently* able to use the skills and knowledge for which recognition is sought.

**Sufficiency** – While there is no exact amount of evidence that needs to be collected, assessors need to ensure that the candidate has provided enough to enable them to make a confident judgement that competence has been achieved. Sufficiency of evidence is really a question of the *coverage* of the unit of competency rather than the number of pieces of evidence collected by the assessor.

**Authenticity** – The assessor needs to ensure that the evidence collected is actually the work of the candidate and not of someone else. ‘*Triangulation*’ in evidence collection can assist here. (E.g. In the interview the candidate tells you that he/she has performed certain tasks and this is confirmed through third party reports.)

When using questioning in the evidence collection interview we must be mindful of these rules of evidence. The behavioural approach to questioning and evidence collection is built upon these principles.

### **Principles of Assessment**

The process of Recognition must also follow the principles of assessment to ensure that the candidate is treated appropriately.

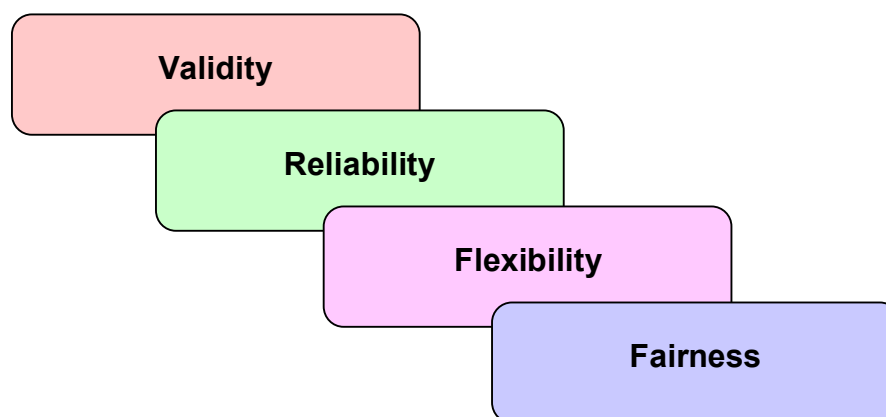


Figure 3: Principles of assessment.

**Validity** – the assessment evidence proves that the person has the skills in the relevant Unit of Competence, and that the candidate is not actually mistakenly being assessed against a different standard or criteria.

**Reliability** – another assessor would make the same decision.

**Flexibility** – the assessment is either on or off-the-job and at a mutually convenient time and situation.

**Fairness** – the method of collecting the evidence didn't make it more difficult than the level of the Unit of Competence requires.

The use of an interview may or may not meet these principles. It is the skill of the assessor to decide whether it is an appropriate tool in the mix of evidence collection. For example, a candidate from a non-English speaking background may find the preparation of portfolio of evidence to be quite daunting; however speaking to an assessor in an interview may be a far more *flexible* approach. On the other hand, if we have been provided with a very comprehensive portfolio of evidence then to also require the candidate to submit themselves to an interview it may not meet the requirement of *fairness*.

Remember also, in modern assessment we want to achieve an efficient process. Time is money. Interviews may be a very efficient way of completing a holistic Recognition assessment. On the other hand, we may be wasting time if we are trying to gather excessive amounts of evidence if we already have enough to make a judgement about competence.

### ***Synthesising and Judging Evidence***

A good practice Recognition process encourages the consideration and judgement of evidence in an holistic manner. It promotes consideration of evidence as a whole and its synthesis in terms of the requirements for a number of units of competence.

Fragmented, mechanical, criteria-by-criteria approaches to the collection of and judgement of evidence takes a lot of time and usually proves to be highly inefficient and ineffective. *(This last statement can be controversial. However this is why sufficiency is an important principle; so that holistic judgements can be made.)*

The preparation of questions for use in the interview requires that units of competence be interpreted holistically.

## **Interpersonal Skills for Use When Interviewing**

There are four important interpersonal skills that competent interviewers use. These are:

- Encouraging
- Asking
- Reflecting
- Summarising

The mnemonic also spells EARS; a reminder that we must use these skills if we are going to demonstrate good active listening techniques during the interview.

### ***Asking***

It is very difficult to start a conversation without asking a question. Questions fall into two types.

#### **Closed Questions.**

These type of questions give ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses.

**Advantages** – can be used to get confirmation of evidence gathered so far. Can also be used to ‘shut-down’ an overly talkative candidate.

**Disadvantages** – does not encouraging much talking from the candidate. Excessive use can make the interview sound more like an interrogation!

## Open Questions

These type of questions give expansive answers, usually containing much information.

**Advantages** – get the candidate talking, and helps put them at ease.

**Disadvantages** – you may be overwhelmed by the amount of information you are hearing!

## Encouraging

Making the sounds that will encourage the other person to continue talking. This behaviour shows that you are genuinely interested in allowing them to speak.

**Advantages** – demonstrates empathy with the candidate and encourages them to keep talking.

**Disadvantages** – if used excessively it can show lack of interest (not listening) or impatience.

## Reflecting

Repeating the last one or two words you have just heard. The length is rarely more than three or four words and the intention is to show that you are following, understanding and that you are interested. It is usually balanced with the use of the ‘encouraging’ skill (or used simultaneously).

**Advantages** – demonstrates empathy with the candidate and encourages them to keep talking.

**Disadvantages** – if used excessively it can make the conversation sound stilted – the interviewer sounds a bit like a parrot!

## Summarising

It is a summary of the key points the interviewer has gained from the conversation so far. Usually occurs about every two or three minutes. It is typically about two or three sentences in length.

**Advantages** – demonstrates to the candidate that the interviewer has paid close attention to the evidence being presented. Gives an opportunity to confirm that the interviewer has correctly interpreted what he or she was told by the candidate.

**Disadvantages** – there is no real disadvantage. It does however require concentration and work!

Summarising also pulls together the conversation so far and structures how it is to continue. This behaviour allows the discussion to keep on track and stops the other person going round in circles.

## Behavioural Evidence

Candidates (or job interviewees) will often try to ‘fudge’ their way through the interview by quoting hypothetical or theoretical responses to how they would propose that they would deal with certain situations. Behavioural interviewing rejects these ‘hypothetical’ responses and only accepts evidence in the form of past actual behaviour – actions, activities, etc that the candidate has actually done. It is not uncommon for a candidate to start by quoting a theoretical response to how they would deal with a situation. This can often be used by the skilled interviewer as the lead in to a good behavioural example.

To help the interviewer ensure that they have all the aspects required to make the evidence valid, a mnemonic has been developed. We call it the **PRO** technique:

**Problem or Position** – what was the problem, position or situation that the candidate needed to deal with?

**Response** – how did the candidate respond or deal with the position or situation they found themselves in? What skills and knowledge were used?

**Outcome** – having applied their skills and knowledge what was the outcome? Was it as expected (positive) or otherwise (negative?)

## Behavioural Example Exercise

Indicate if the following are complete behavioural examples, incomplete behavioural examples, or FALSE (i.e. hypothetical, theoretical, vague) examples.

Indicate:        *COMPLETE Example*  
                      *FALSE Example*  
                      Needs *PROBLEM/POSITION*  
                      Needs *RESPONSE*  
                      Needs *OUTCOME*

1. The radio transmitter failed whilst on high power. I switched over to low power and we were still able to continue to transmit the weather information to the ships at sea. All reports indicated that we were still received OK.
2. I was really great at dealing with employees about their Conditions of Employment problems. I really nipped them in the bud.
3. Ninety percent of typing was in the same format, so, instead of resetting the word processor's format every time, I set up a glossary which I could call up with one key stroke.
4. I overloaded the shredder with paper every time I used it until the day that it finally stopped working.
5. When I first started work in the store the inventory was in complete chaos. There was no standard way of handling incoming and outgoing goods.
6. I was responsible for the preparation and finally delivery of the company's annual report. I always made sure that my planning for this regular event was done well ahead of time, and that was usually satisfactory.
7. My boss allocated me the task of giving the proposal outline to the senior management team. They were very thorough, and asked difficult questions and raised interesting debating points. But at the conclusion they all voted to let us proceed to the next step of the project.
8. I prepared a help screen to be incorporated into the computer program. My colleagues later congratulated me for my efforts which made using the graphics program much easier than it had been.

## **Preparation**

### ***The Interview Panel***

It is assumed that those conducting the interview will be subject matter experts. This is so that areas of interest that are uncovered during the interview will be able to be explored further.

If possible, use two assessors on the interview panel. This enables one assessor to take notes while the other asks questions and engages with the candidate. Use of two assessors also helps with ensuring that the Rules of Evidence and Principles of Assessment are complied with. When it comes time to make a judgement of competence, use of two assessors can increase the reliability of the process.

### ***The Unit/s of Competence***

Familiarise yourself with the units of competence that the candidate is required to be assessed in. Are they the most up-to-date version of the units of competence? Training packages are regularly updated and it is not uncommon for units of competence to be significantly altered in this updating process. Check the Evidence Guide in each unit of competence as it will provide useful information for what specific behavioural evidence you should be seeking out in the interview.

### ***The Candidate***

What information do you already have on the candidate? Perhaps they have provided a portfolio of evidence? A work resume may provide guidance on the type of tasks and jobs the candidate has done previously that are applicable to the current assessment. What qualifications does the candidate hold?

By developing a background on the candidate you will be better placed to formulate questions and areas that need to be explored during the interview.

## **Interview Guide**

The use of a pre-prepared interview guide serves a number of purposes.

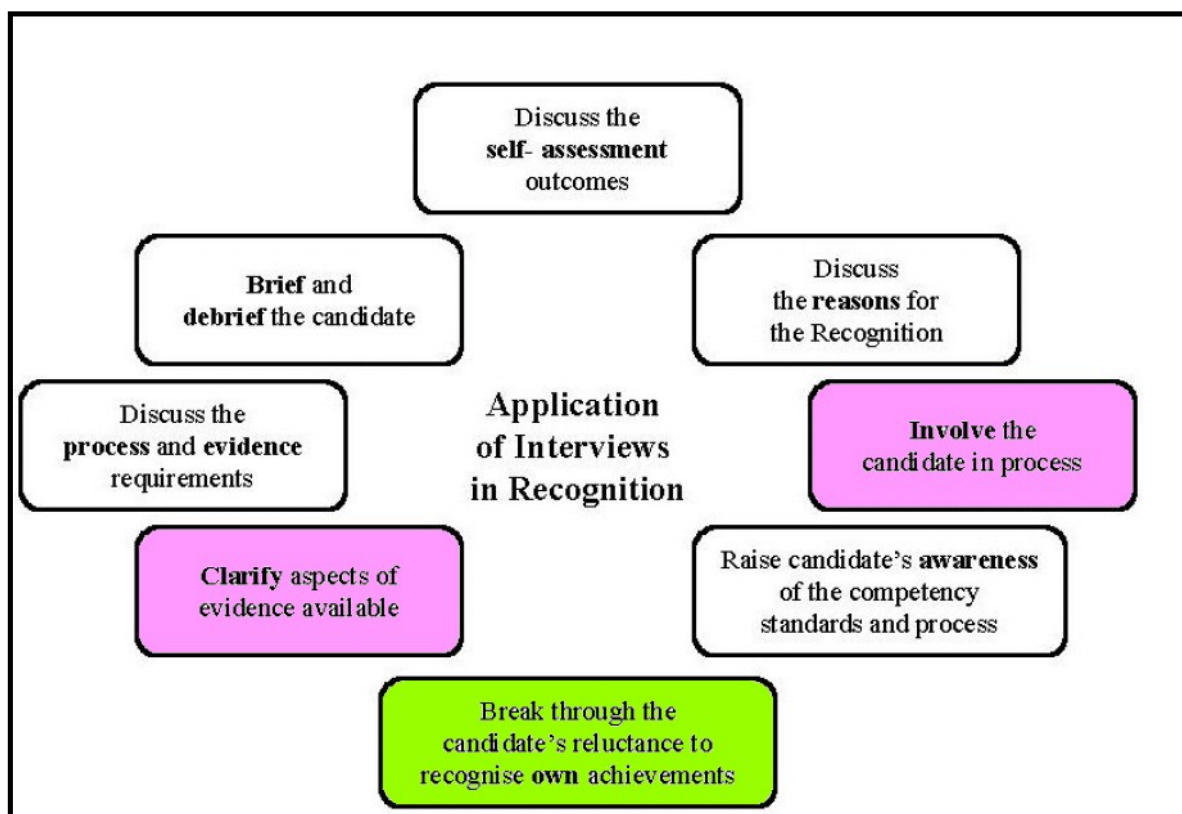
- i. It helps keep the interview structured and on track.
- ii. It forms a common record of conversation for assessors to share.
- iii. It can be used as the basis for providing feedback to the candidate.

- iv. It can be used as a part of the Record of Assessment that Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are required to keep after completion of the assessment.

The design/structure and appearance of the interview guide is one of personal preference. These notes include a style which the author has found in the past to be quite functional. The important aspect is that the interview guide should have adequate white space for writing the responses by the candidate, and one aspect of evidence per page.

### **Interview Structure**

The recognition interviews can serve a range of purposes. The following graphic shows what these purposes may be. (The colour has been used to emphasise where the behavioural evidence technique specifically fits.)



*Figure 4: Purposes of recognition interviews.*

In designing your interview guide you may choose to include some or all of these areas for discussion before proceeding to the behavioural evidence collection stage. This can have the added advantage of putting the candidate at ease.

The following page shows a typical template that may be used in behavioural interviewing.

<b>Candidate's Name</b>	
<b>Date of Recognition Interview</b>	
<b>Unit/s of competence being assessed:</b>	

*Aspect/Dimension of Evidence Being Explored:*.....

*Question:*.....  
.....

<b>Problem/Position</b>
<b>Response</b>
<b>Outcome</b>
<b>(Areas requiring further exploration)</b>

## **Participant Exercise**

Using the Unit of Competency, BSBFLM309C: Support continuous improvement systems and processes -

- a. Review the unit of competence and consider how it may be synthesised (or considered ‘holistically’) when gathering evidence at interview.
- b. What dimensions or aspects would you therefore want to explore at interview.
- c. Formulate behavioural-based questions that you would use during the recognition interview to check for evidence of past behaviour.
- d. Be prepared to test those questions and your interviewing technique in a simulated role play.

### ***Aspects to explore at interview***

### ***Questions to use in interview***

## **BSBFLM309C: Support continuous improvement systems and processes**

### **Description**

This unit specifies the outcomes required to support the organisation's continuous improvement systems and processes. Particular emphasis is on actively encouraging the team to participate in the process, on monitoring and reporting on specified outcomes and on supporting opportunities for further improvements. No licensing, legislative, regulatory or certification requirements apply to this unit at the time of endorsement.

### **Employability Skills**

This unit contains employability skills.

### **Application Of Unit**

This unit replaces BSBFLM309A Support continuous improvement systems and processes.

Frontline managers have an active role in supporting continuous improvement processes in achieving the organisation's objectives. Their position, closely associated with the creation and delivery of products and services, means that they have an important responsibility in influencing the ongoing development of the organisation.

At this level, work will normally be carried out within known routines, methods and procedures, and may also involve a number of complex or non-routine activities that require some discretion and judgement.

Consider co-assessment with BSBFLM305C Support operational plan, BSBFLM312B Contribute to team effectiveness, BSBCUS301A Deliver and monitor a service to customers, BSBCMN311B Maintain workplace safety, and BSBFLM311C Support a workplace learning environment.

### **Unit Sector**

No sector assigned

### **Performance criteria**

<b>Element</b>	<b>Performance criteria</b>
1. Contribute to continuous improvement systems and processes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.1 Actively encourage and support team members to participate in decision making processes and to assume responsibility and exercise initiative</li><li>1.2 Communicate the organisation's continuous improvement processes to individuals and teams</li><li>1.3 Effectively utilise <b>mentoring and coaching</b> to ensure that individuals/teams are able to support the organisation's continuous improvement processes</li></ol>

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 2. Monitor and report on specified outcomes      | 2.1 Utilise the organisation's <b>systems</b> and <b>technology</b> to monitor team progress and to identify ways in which planning and operations could be improved |
|  | 2.2 Apply continuous improvement techniques and processes to improve <b>customer service</b>   |
| 3. Support opportunities for further improvement | 3.1 Communicate <b>agreed recommendations</b> for improvements in achieving the business plan to team members  |
|  | 3.2 Document and use work performance to identify opportunities for further improvement  |
|  | 3.3 Maintain records, reports and recommendations for improvement within the organisation's systems and processes  |

## Skills and Knowledge

### Required skills

- ability to relate to people from a range of social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and physical and mental abilities
- functional literacy skills to access and use workplace information
- research, analysis, interpretation and reporting skills
- monitoring and evaluation skills
- communication skills to:
  - gain the commitment of individuals and teams to continuous improvement
  - deal with people openly and fairly
  - use consultation skills effectively
- skills to consolidate opportunities for improvement
- coaching and mentoring skills to provide support to colleagues.

### Required knowledge

- legislation from all levels of government that affects business operation, especially in regard to occupational health and safety and environmental issues, equal opportunity, industrial relations and anti-discrimination
- principles and techniques of:
  - continuous improvement systems and processes
  - benchmarking
  - best practice
- benefits of continuous improvement
- quality approaches which the organisation may implement
- methods that can be used in continuous improvement
- barriers to continuous improvement
- recording, reporting and recommendation processes to facilitate continuous improvement applied within the organisation.

### Range statement

The range statement relates to the unit of competency as a whole. It allows for different work environments and situations that may affect performance. Bold italicised wording,

if used in the performance criteria, is detailed below. Essential operating conditions that may be present with training and assessment (depending on the work situation, needs of the candidate, accessibility of the item, and local industry and regional contexts) may also be included.

Legislation, codes and national standards relevant to the workplace may include:

- award and enterprise agreements and relevant industrial instruments
- relevant legislation from all levels of government that affects business operation, especially in regard to occupational health and safety (OHS) and environmental issues, equal opportunity, industrial relations and anti-discrimination
- relevant industry codes of practice

OHS considerations may include:

- provision of information about OHS legislative requirements and guidelines, and the organisation's OHS policies, procedures and programs
- participation in the regular update of OHS systems and procedures
- implementation of the continuous improvement processes of the OHS management system
- changes to work practices, procedures and the working environment which impact on OHS
- organisation's responsibilities to customers and suppliers

Methods used to **communicate** with individuals and team may include:

- verbal, written or electronic communications
- on-the-job mentoring and coaching

Continuous improvement processes may include:

- policies and procedures which allow an organisation to systematically review and improve the quality of its products, services and procedures
- cyclical audits and reviews of workplace, team and individual performance
- seeking and considering feedback from a range of stakeholders
- modifications and improvements to systems, processes, services and products
- evaluations and monitoring of effectiveness

Mentoring and coaching may refer to:

- teaching another member of the team, usually focusing on a specific work task or skill
- providing feedback, support and encouragement on a range of matters
- providing assistance with problem solving

Systems may include:

- organisation policies and procedures
- web based communication devices
- attendance at forums, meetings
- newsletters and reports

Technology may include:

- computerised systems and software such as databases, project management and word-processing

- telecommunications devices
  - any other technology used to carry out work roles and responsibilities
- Customer service may be:
- internal or external, to existing or new clients
  - identifying needs and priorities in delivering a service to customers
  - understanding of different levels of customer satisfaction
- Agreed recommendations may be:
- identified improvements arising from the continuous improvement process
  - determined in accordance with organisational policies and procedures

## Evidence guide

The evidence guide provides advice on assessment and must be read in conjunction with the performance criteria, required skills and knowledge, range statement and the Assessment Guidelines for the Training Package.

### Overview of assessment

#### Critical aspects for assessment and evidence required to demonstrate competency in this unit

Evidence of the following is essential:

- examples of actions taken by the candidate to support continuous improvement including:
- use of work performance to identify improvement
- adjusted plans to reflect changes
- effective communication to all stakeholders
- use of technology to monitor operational progress
- application of suitable recordkeeping processes.

#### Context of and specific resources for assessment

Assessment must ensure:

- access by the learner and trainer to appropriate documentation and resources normally used in the workplace
- that this unit is assessed in the workplace or in a closely simulated work environment.

#### Method of assessment

A range of assessment methods should be used to assess skills and knowledge. The following examples are appropriate for this unit:

- Direct questioning combined with review of portfolios of evidence and third party workplace reports of on-the-job performance by the candidate
- Review of records supporting the organisation's continuous improvement systems and processes, such as:
  - contributions to organisational policies and procedures

- contributions to procedures and policies for dealing with continuous improvement processes, and related codes of conduct
- actions taken to address information collection, retrieval and use in the workplace
- actions taken to address issues and problems within work team
- actions taken to address methods of reporting information
- learning and development plans for team members
- materials developed for coaching, mentoring and training
- induction programs developed and/or delivered
- actions taken to address internal and external information management issues
- reviews of people management
- advice and input into management decisions related to continuous improvement
- records of people management lessons learned.

**Guidance information  
for assessment**

This unit should be assessed with other frontline management units taken as part of this qualification, as applicable to the candidate's leadership role in a work team, and as part of a holistic assessment activity.

## References

Some of the content for this workshop has been developed from the kit of resource materials developed for workplace assessors by the Australian National Training Authority in 2001.

2001. The Training Package Assessment Materials Project – Guide 3. Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs / Australian National Training Authority. ISBN 0 642 25439 7

It can be purchased from Australian Training Products. [www.atpl.net.au](http://www.atpl.net.au) using the ATP Stockcode 1700103R

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Organisations who may be interested in having similar workshops run, or who wish to discuss the concept further, can contact the author, David Neyle at:

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