

Assessment Centers: What's New

Assessment center issues that have emerged and the resulting trends

A presentation by Dennis A. Joiner

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Issue: ACs What Are They?

- ◆ Multiple Job Simulation Exercises
- ◆ Opportunity for Candidates to Demonstrate KSAs
- ◆ Standardized Evaluation by Multiple Trained Observers Using Multiple Testing Techniques
- ◆ "Not a Place"

Issue: Why Use ACs?

- ◆ Legal Issues
- ◆ Employee Associations
- ◆ Fairness
- ◆ Validity

Issue: How to Justify the Cost

- ◆ Public Sector: Primarily Consequences of Less Defensible Methods = Fear of Litigation
- ◆ Private Sector: Primarily Cost Benefit Analysis = Return on Investment (300+%)
- ◆ Public & Private = Higher Validity
 - ☞ Private More a Utility Issue
 - ☞ Public More a Face Validity and Candidate Acceptance Issue

Issue: Purpose of Assessment

or How are the Assessment Results Used?

- ◆ Employee Selection
- ◆ Promotion
- ◆ Career Development and Training
 - ☞ Organizational Development
 - ☞ Individual Development
 - ☞ Skills Banking/Workforce Reallocation
 - ☞ Targeted Training “Rifle vs Shotgun”

Issue: Candidate Orientation

- ◆ Reduce Test Anxiety
- ◆ "Level the Playing Field"
- ◆ Undo Misconceptions

Issue: Goals of Orientation vs. Career Development vs. Candidate Training

- ◆ Orientation = Reduce Test Stress
- ◆ Career Development = Skills Development
- ◆ Candidate Training = Make Money for Trainer

Issue: Candidate Orientation Methods

- ◆ Written Information
- ◆ Live Orientation Session(s)
- ◆ Video Tapes/Video Technology
 - ☞ Viewed During Live Orientation
 - ☞ Viewed at Work Sites
 - ☞ Viewed at Home

Issue: What ACs Don't Measure Well

- ◆ Technical Knowledge - Better Methods Exist
- ◆ Past Performance/Track Record/Motivation on the Job
- ◆ Candidate May Have Skills, but May Not Apply those Skills on the Job

ACs = Skills Assessment Snapshot

"Not a Panacea!"

Issue: How to Score Candidates - the Search for the Best Scoring Model

- ◆ Consensus (Traditional)
- ◆ Mechanical (Statistical)
- ◆ Combination Methods

Issue: How Much Assessor Training?

- ◆ One Day vs. Two Days or More
- ◆ Private Sector vs. Public Sector
(Traditional Model vs. Streamlined)
- ◆ Behavioral Recording vs. Frame of Reference Training Model

Issue: What are ACs Actually Assessing?

- ◆ Behavioral Dimensions vs. Exercise Performance (Exercise Effect)
- ◆ Dimensions vs. Tasks vs. Competencies

The KEY is a Structured Evaluation of Job Relevant Worker Characteristics

Issue: How to Reduce the Costs?

◆ Screening Down Candidate Group

☞ Technical Knowledge Written Tests

☞ Written Exercises (Inbaskets, etc.)

☞ Situational Judgment Tests (SJTs)

Some Jurisdictions using SJTs to Screen Down

- City of Anaheim, California
- City of Lakeland, Florida
- City of Minneapolis, Minnesota
- City of St. Paul, Minnesota
- East Bay Municipal Utility District, California
- King County, Washington
- State of New Jersey
- State of Nevada
- University of California Police Department
- Washoe County, Nevada

Sample/Example SJT Item

You have noticed that there is a lack of cooperation and trust among the employees in the organization you manage. This counter productive behavior is adversely affecting both the quality and the quantity of the work produced by the employees. You would . . .

- A. Inform the employees that failure to cooperate and work harmoniously will result in disciplinary action.
- B. Bring in someone to do some team building with the employees.
- C. Meet with the employees to discuss your observations and identify the cause of the interpersonal problems.
- D. Change some of the work assignments in order to attain a more cohesive and cooperative work group.

1. Most Likely _____ 2. Least Likely _____

Issue: How to Reduce the Costs?

- ◆ Streamlining the Process
 - ☞ Multiple Choice Inbaskets
 - ☞ Item-Rated Inbaskets
 - ☞ Multiple Hurdle AC Components
 - ☞ Reduction in Scope of AC
 - ☞ Less Exercises
 - ☞ Shorter Exercises
 - ☞ Assessor Checklists vs. Narrative Descriptions

Issue: How to Reduce the Costs?

◆ Cross-Classification Assessment Centers

- ☞ City of Los Angeles - combined testing for common management tasks
- ☞ State of Alabama - one management AC for 27 management job classifications
- ☞ State of New Jersey - day in the life of a supervisor test for all supervisory jobs

Issue: New Technology - How Used?

◆ Use of Computers

- ☞ Candidates - Use Optional vs. Required
- ☞ Assessors - Rating Form Templates
- ☞ Staff - Spreadsheets for Mechanical Scoring Models

Issue: New Technology - How Used?

◆ Use of Video

☞ Stimuli for Candidate Response

Example: Fire Code Inspection Video Exercise

☞ Video of Candidates' Responses

Example: Jefferson Co. Alabama - Police and Fire

☞ Total Video Programs

Example: Washington State Patrol Sergeant AC

Issue: New Exercise - SJT Spin Off

◆ The “Multiple Situations” Exercise:

- ☞ Some Situations Require a Written Response
- ☞ Some Situations Require an Oral Response with Preparation Time
- ☞ Some Situations Require an Immediate Oral Response without Preparation Time

You Can Also Incorporate a Multiple-Choice Format SJT into AC as a Weighted Component.

Issue: Multiple Situations Exercise

Pros and Cons

- ➡ Advantage = Covers Multiple Types of Critical Job Tasks through the use of Multiple Scenarios
- ➡ Disadvantage = Not a True "Simulation" of the Job since Candidates Describe What They "Would" Do vs. Demonstration of How They Would Do It
- ➡ Issue is Breadth of Exercise vs. Depth

Some Jurisdictions using Multiple Situations Exercises

- City of Anaheim, California
- City of Corpus Christi, TX
- City of Oakland, California
- City of San Diego, California
- City of St. Paul, Minnesota
- East Bay Municipal Utility District, California
- Clark County County, Nevada
- King County, Washington
- University of California - Davis

Further Reading/Handouts

- ◆ Assessment Centers: What's New?
Joiner, D.A., IPMA-HR's Public Personnel Management Journal (PPM), Summer 2002
- ◆ Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations,
International Task Force on Assessment Center Guidelines (2000) in PPM, Fall 2000
(Available online at Assessmentcenters.org)

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