ACSG

Guidelines for Assessment and Development Centres in South Africa

Fourth Edition 2007
Assessment Centre Study Group

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FOREWORD

It is with pride that the Assessment Centre Study Group of South Africa presents the 4th edition of Assessment and Development Centre guidelines for South Africa.

There were two main objectives for the revision, it was *firstly* decided to revise the 1999 guidelines to ensure that the South African guidelines are aligned to the 2000 international guidelines and that they incorporate the 2006 Professional Guidelines for global ACs. The *second* reason was the incorporation of DACs as part of the guidelines and at the same time to focus on the cross-cultural application of ACs and DACs in South Africa.

The current document provides guidelines for practitioners to ensure that ACs and DACs keep track, comply with scientific requirements and international best practices. There is a continuous need for updating these guidelines and the Assessment Centre Study Group will continue to play a central role in updating these guidelines for South Africa in the future. We hope that this guideline document will be helpful to practitioners, scientists and students as a reference and a guide on current best practices, globally and in South Africa.

Prof Deon Meiring
Task Group Chairman

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2. Aim and Goals of the Guidelines

The fourth edition of the Assessment Centre (AC) and Development Assessment Centre (DAC) guidelines for South Africa was compiled by the Assessment Centre Study Group (ACSG) of South Africa during 2007. The intended aim of this document is to establish professional guidelines and communicate ethical considerations for users of ACs and DACs in South Africa. The guidelines have been updated to help establish the effective design, implementation and evaluation of ACs and DACS in the workplace.

The goals of the guidelines are to provide; (1) guidance to industrial and organisational psychologists, organisational consultants, human resources management specialists and generalists and others designing and conducting ACs and; (2) information to managers who decide whether or not to institute an AC or a DAC; and (3) instructions to assessors serving on the staff of an AC or a DAC.

Note: The guidelines encompass both ACs and DACs. Whilst the purpose and design of an AC will differ from that of a DAC; their constituent features have broad similarities. The key references used when compiling these guidelines are listed under references. The Assessment Centre Study Group wish to gratefully acknowledge the use of the international guidelines and related documents for the 4th edition guidelines for assessment and development assessment centres in South Africa. A full account of the development of AC guidelines both internationally and in South Africa is given in the appendix.

3.   What are ACs and DACs?

3.1   Defining ACs and DACs

An AC is a multiple assessment process where a group of participants takes part in a variety of exercises observed by a team of trained assessors who evaluate each participant against a number of predetermined, job related behaviours (competencies). Decisions are then made by pooling shared data (Ballantyne & Povah, 2004).

A DAC is a collection of workplace simulation exercises and other assessments that provide individuals with practice, feedback, and developmental coaching on a set of developable behavioural dimensions found to be critical for their professional success (Thornton & Rupp, 2003).

3.2   Key Features of ACs and DACs

ACs and DACs gained wide recognition in South Africa as a systematic and rigorous means of identifying behaviour relevant to job-related competencies (or dimensions) for the purposes of recruitment, selection, promotion and development within the workplace.

Good ACs and DACs provide the following benefits:

- Highly relevant, observable and comprehensive information;
- Effective decision making, including workplace planning;
- Added fairness from multiple judgments (versus single judgments);
- An enhanced image of the organisation among participants;
- An effective preview of the role or job level;

- Developmental pay-offs to participants arising from the self insight obtained;
- Developmental pay-offs to assessors arising from involvement in the process;
- A legally defensible selection system; and
- A method of assessment that predicts work performance.

ACs and DACs have a number of key features:
- They are one assessment process consisting of multiple assessment techniques and there are various ways in which that is so;
- A group of participants take part in a variety of behavioural simulation exercises and they are observed by a team of trained assessors.
- The assessors evaluate each participant against a number of predetermined, job-related behavioural dimensions; and
- Decisions for assessment or development are then made by pooling the available data.

Each of these features is described below:

Combination of Methods
The focal point of ACs and DACs is the use of behavioural simulation exercises. These exercises are not meant to replicate a job. They are simulations of situations that the participants may encounter in a specific job. The purpose of these exercises is to elicit the behavioural dimensions (or competencies) that have to be assessed. To gain a full understanding of a person's range of competencies at least two simulation exercises should be used.

Example of Exercises

Exercises	Description
Presentation	Simulations of delivering formal "stand up" speech about some subject matter to someone in authority
Group discussion	Team interaction exercise based on around given information
One-to-one role-play	Communication/negotiation exercise within a one-to-one interaction context
Leaderless group discussion	Participants work in groups of 4-6 to solve a problem or make a decision within a specified period of time
Oral fact finding	Participant is given a short description of a situation that has occurred or a decision that has been made but is now being challenged
In-tray / in-basket / e-basket	Simulations of role-based in-tray, in-box, email inbox requiring action and prioritisation
Written analysis	Written problem analysis exercise against work-based issues
Fact finding	A communication exercise requiring analytical and information gathering skills

Team of Assessors

In ACs and DACs a team of assessors are used to do the assessment. To improve objectivity, each assessor should observe each participant in at least one of the various simulation exercises. Each assessor needs appropriate training in the ORCE technique (Observing, Recording, Classifying and Evaluating behaviour) and applying the technique to the particular exercises that are used. In addition to this, frame-of-reference training

should be conducted. Wherever possible, the trained assessors should be representative of the diversity of the people they will be observing (diversity in terms of ethnicity, gender and age).

Job-Related Behavioural Dimensions

The starting point of an AC is an analysis of the job (or perhaps job level) to determine the critical competencies that discriminate between the performance of good and poor job incumbents. The number of competencies should not be excessive (typically no more than 10) otherwise effective measurement of the competencies becomes extremely difficult. Other aspects of appropriate job analysis include understanding the context in which the competencies manifest themselves and the level of difficulty of common problems encountered in the job.

Shared Data

Data about participants are shared between assessors at the end of the assessment process. In the case of selection, no final decision is made until all the evidence is gathered from observations of candidates in all the various simulation exercises. In ACs competency scores should be aggregated across exercises (through consensus discussion or statistically), and then the overall assessment rating (OAR) is computed by aggregating across overall competency scores (either through consensus discussion or statistically. In some DACs, the data is shared with the participants as the DAC progresses.

3.3   Criteria for Defining ACs and DACs

An AC consists of a standardised evaluation of behaviour based on multiple inputs. Multiple trained observers and techniques are used and judgments

about behaviour are made primarily from specifically developed simulation exercises. These judgments are pooled in a discussion session with the assessors or by a statistical integration process (International Task Force, 2000). In a data integration discussion session, comprehensive accounts of behaviour, and often ratings thereof, are pooled and the discussion results in an evaluation of the performance of the participant relative to the competencies or other variables which the AC is designed to measure. Simulations or other assessment instruments should be validated in accordance with professionally accepted guidelines before they are used in the AC/DAC. The following criteria determine when a procedure may be termed an "AC".

Job Analysis

South African law states that a job applicant may only be assessed on the inherent requirements of a job. A job analysis must therefore be conducted to determine the competencies, attributes, characteristics, qualities, skills, abilities, motivation, knowledge or tasks that are necessary for effective job performance and to identify what should be evaluated by the AC. The context in which the job is performed is also an important variable to be understood. Therefore, the job analysis should be conducted by trained and experienced job analysts in order to ensure that the data obtained in the job analysis process is valid. The type and extent of the job analysis methodology used will depend on the purpose of the assessment, the complexity of the job, the level of risk to take a wrong decision and the adequacy and appropriateness of prior information gathered about the job. If previous job analyses and research are used to select competencies and exercises for a new job, evidence of the comparability of the jobs must be provided. When the job does not currently exist, analyses can be done of actual projected tasks that will be required in the new job.

Simulation Exercises

The assessment techniques must include simulation exercises to sufficiently allow multiple opportunities to observe the candidate's behaviour relative to each competency being assessed. A simulation is an exercise or technique designed to elicit behaviours related to job competencies. Simulation exercises simulate work tasks issues and problems rather than replicate them. Simulation exercises require the participants to respond behaviourally in a given situation so that the participant's competencies may be measured. Examples of simulation exercises may include group exercises, in-basket exercises, role-play exercises and fact finding exercises. If a single comprehensive assessment technique is used, then it must include distinct job-related segments. For simple jobs, one or two job-related simulations may be used if the job analysis clearly indicates that only one or two simulations will sufficiently simulate a substantial portion of the job being evaluated.

Assessment Matrix

A matrix should be drawn up to indicate which competencies are measured by which simulation exercises and by which psychometric instruments (such as a personality questionnaire or aptitude test). As a rule of thumb, each competency should be measured by more than one AC component. It is not advisable to have more than 5-7 competencies per exercise because that makes it difficult for assessors to make important distinctions between them.

Behavioral Observations

Assessors must classify their behavioural observations into meaningful and relevant categories, such as dimensions, competencies, attributes, characteristics, aptitudes, qualities, skills, abilities, knowledge or tasks.

The term "competencies" rather than dimensions is most commonly used by South African AC users and is used in this document for purposes of simplicity. The techniques used in the AC must be designed to provide information for evaluating the competencies previously determined by job analysis.

Informed Consent

Participants need to know the purpose of the AC or DAC and how the data will be gathered. How the data will be used and stored and who will have access to that data must be communicated (preferably in writing) to the participants prior to the AC or DAC. The participants should also have the opportunity to agree that their data may be used for the stated purposes. Participants are also entitled to feedback.

Multiple Assessment Techniques

A variety of assessment techniques must be used to ensure that each competency is measured in more than one way. These can include tests, interviews, questionnaires, and simulations. The assessment techniques are developed or selected to elicit a variety of behaviours and other information relevant to the predetermined competencies required for job success. The assessment techniques must be pre-tested prior to their use so as to ensure that the techniques provide reliable, objective and relevant behavioural information for the organisation and for the position in question. Pre-testing may entail piloting the AC with participants similar to those that will be assessed.

Peer- and self assessments (for example 360° assessments) may be gathered as additional assessment information, especially in the case of a DAC.

Multiple Assessors

To enhance objectivity a number of assessors must be used to observe each participant. When selecting a group of assessors the following characteristics should be considered: diversity of ethnicity, age, gender and functional work area. Each participant is observed and assessed by more than one assessor. In other words, no participant should be observed by the same assessor on all the simulation exercises and each participant should be observed by more than one assessor in each simulation exercise.

The Ratio of Participants to Assessors

The maximum ratio of participants to assessors is a function of several variables, which include the type of exercises used, the competencies assessed, the roles of the assessors, the type of integration carried out, the amount of training received by the assessors, the experience levels of the assessors, the support documentation that the observer is using and the purpose of the AC. A typical ratio of participants to assessors is two to one. A participant's supervisor should not assess him/her in an AC or DAC.

Observation and Recording of Behaviour

A systematic procedure must be used by assessors to accurately record specific behavioural observations at the time of their occurrence. This might involve handwritten notes, structured rating forms, behavioural observations scales (e.g., BARS) and behavioural checklists. Audio and visual equipment can also be used to record all activities.

Data Integration

Assessors initially rate participants' performances independently before the data integration meeting.

The integration of ratings is then based on a pooling of information from assessors or through a statistical integration process that is validated in accordance with professionally accepted standards. During the data integration session, assessors should report on information gathered and behaviours observed from the various assessment techniques. Assessors should refrain from sharing information that is irrelevant to the purpose of the assessment process. The integration of information may be accomplished by consensus or by some other method of arriving at a joint decision. Assessor evaluations of information that is reported in the assessor discussion must be supported by tangible evidence that shows reliable and valid aggregations of the observations. Assessors must prepare a report or record of the observations made in each exercise in preparation for the data integration discussion.

Feedback and Reports

For selection ACs the matrix is normally given to management, with applicants only receiving a pass or fail feedback. Only management receives integrated summary reports indicating the performance of all participants. In DACs verbal feedback and written reports are provided to participants. Written reports normally include a completed assessment matrix for each participant, indicating the ratings obtained on the assessed competencies and further development suggestions.

3.4   Differences between ACs and DACs

Some ACs are conducted purely for the purpose of assessment e.g., in the case of a centre that is conducted for the purposes of selecting the most suitable candidate for a vacant position.

Others, on the other hand, can be conducted purely for development purposes. Whilst a number of organisations today use hybrid AC/DAC models (Thornton & Rupp, 2006 advise against the use of hybrid centres) where candidates compete for a specific position and they receive personalised, development feedback, it is useful to clarify the factors that distinguish between "pure" ACs and DACs. These differences are tabulated below:

Assessment Centre	Development Centre
Constructed primarily for selection, recruitment, fast tracking and promotion.	Designed to identify potential and to establish training needs.
Are pass/fail events. That is the individual may lose something by attending the event e.g., he/she may not be selected for the position.	Are not pass/fail events. That is the individual will gain by attending the event e.g. he/she will be given feedback on strengths and development areas and this information will feed into his/her development plan.
Criteria for AC is future job performance.	Criteria for DAC is learning, development and improvement .
Shorter and less costly.	Longer and more expensive.
Feedback is usually given after the process.	Usually contains feedback to the participants as part of the process.
Feedback to management is very specific and focuses on the individual participant.	Feedback to management may be on a general level – not singling out any specific individual.
Ownership of the AC information rests with the organisation.	Ownership of the development centre data rests with the individual participant.
The AC does not include development activities although the information gathered may be used to initiate them at a later	Feedback and development occurs during or at the end of the development centre.

date.	
ACs are usually geared towards filling an immediate organisational need.	DACs are geared toward filling a longer term organisational need.
The ratio of assessors to participants is usually in the region of 1:3 or 1:4.	The ratio of assessors to participants can be 1:1 or 1:2.
Usually don't involve line managers as observers.	May involve line managers as assessors.
Focus on future performance.	Focus on potential. The design of the centre gives participants the opportunity to try out alternative ways of behaving and to practice new skills.
Have very little pre-centre briefing.	Have a substantial pre-centre briefing.
Tend to be used with external candidates.	Tend to be used with internal candidates.
Use assessors.	Use facilitators or observers.
The assessor's role is to assess.	The assessors role is to assess and give feedback (and are thus sometimes referred to as facilitators)
Have candidates participate in the centre.	Have delegates or participants participate in the centre.

4.   Implementing ACs and DACs

4.1   Organisational Policy

ACs or DACs need to operate as a part of a human resources management system.

Prior to the introduction of a centre into an organisation a policy statement should be prepared and approved by the organisation. This policy statement should address the following areas:

Objective and Purpose

The reasons why the organisation is using an AC or a DAC should be identified. These may be related to recruitment and selection, diagnosis for development, early identification, affirmative action, evaluation of competencies, succession planning or any combination of these. The intended benefits to the organisation and the candidates when using the AC/DAC should also be identified.

Participants

The population to be assessed, the method for selecting participants from this population: procedures for the notification of participants and a policy statement related to assessing in general should be specified. It should also be clear whether participation is compulsory or voluntary. Where appropriate, the alternatives to participation, the consequences of non-participation and the conditions under which reassessment takes place should also be made clear.

Assessors

The assessor population (including sex and ethnic mix), limitations on use of assessors, the number of times a particular assessor has been assigned, the evaluation of assessor performance and the certification requirements, where applicable, should also be specified.

Use of Data

The flow of assessment records, criteria for decision-making (if applicable to recruitment, selection or promotion), who receives reports, any restrictions on access to information, the procedures and controls for research and program evaluation purpose, feedback procedures to management and to the participant, as

well as the length of time that data will be kept should be specified.

Qualifications of Consultant(s)

The internal or external consultants responsible for the development of the centre should be identified and their professional qualifications and related training listed (see point 4.2).

Validation

There should be a statement specifying the validation model being used. If a content oriented validation strategy is used, documentation of the relationship of the job content to the competencies and exercises should be presented along with evidence of reliability in observation and rating of behaviour. If evidence is being taken from prior validation research, which may have been summarised in meta-analyses, the organisation must document that the current job and AC are comparable to the jobs and ACs studied elsewhere. If local validation has been carried out, full documentation of the study should be provided. If validation studies are underway, there should be a time schedule indicating when a validation report will be available.

4.2 Training issues in AC & DAC

Participants at an AC or a DAC should have clarity on their role, accountabilities and responsibilities.

They should be trained to fulfil these roles, accountabilities and responsibilities effectively. Theoretical knowledge and a professional qualification on their own do not automatically qualify a person to fulfil any of these roles, accountabilities and responsibilities.

Training of Assessor(s)/Facilitator(s)

Assessors function mostly (not exclusively) during ACs while facilitators function mostly during DACs. The assessor's role is to accurately observe, note, classify and evaluate participant behaviour according to the applicable competencies and norms at the AC. The assessor also needs to complete all AC documentation accurately and comprehensively.

In a DAC, a facilitator assists candidates to gain insight in their own behaviour. He/she also help candidates to get a better understanding of their behaviour on the environment. The facilitator is accountable to ensure that the candidate experiences the DAC as a positive learning experience.

The minimum qualification recommended for an assessor is an honours or masters degree in behavioural science (e.g. Industrial Psychology; Human Resources Management, etc.). If it is a line manager fulfilling this role at an internal DAC, the person should be at a senior management level and be behavioural sensitive. The line-manager should also be teamed with a fully trained and qualified observer with a behavioural background. In addition, a facilitator at a DAC should also have senior management experience as well as business knowledge.

Both an assessor and a facilitator should receive training (theoretical input and practical experience) in observing, noting, classifying and evaluating behaviour. The assessor and facilitator should also be trained on the competencies (e.g. the behavioural elements and how behaviour on each competency looks like in every simulation) and the simulations. Again, the training should be in the form of theoretical input and practical experience.

The assessor and facilitator should be declared competent on all the above, including the correct use of all paper work at the AC or DAC.

Depending on the format of the AC/DAC, the assessor and/or facilitator should also be trained and declared competent on writing feedback reports, compiling development plans and conducting a feedback discussion with a and his/her line manager. A facilitator should also receive training and be declared competent on coaching delegates. The theoretical input should be a minimum of four training days. In addition, the potential assessor and facilitator should have acted as assistant assessor and/or facilitator at least twice. It is recommended that a potential assessor and/or facilitator attend an AC/DAC as candidate prior to embarking on training. An assessor and/or facilitator should act in these roles at least twice per annum. The assessor and facilitator should also attend at least attend one, one-day refresher training course per year. An assessor and/or facilitator should attend an orientation session prior to every AC/DAC and should receive feedback on their performance after every AC/DAC.

Training of an AC/DAC Administrator

The role of an AC/DAC administrator is to oversee the effective operation of the centre.

The Administrator is accountable to ensure that:

- All observers, assessors and facilitators are competent to function in these roles at the AC/DAC;
- All correct AC/DAC material is available on time;
- All venues and equipment is available on time;
- All pre-work is sent out on time;
- The AC/DAC participants adheres to the

selection criteria;

- All orientations, debriefings and data integration sessions (wash-up sessions) take place effectively;
- All role-players fulfil their roles, accountabilities and responsibilities effectively; and
- All post AC/DAC activities take place effectively as agreed upon.

An AC/DAC administrator should be a qualified AC/DAC assessor or facilitator with extensive experience in this role. The administrator should also have credibility in the eyes of senior management. The potential administrator should receive on-the-job training from a senior AC/DAC administrator.

Training of Role-Players

Role-players during interactive simulations create the opportunity for a participant to show the behaviour linked to the competencies being evaluated. Role-players are accountable to play the role through the character they portray by responding to the unique behaviour of the candidate. Role-players are responsible to create opportunities for the participant to show behaviour linked to all the competencies being evaluated. They are also responsible to ensure that they do not overplay or underplay a role, thereby taking away an opportunity for the participant to show behaviour or unfairly giving more opportunities to show behaviour to a particular candidate. Role-players should be trained to understand their own role, the competencies being evaluated, to recognise behaviour linked to these competencies, to understand the character they will portray and the content of the simulation. The training should include theoretical input and practical exercise.

The duration of the training will depend on the

complexity of the character and simulation, as well as the competence of the role player. Role-players should also attend pre-centre orientation sessions as well as post-centre debriefings. The purpose of these sessions is to ensure that the roles are played consistently (and fairly) from situation to situation, from role-player to role-player.

4.3 Informed Participation

The organisation and the assessor are jointly liable and legally and constitutionally obliged to make an announcement *prior* to AC/DAC so that participants will be fully informed about the assessment programme. Ideally, prior written information should be made available to the participant. If participation in the AC/DAC is part of the condition of their employment participant have the right to be fully informed of the purpose of the AC/DAC why they are attending. Legal compliance prescribes that participants must complete and sign an informed consent form in which they confirm: that they have been informed about the nature and purpose of the assessment, their rights, the implications of the assessment, permission to the assessors to assess, acknowledgement of entitlement to feedback, permission as to who in the organisation may receive information.

4.4 Rights of Participants

AC/DAC activities typically generate a volume of data/ information about an individual who attended the AC/DAC. These assessment data come in many different forms, ranging from observer notes, reports on performance in the exercises, assessor ratings, peer ratings, paper and pencil tests, and final AC/DAC reports. This list, while not exhaustive, does not indicate the extent of the information that may be gathered about an individual.

The following guidelines for use of this data/information are suggested:

- After an AC/DAC participants need to be provided with feedback on his or her assessment results. Feedback is given to participants on a voluntary basis.
- Feedback is provided confidentially by the assessor(s) that assessed the participant.
- It is recommended that feedback should be provided promptly after an assessment/ development process.
- In DACs, feedback should be given as part of the assessment process.
- Only observations gathered during the AC exercises and the observer conference should serve as a basis for feedback of the candidate's concrete behaviour. Essential contents of the feedback process are personal strengths and development areas that link to the specific job requirements.
- If participation in the AC is part of the participant's condition of employment, participants have a right to be fully informed of the purpose of the AC and why they are attending.
- Decisions made that are based on AC outcomes have to be quickly agreed, documented and communicated.
- After internal ACs, concrete plan(s) for personal development must be worked out and arranged for every participant. The development plan refers to the inherent job requirements of the participant's present or future function. The implementation of the development plan has to be monitored regularly.

For reasons of test security, AC exercises are exempted from disclosure but the rationale and validity data concerning ratings of dimensions and recommendations should be made available upon request of the individual. The organisation should inform the assessee what records and data will be collected, maintained, used and disseminated.

- Confidentiality and data protection have to be strictly adhered to by any involved person.
- High quality feedback enhances transparency of the method.

5. Data Integration and Decision Making

One of the crucial activities in an AC/DAC is to integrate all the different ratings from the various exercises and to make a final recommendation on the selection or development of the candidate. This has to be done at an integration session often referred to as a "wash up session". During this session the various assessors have the opportunity to give feedback on their observations and an integrated or a final score for each competency is agreed upon.

The AC coordinator will facilitate these discussions and they should take place as soon as possible after all the exercises have been completed. The purpose of the integration session is to:

- Provide a fair and objective review of the evidence gathered;
- Gain agreement and consensus amongst assessors;
- Focus on the participant's overall performance

against the competency model rather than on individual exercises; and

- Identify a pattern or profile of strengths and development areas.

The role of the assessor during this integration is to:

- Feed in ratings for relevant exercises;
- Contribute to discussions with evidence gathered;
- Discuss discrepancies; and
- Reach a consensus on an overall rating.

See point 3.2, Shared Data. Listed below are some of the common pitfalls to be avoided during the integration session.

AC Mathematics

A proper discussion should take place and a rating, agreed upon by all the assessors should be allocated. This rating should reflect the real performance of a candidate across the different exercises as rated by different assessors. The final rating should NOT be based on a mere mathematical average.

Conflicting Evidence in Exercises

Evidence per exercise should be discussed. It may often happen that a candidate performs significantly differently on the various exercises. Where serious conflicting evidence is noted, this must be integrated into the feedback report and not disregarded in favour of the general view.

Ratings that do not reflect Evidence

Ratings should be based on the evidence as this the

only way to ensure that a fair rating is given to the candidate.

No Reference to Competency Definitions

All assessors should have a common understanding of the various competencies and their behavioural anchors. The AC coordinator should explain the competencies to the assessors and make sure that all assessors have the same understanding before any integration takes place.

Bring in Outside Knowledge of Participant

All ratings should be based only on what was observed during the assessment and NO other information should be discussed or integrated.

Consideration of Cultural Issues

Knowledge of cultural differences in behaviour can aid in the interpretation of observed behaviours. If significant cultural differences exist between assessors and the culture of the target population, a professional with local cultural expertise should be present during the data integration process to provide support.

Prior Discussions

The assessors must not be allowed to discuss their observations prior to the integration session as this may influence their views and ratings. At the end of each integration session, the coordinator and the assessors will have to make a recommendation on each candidate. In the case of an AC, the recommendation should focus on the candidate's potential to be successful in the position assessed for.

The job description and competency profile should serve as the departure point for such a

recommendation. In some cases the observers will have the final say, while in other cases information such as interview results have to be integrated, but the assessors can only make a recommendation based on the AC.

In the case of a DC, the recommendation should focus on areas of strengths and development and should be summarised through specific suggestions relevant to the areas of development. For DACs external, collateral information can be considered when compiling a development plan, e.g., performance appraisals and current development plans. However, such information should not have an influence on the competency rating, as this should only be based on the behaviour observed during the assessment exercises.

6.   Development Intervention

Development intervention is more a key focus of the DAC than the AC. When an applicant attended a DAC, an expectation for development to follow the DAC has been created. As such, a development plan tailored to the unique development areas identified by the DAC needs to be compiled for every delegate. It is recommended that a candidate who attended an AC, also receive a unique development plan. However, this is a decision for every organisation to take since there is a cost implication. The principles to follow when compiling a development plan is exclusivity and transparency. It is thus recommended that a candidate actively participate when his/her development plan is compiled. It is also advisable that the applicants' direct line manager be included in this process. The aim is to allow the applicant take ownership of the development.

Anchored in other HR Processes

It is recommended that an AC or a DAC forms part of other human resources processes and do not stand in isolation. As example, it can be a requirement that all managers attend a DAC to obtain a personal development plan. The manager is then evaluated as part of the organisation's performance management system on how actively he/she pursues his/her own development as well as the development of the people reporting to him/her. It is also recommended that a development framework be compiled that includes the DAC. This will increase the possibility that the development activities indicated on the development plan will take place.

If the job analysis phase has been done effectively, the competencies used at the DAC should also be the competencies used in other human resources processes (e.g. performance management, selection processes, succession development).

Development Plans

Each development plan should be unique and tailored to the specific development areas identified during the DAC. The purpose of a DAC is negated when a generic plan without any tailoring, is used. The principle to apply when compiling a plan is the principle of comprehensiveness. This means that a plan should preferably contain development actions that will increase knowledge and skill of the competency needing development on-the-job.

Follow-Up Sessions

It is recommended that a development plan be followed up periodically to increase the possibility that development will take place. This can take the form of a discussion or another DAC.

7.   Documentation

Documentation is necessary for all aspects of the AC/DAC that are adapted for all evidence of validity for the relevant cultural group(s). As such, documentation should include but is not restricted to the following:

- Justification for adapting the original AC/DAC (e.g. differential bona fide occupational requirements, cultural norms, local laws);

- Description of modifications made to the AC/DAC content or techniques (including the rationale for these modifications);

- Evidence in support of the validity of the adapted AC/DAC for the relevant cultural group(s); and

- Evidence in support of the equivalence of the AC/DAC methods across cultures (for the unchanged areas of the AC/DAC).

Where possible, assessors should also assist in updating information regarding local country norms, reliability, and/or validity of an assessment tool by providing information to international or local tool developers, publishers and researchers. Finally, it is important to note that over time, amendments to local, professional and legal standards are customary. These amendments should be documented and any resulting changes to the AC/DAC should be formally noted. It is important that control is maintained in terms of access to the various AC/DAC materials (exercises, observer guidelines, etc.). All materials should be kept secure. Access to material should only be open to those authorised and trained to utilise those materials.

8. Validity

8.1 Definition and Description

Validity is defined as the extent to which a measurement tool or process, such as an AC yield useful results. Multiple types validity evidence might be measured (e.g., construct, content, criterion, face and predictive validity) depending upon the questions being explored and the tool or process being investigated. Face validity refers to a process or exercise that is constructed to outwardly appear relevant to the context/target job role. Predictive validity is often used when an overall assessment rating is related to some external criterion of management performance or progress. The vast majority of recent international research regarding validity can be grouped around four broad themes: criterion-related validity; incremental validity; construct and process-related validity. These findings suggest that AC validities hold across a wide range of jobs, over longer time periods and in international contexts. (Thornton & Rupp 2006, Chapter 10). Effective scientific evaluation of AC/DAC starts from clear articulation of the AC objectives. This will in turn aid in the production of empirical evidence for the validity of the AC – in other words, did the AC measure what it intended to measure?

8.2 General Aspects to Consider when Validating an AC

Ascertaining the validity of an AC programme is a complicated technical process and it is important that validation research meets both professional and legal guidelines. Research should be conducted by individuals knowledgeable in the technical and legal issues pertinent to validation procedures. A major factor in the widespread acceptance and use of ACs is directly

related to an emphasis on sound validation research. Numerous studies demonstrating the predictive validity of individual AC programmes have been conducted and reported in the professional literature in a variety of organisational settings. However, the historical record of the validity of this process cannot be taken as a guarantee that a given assessment programme will or will not be valid in a new setting.

Validity generalisation studies of AC research suggest that overall assessment ratings derived in a manner conforming to these guidelines show considerable predictive validity. Such findings support the use of a new AC in a different setting if the job exercises, assessors, and assessees in the new situation are similar to those in the validation research and similar procedures are used to observe, report, classify, evaluate and lastly integrate the information. The validity generalisation studies of the predictive validity of the overall assessment rating do not necessarily establish the validity of the procedure for other purposes, for example, diagnosis of training needs, accurate assessment of level of skill in separate dimensions, or the developmental influence of participation in an AC. Technical standards and principles for validation should be obtained from reliable and relevant academic sources, such as textbooks on psychological assessment and statistical procedures. Those responsible for evaluating and validating ACs and DACs should at least apply the following minimum standards:

- Procedures should be implemented in order to ensure the efficient and accurate gathering of data; and
- Evaluation should as much as possible be rigorous and scientific in approach and include qualitative content analysis, statistical analysis and candidate/assessor attitude surveys.

- In addition a key emphasis is to undertake empirical validation studies wherever possible (including matching assessment outcomes to performance outcomes).

In evaluating the validity of AC programmes, it is particularly important to document the selection of the competencies/dimensions assessed in the centre. In addition, the relationship of assessment exercises to the competencies, dimensions, attributes or qualities assessed should be documented. Several approaches can be utilised to gather evidence in support of the validity of the adapted AC. Ideally, evidence from local validation studies may serve as a useful reference/resource. In situations where such traditional validation techniques are not feasible, a genuine effort needs to be made to collect alternate validation evidence. These attempts should be directed at demonstrating the relevance and validity of the assessment *process* and *outcomes* across cultural contexts. Alternate approaches can include, but are not restricted to the following:

- Collection of content validation evidence;
- Review of job performance evidence (e.g., collected through on-the-job observation, interviews with supervisors, or performance appraisal data); and
- Interviews with relevant stakeholders and incumbents to gain insight into the validity and effectiveness of the AC.

Finally, it seems that in the literature (Lievens, 2007), the debate on construct related validity has come up with possible explanations for construct related validity findings. A first spin-off of the construct-related validity debate has been the increased emphasis on "good" AC design. Secondly, task-based ACs constitute another

practical development of the construct-related validity research stream in ACs. Thirdly, the application of trait activation theory provide a window of opportunities to improve AC practice.

9. Cross-cultural Issues

The spread of AC/DACs around the world, the cross-cultural application of AC/DACs, globalisation of business, the need for global executives and the establishment of consultancies offering AC/DAC services in many other countries have raised the question about the application of AC/DAC practices in diverse countries. Many challenging issues about the design and implementation of AC/DACs arise when they are used in a cross-cultural situation accordingly to Lievens and Thornton (2005). The emergence of global business in South Africa has contributed much to this situation where, for instance, an existing AC/DAC method is transported from, for instance, the United Kingdom to an organisation in South Africa or where a successful AC is imported from the US or Europe and implemented in a organisation in South Africa.

When designing AC/DACs in these contexts two approaches can be considered namely, the Etic and Emic approach. The *etic* approach assumes that (a) there are universal individual attributes that are relevant to organisational effectiveness; (b) pre-existing assessment techniques can be adapted in different countries; (c) standardisation and validity extensions require that a fixed set of dimensions and procedures must be used; and (d) the adoption of uniform selection procedures across cultures contributes to a homogeneous organisational culture. The *emic* approach assumes (a) generic assessment methods will

be invalid (e.g., they under-specify unique aspects of criteria performance); (b) each culture must be studied to identify its unique features; (c) the acceptance of various assessment techniques varies across cultures; and (d) assessors training must include an appreciation of contextual information. According to Lievens & Thornton (2005) ACs will be used more frequently in international settings. Home-country organisations will use ACs to assess persons going to host-countries. Home-country organisations will use their AC methods to assess host-county persons in those other countries. Organisations in countries not currently using ACs will adopt the method. Each of these applications of the AC method presents unique challenges.

The 2006 Professional Guidelines for Global ACs prescribe various contextual factors to be taken into consideration. When developing ACs for cross-cultural application, the assumption cannot be made that the purpose, design and content of a pre-existing AC method is transferable across cultures or countries. To ensure the validity of the AC methods for all cultures involved, a determination will have to be made as to whether an AC method, developed for one culture can be applied to another culture. A range of contextual factors will help determine whether the AC methods can be adopted uniformly with minimal changes, or whether the AC will need to be customised (to varying extents) to suit the needs of the new country.

In South Africa the cross-cultural application of ACs will come more and more under scrutiny as stronger demands for the cultural appropriateness of assessment measures will be prescribed / demanded by the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998.

10. References

The Guidelines have been developed to be compatible with the following:

1. Ballantyne, I & Povah, N (2004). Assessment and Development Centres (2nd ed). Aldershot, England: Gower.

2. Design, Implementation and Evaluation of AC & DC – Best Practice Guidelines (2005). The British Psychological Society, Psychological testing centre.

3. International Task Force on Assessment Centre. (2000). Guidelines on ethical considerations for assessment centre operations. *Public Personnel Management, 29, 315-331.*

4. Lievens, F. (2007). *A tale about Dimensions, Exercises and Dancing Bears.* Paper presented at the 22nd Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology April, 2007.New York.

5. Lievens, F. Thornton III, G.C. (2005). Assessment Centres: Recent developments in practice and research. In Evers, A., Smit-Voskuijl, O. & Anderson, N (Eds.) *Handbook of Selection.* (pp. 243-264) Blackwell Publishing.

6. Professional Guidelines for Global Assessment Centre, the 2006 Extension to the guidelines (draft version). Presented for review at the 33rd International Congress on Assessment Centre Methods, (2000) September, London, England.

7. Thornton III, G.C. & Rupp, D.E. (2003). Simulations and assessment centres. In JC Thomas (Ed.), & M. Hersen (Series Ed.), *Comprehensive handbook of psychological*

assessment, Vol. 4 Industrial and organizational assessment (pp. 318-344) New York: Wiley

8. Thornton III, GC & Rupp, D.E. (2006). *Assessment Centers in Human Resource Management*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

APPENDIX

History of AC Guidelines Internationally and in South Africa

International Developments

The rapid growth internationally in the use of ACs in recent years resulted in a proliferation of applications in a variety of organisations. ACs are currently used in business and industry, the public sector, and other organisations. In the past, practitioners have raised serious concerns that reflected the need for standards or guidelines for users of the AC methodology. This need was addressed promptly and adequately when the set of guidelines was endorsed during the Third International Congress in the AC method in May 1975 in the USA. Developments in the ensuing years concerning federal guidelines relating to testing, as well as to practical experience with the original guidelines, suggested that guidelines should be evaluated and revised. Consequently, more clearly defined and expanded guidelines were accepted in 1979.

During the 1980's the use of ACs spread dramatically to many different organisations and were used to assess individuals from widely diverse types of jobs. At the same time, and probably due to the vast increase in its use, pressures to modify the AC method emerged. These pressures come from three sources:

- Attempts to streamline the procedures and make them more cost-effective;
- Theoretical arguments and empirical research evidence claiming that the AC method did not work as originally believed and that the method should be modified; and

- Previous guidelines were not clear enough on which procedures constitute an AC and which procedures do not.

In order to address the above and other concerns raised during the 10 years following the 1979 Guidelines, a Task Force was set up under the co-chairmanship of Doug Bray and George Thornton. Information was gathered, comments were solicited and draft proposals circulated and discussed at the Sixteenth International Congress in Tampa, Florida, USA in May 1988. George Thornton also tested the draft guidelines at the South African Annual AC Conference in May 1989. These Guidelines were endorsed by a majority of the Task Force and by participants at the Seventeenth International Congress in May 1989 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.

Changes to the 1989 guidelines were initiated at the 27th International Congress on AC Methods in Orlando, Florida, in 1999. A primary factor driving the revision was the passage of a full decade since the 1989 edition. The final draft of the 2000 guidelines was presented and endorsed at the 28th International conference held in San Francisco, California, USA.

In 2006 Professional Guidelines for Global ACs (draft version) emerged from ongoing discussions between B Byham, G Thornton (III), and A Chawla at the 32nd International Congress on AC Methods held in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA in 2004. The extended guidelines addressed issues relevant to the development, use and validation of ACs when applied across multiple countries for selection, promotion and development of leaders operating in an international context. These draft guidelines were tabled at the 33rd International Congress on AC Methods held in London, UK in 2006.

South African Developments

Since its establishment in 1981, the ACSG has played a major role in disseminating information about ACs through its annual conferences, newsletters and networking activities. Since the middle of the 1980's with more human resources practitioners and consultants using the methodology, some with limited experience, the ACSG started to play an active role with regard to the professional and ethical aspects of ACs.

1987 Guidelines

The use of ACs in South Africa increased at an equally fast tempo when compared to usage internationally during the eighties. The ACSG which was established in 1981 under the auspices of the Institute for Personnel Management (IPM) to further the aims of the ACSG has grown steadily over the years and by 1987, there seemed to be some cause for reflection. The reason for such reflection included (1) the lack of appropriate legislation which regulated the use of personnel assessment techniques; and (2) the emergence of consultants and HR practitioners who did not possess the required exposure to, and experience of the methodology needed to implement ACs effectively.

These issues were considered to be serious and at an executive meeting held in June 1987, it was decided to adapt the 1979 International Guidelines to conform to South African legal requirements. It was furthermore decided to publish in the IPM Journal a document containing the amended guidelines, as well as the role of the ACSG in monitoring AC applications. The role of the ACSG was described as follows: "In view of the concerns about the implementation of ACs in the introduction of this paper, it becomes clear that the Interest Group, and more specifically the executive, will have to play a more watchful role. It does not want to

play a policing role and neither does it have the resources or authority to do so. It will, however, in future have to be very much alert in order to continuously monitor activities in the field."

1991 Guidelines

Endorsement of the new International Guidelines by participants at the Seventeenth International Congress on the AC Method in May 1989 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA prompted the South African AC fraternity to follow suit. These guidelines were presented by Hermann Spangenberg, convener of the project at the 11th Annual ACSG conference in Stellenbosch in March 1991 where copies were circulated to delegates. The guidelines were discussed and it was decided to take a decision on the guidelines during the Annual General Meeting on the second day of the conference. This would allow delegates more time to think about possible implications of accepting the guidelines. Proceedings of the two sessions are summarised as follows:

The 1989 International Guidelines were endorsed unanimously by delegates. The convener was asked to edit the 1989 guidelines (for the purpose of clarity and brevity) circulate the document to members of the executive for verification; and submit edited copies to the IPM Journal for publication, and to the secretary of the ACSG for circulation to members.

The role of the executive with regard to the application of the Guidelines was discussed. Of special interest was the advisory role which executive members could play during the construction of an AC. In order to safeguard committee members from possible litigation, however, it was decided that committee members could not officially be called upon to approve procedures or steps

in the construction process. Committee members, who were usually experienced AC practitioners, could however be consulted informally. This has been in fact, common practice in the past. Although the endorsed guidelines would have no formal legal status, they could play an important role in litigation in as much as they would be considered as the opinion of experts in the field.

1999 Guidelines

During the 1998 ASCG conference in Stellenbosch, it was decided to revise the 1991 guidelines so that they would be better aligned to the legal and social developments in South Africa. In addition, the guidelines needed to meet the requirements of the new labour legislation as well as vigorous validity procedures.

In their strategy for revising the guidelines the committee adhered to the following criteria:

- Relevant stakeholders were consulted i.e., our members as well as representatives of the Department of Labour and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA); and

- The draft copy of the guidelines was also distributed at two sessions of the Psychological Assessment Initiative (PAI) an interest group of the Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology of South African (SIOPSA) and members were asked to give comments on the guidelines.

The following step-by-step process was followed:

- Inputs from stakeholders were obtained;

- A task team consisting of members of the ACSG management committee integrated information and developed a draft proposal; and

- The final proposal was submitted for endorsement at the March 1999 Annual ACSG conference.

2007 Guidelines

During the 2006 Annual ACSG Conference in Stellenbosch, it was decided to revise the 1999 guidelines so that the South African guidelines are aligned to the 2000 international guidelines and so that they incorporate the 2006 Professional Guidelines for global AC. One of the key features of the 2007 guidelines is the incorporation of DACs as part of the guidelines and at the same time to focus on the cross-cultural application of ACs and DACs in South Africa.

The following steps were followed:

- Various stakeholders, especially in the consulting domain of ACs were consulted;

- The latest information available on AC guidelines were collected and studied;

- A task team comprising members of the ASCG group facilitated a work session where a broad structure for the 2007 guidelines was proposed;

- A draft version of the 2007 guidelines was introduced at the 27th Annual ACSG Conference held in March 2007 in Stellenbosch and

- The completed 2007 guidelines will be published and handed out at the 28th Annual ACSG Conference to be held in March 2008 in Stellenbosch.