Developing Organizational Simulations

The decision to “make or buy” organizational simulation exercises for assessment centers is quite complex (Pritchard, S. & Riley, P., 2011). Situations calling for an organization to make unique custom simulations include: the need for organization-specific content; the need to revise and adapt exercises for each annual administration, for example, for security reasons in high-stakes promotion; financial constraints precluding buying from vendors; desire of HR staff to build the exercises.

The program will provide guidance on how to build reliable and valid simulation exercises. A model with three phases of simulation construction will be presented: (1) job/competency/situation analyses, (2) building and pretesting case material including instructions and assessor supports, and (3) establishing evidence of reliability and validity and legal defensibility. Specific set of steps in each phase will be presented, including tips for writing case materials. Examples of the three phases, specific steps, and practical tips will be provided for different types of exercises, e.g., group discussion, case study, and simulation of a performance review with a subordinate (role play). Practical applications of trait activation theory will be woven throughout the presentation to show how to elicit behaviors relevant to specified dimensions and competencies. Options for using technology to make simulation more efficient will be described.

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Dr. Thornton is Professor Emeritus of Psychology, Colorado State University. Dr. Thornton earned his Ph.D. from Purdue University in 1966. He is a Diplomate in Industrial/ Organization Psychology awarded by the American Board of Industrial/Organizational Psychology, and a Fellow of the Society of Industrial and Organizational.

Dr. Thornton specializes in assessment centers, selection practices, test development and validation, and implications of employment discrimination law for personnel psychology. He has developed, validated, and implemented assessment centers and other situational exercises for selection and development for numerous jobs.

Dr. Thornton is the author of numerous publications on assessment center matters including refereed journal articles, book chapters, and two recent books, Assessment Centers In Human Resource Management: Strategies for prediction, diagnosis, and development (2006 with Deborah Rupp) and Developing Organizational Simulations: A Guide for Practitioners and Students (2004 with Rose Mueller-Hanson). He is currently co-editing a book, with Nigel Povah, Assessment and Development Centres: Strategies of Global Talent Management, which consists of chapters by more than 40 authors from 19 countries spanning five continents.

Dr. Thornton has made presentations on the assessment center method to professional conferences such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the International Congress on Assessment Center Methods, and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, and to professional
audiences throughout the United States, and in Germany, Switzerland, England, Israel, South Africa, Indonesia, Korea, Singapore, Brazil, Costa Rica, and China.