

Assessment Centre Study Group Conference Program: 3-4 March 2005

Program 3 March 2005

- 08:30 **Registration and Refreshments**
- 09:00 **Welcome**
Charmaine Swanevelder, Chairperson
- 09:15 **Milestones in AC Development: Celebrating the history of Assessment Centres from the 1940's, with special emphasis on the last 25 years in South Africa.**
Anthony Wilson
- 10:00 **Is the Assessment Centre a survivor?**
Marisa Born
- 10:45 **Refreshments**
- 11:15 **Open Space**
Room 1: Assessing self-efficacy as a means to select the best talent.
– *Wendy Anyster*
Room 2: The Matrix of Working relationships and assessment center technology. – *Jacques Haworth*
Room 3: Using and Assessment Centre to stimulate personal and professional growth amongst UNISA Master Students. – *Prof Rian Viviers*
- 12:00 **The role of assessment centers in transformation.**
William Shisana
- 12:45 **Lunch**
- 13:45 **Open Space**
Room 1: Using Assessment Centres In Your Organizations' Transformation Strategies. – *Natasha Müller*
Room 2: Building sales and market execution capability through assessment centres in a multicultural and global context.
– *Tracy Potgieter & Jean Richardson*
Room 3: Using Assessment Centre technology in selection and the impact it has on recommending black applicants. – *Chris Swart*
Room 4: The issue of inter-rater reliability becomes critical in establishing predictive validity and reliability. – *Rudi Frigenti*
- 14:30 **International controversy around the use of personality assessments in the assessment centre.**
Hennie Kriek
- 15:15 **Refreshments**
- 15:45 **Future trends in employee assessment: towards an international science and practice.**
Néil Anderson
- 16:30 **End day 1**

Program 4 March 2005

- 08:30 **Refreshments**
- 08:45 **Committee nominees announced**
Charmaine Swanevelder, Chairperson
- 09:00 **Personality testing in employee assessment: From theory to practice (and back again).**
Neil Anderson
- 10:00 **Proving development center impact on the bottom line or putting your bottom on the line.**
Wilma Botha
- 10:45 **Brunch & Voting**
- 11:30 **Open Space**
Room 1: Mind the Gap. *Charmaine Swanevelder*
Room 2: The use of narrative technique when debriefing during a collaborative centre. *Sandra Schlebusch & Lydia Cillie-Schmidt*
Room 3: Assessment center practice for cross-functional teams.
Kas Koekemoer
Room 4: Assessing customer focus in a financial institution.
Wea van Heerden
- 12:15 **Score differences between ethnically diverse applicants and the eyes of the assessor.**
Marisa Born
- 13:00 **New ACSG Committee announced**
- 13:30 **Evaluation and end day 2**

ABSTRACTS

ANTHONY WILSON: MILESTONES IN AC DEVELOPMENT CELEBRATING THE HISTORY OF ASSESSMENT CENTRES FROM THE 1940'S, WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE LAST 25 YEARS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

This paper will contribute to Knowledge Management in Assessment Centres. It will collect and consolidate AC knowledge in South Africa, so that there will be less need to "reinvent the wheel" in the future. It will include both technical development and strategic business uses of Assessment Centres provided by South African pioneers in Assessment Centre design and usage. The paper will summarize the developments of the past. It will also point to the future by presenting contributors' views of forthcoming trends.

MARISA BORN: IS THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE A SURVIVOR?

This presentation looks into the future of the AC by predicting from AC's past and from advances in the selection area. The interest in the AC over decades now has revolved around the issues of how strong it predicts and what it really is measuring. Until the day of today the debates are raging.

WENDY ANYSTER: ASSESSING SELF-EFFICACY AS A MEANS TO SELECT THE BEST TALENT.

Self-efficacy can be defined as the belief in one's capabilities to achieve desired performance results. The self-efficacy construct is the distinguishing factor between high performers and average performers. This can have a huge impact on the performance results that businesses achieve. The assessment of this variable at the point of selection into the organisation is critical. Through the use of assessment centre methodology human resources practitioners and line managers can make an informed decision about an individual's capabilities and will be able to predict the future performance of a prospective employee. The presentation will cover:

- ☞ Characteristics of self-efficacy
- ☞ Measurement of self-efficacy
- ☞ Sources of efficacy information
- ☞ Assessment measures
- ☞ Impact of self-efficacy on performance.

JACQUES HAWORTH: THE MATRIX OF WORKING RELATIONSHIPS AND ASSESSMENT CENTRE TECHNOLOGY

A presentation focusing on:

- The Matrix of Working Relationships and the value of this model of work complexity.
- The benefits of including work complexity as a design factor in developing role profiles, competencies and assessment technology.
- Practical case studies and lessons learned from integrating work complexity with assessment /development Centres (from design to application)

PROF RIAN VIVIERS: USING AN ASSESSMENT CENTRE TO STIMULATE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AMONGST UNISA MASTER STUDENTS.

Industrial and Organisational Psychology Masters students at Unisa undergo thorough selection. During the first week of attending class, they take part in a one-day Assessment Centre. Different lecturers give individual feedback on each exercise three days after the assessment. Based on the feedback, students compile a PDP and commit to a process of personal and professional growth. Three assignments on the philosophy and theory of personal and professional growth, as well as action plans for continuous development and growth during the year have to be submitted for evaluation. In addition, they also introduce a student mentor and a work/life mentor for guidance and feedback. Evaluation interviews with mentors and students are finally scheduled to assess individual Personal and Professional Growth.

WILLIAM SHISANA: THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENT CENTERS IN TRANSFORMATION.

This session will review the role that assessment centres can play in the critical transformation process in South Africa.

NATASHA MÜLLER: USING ASSESSMENT CENTRES IN YOUR ORGANIZATIONS' TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES.

A challenge facing most organizations in South Africa today is the retention of talent (especially Black talent). More importantly, the succession pool needs to be geared to drive the organization from its current state to its desired future state. In this session, we will discuss the use of assessment centres as an integrative strategy to select the succession pool and drive transformation. Tips for retaining your Black Talent Pool will also be shared.

TRACY POTGIETER & JEAN RICHARDSON: BUILDING SALES AND MARKET EXECUTION CAPABILITY THROUGH ASSESSMENT CENTRES IN A MULTICULTURAL AND GLOBAL CONTEXT.

Coca-Cola Sabco, a successful emerging market bottler, operating in 12 countries across Africa and Asia, has utilized assessment centre technology as an integral part of its strategy to develop sales and market execution strategy capability in its operations.

A case study of the development and implementation of these assessment centres from the inception in a large-scale project across South Africa, through to the implementation in countries such as Uganda, Tanzania and Mozambique and now forward into Vietnam and Sri Lanka are presented.

The assessment batteries are developmental in nature. They are used to identify training needs, themes and trends for the entire sales force in the country and provide input into comprehensive country training plans. They are also used at an individual level for career and development planning purposes. These batteries have been so successful because they are part of an integrated development process and not simply stand alone assessments.

The assessment battery forms part of a development process and it was used to identify training needs, themes and trends amongst a population of sales staff in a country to enable the development of more focused individual development plans, career and development discussions, new pay model as well as a broad roll-out training plan for the country.

Even though faced with challenging logistical issues, the assessment centre used a whole-person approach as a philosophy and wherever applicable. The dynamic assessments included potential, personality, job fit, competency-based and cognitive assessments.

To cater for the different types of markets, two models were eventually developed with a series of batteries for a developed market and a series of batteries for an emerging market. These batteries covered the full spectrum of levels of work in the sales and market execution environment, from drivers right through to area sales managers.

The impact of the development process has meant a departure from the era of "order-takers" to an era of multi-facetted, multi-skilled "account developers", selling to our customers, a multitude of products, in a way that satisfies the customer, and also our business needs.

This presentation explores the development and use of these assessment batteries as well as the key learnings from the process.

CHRIS SWART: USING ASSESSMENT CENTRE TECHNOLOGY IN SELECTION AND THE IMPACT IT HAS ON RECOMMENDING BLACK APPLICANTS.

A study was done in conjunction with SHL to determine the factors contributing to a greater proportion of Black candidates not being recommended for selection in relation to other groups.

The practical significant differences in scores obtained by the recommended versus the non-recommended candidates on ability measures, personality and role-play results were calculated using Cohen's d statistic.

Learnings from this study will be shared as it relates to weightings applied to different selection assessment measures as well as differences identified in personality factors where people were tested at different levels of complexity.

RUDI FRIGENTI: THE ISSUE OF INTER-RATER RELIABILITY BECOMES CRITICAL IN ESTABLISHING PREDICTIVE VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY.

During the assessment process, a structured approach toward enhancing the interview process as instrument is presented.

The effect of inter-rater reliability are important in establishing a credible assessment method. Additionally they are also pre-requisites for fair and acceptable assessment in terms of the Employment Equity Act. The interview is one "instrument" that is always part of the selection procedure in assessment centres. Despite the prolific use of the interview its weakness as a predictor of job success is well documented. This problem is exacerbated when different people are involved in conducting interviews. As the issue of inter-rater reliability becomes critical in establishing predictive validity and reliability, a structured approach toward enhancing the interview process as instrument is presented.

HENNIE KRIEK: INTERNATIONAL CONTROVERSY AROUND THE USE OF PERSONALITY ASSESSMENTS IN THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE.

Strickland has questioned the Construct Validity of the Assessment Centre since the early 1980's. This caused Assessment Centre Practitioners to re-evaluate Assessment Centre design and methods in order to improve the construct validity of overall ratings and dimension ratings. The optimal integration of Assessment Centre exercises and dimensions is one aspect of Assessment Centre design that has been constantly studied over the last decade.

Personality questionnaires and other conventional paper and pencil evaluations were traditionally, at least in the USA and South Africa, not used as an integral part of the Assessment Centre Method. This has changed over the last couple of years and we find more and more practitioners that use self report Personality and other assessments as an integral part of their Assessment Centre. In this paper the practical and theoretical value of this trend will be discussed and evaluated.

NEIL ANDERSON: FUTURE TRENDS IN EMPLOYEE ASSESSMENT: TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL SCIENCE AND PRACTICE.

This paper will consider the future of assessment and selection generally in organizations globally. As the drivers for change continue to demand responses from HRM departments in organizations, the science and practice of employee selection needs to respond to these international drivers. Emergent trends in assessment will therefore be overviewed from a scientist-practitioner perspective and several emergent themes and challenges identified. These include testing for general mental ability (GMA) both within AC procedures and in selection generally; theory-practice links in selection; applicant decision making as the 'dark side' of the process; and personality testing. All themes are also touched by new technology in assessment, and this issue will be mentioned in the context of the increasing internationalisation of selection procedures. Particular attention will be given to the international generalisability of meta-analysis findings and a major European project to establish the operational validity of GMA tests across 14 European Union countries. Challenges to the future viability of traditional selection procedures, constructs, and assumptions will be noted and a five-tier model of the international generalizability of research findings originating from the USA to other countries worldwide will be proposed.

NEIL ANDERSON: PERSONALITY TESTING IN EMPLOYEE ASSESSMENT: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE (AND BACK AGAIN)

Detailed results from a multi-phase program of research into popular personality inventories in the UK and Europe will be presented. The research, carried out by Neil Anderson and Deniz Ones, examines several crucial issues in the design, psychometric properties, and results obtained from three highly popular measures of personality. Whilst personality theory has progressively moved toward a Five Factor Model structure over recent years, it will be noted that in occupational testing settings this structure has been somewhat less popular and has some inherent drawbacks. Our program of research examined the psychometric properties, factor structures, construct validity, and adverse impact of three commercially published measures, with generally highly encouraging results. As personality testing has become almost a standard component of Assessment Centers or more widely in selection systems at earlier stages of administration, this presentation will highlight the importance of independent, robust research into the properties of commercially published measures. The paper will conclude with a discussion of likely future-oriented trends in personality measurement for employee selection, including theory-practice linkages, measurement of key personality factors, and the rights of applicants to professional feedback of profile results.

WILMA BOTHA: PROVING DEVELOPMENT CENTRE IMPACT ON THE BOTTOM LINE OR PUTTING YOUR BOTTOM ON THE LINE

Companies are realising that employee development can positively affect their bottom line. According to data collected by the American Society for Training and Development, employee training is the most reliable tool companies can use to keep an edge over the competition. But, to ensure that training and development interventions are worthwhile, companies would probably start by determining development needs.

A development centre is a proven way to determine strengths and development needs. Multinational organisations increasingly need to coordinate staff assessment and development across their international offices. Using development centres for this purpose became a possibility to consider.

This presentation will examine issues of process, design and content that must be considered when a development centre has to be implemented in a multinational organisation. Tips from the literature will be integrated with lessons learnt from personal experiences. Points covered will include the suitability of the exercises in different cultures, process issues like handling large numbers of participants and training observers.

A multi-national IT company with 140 000 employees in 178 countries will be used as a case study to illustrate some of the important points when handling a large scale development centre project. This company embarked on an international development centre project for all their sales staff, including sales directors, managers and representatives. What makes this example particularly interesting is that it was important for the company to measure the impact of the intervention. Therefore, the company's performance agreement with the service provider required an increase of 1% in annual turnover.

The presenter will detail the efforts made to ensure consistency and standardisation when handling a project of this magnitude across 23 countries and in several different languages. She will share interesting and novel aspects of the design, like reproducing "day in the life" situations for participants. She will also give the reasons for using professional actors as role players and training line managers as observers. She will outline issues regarding the process, logistics, quality assurance and cultural differences.

CHARMAINE SWANEVELDER: LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT.

Custom competencies were designed for Leadership, multi-method assessment matrixes were designed and all potential candidates for Leadership roles in the company were put through comprehensive assessment centres with integrated reports for developmental purposes nationally. The process has also been rolled out to offices in India recently. Learnings from the project will be shared.

SANDRA SCHLEBUSCH & LYDIA CILLIE-SCHMIDT: THE USE OF NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE WHEN DEBRIEFING DURING A COLLABORATIVE CENTRE.

Narrative Technique has been extensively used in family- and counseling therapy. Very few studies have however been conducted in the industrial context. Narrative therapy is based on the assumption that:

- Meaning is derived through the structuring of experience into stories
- People ascribe meaning to their experience and constitute their lives and relationships through language
- Problems are maintained when a person believes that only one view of a problem exists. The goal of Narrative Therapy is to help clients realise that their dominant story is not necessarily reality, but simply one way to view the problem (Wetchler, 1999)
- Persons should gain a reflective perspective on their lives

One of the objectives of a Collaborative Centre is for candidates to realize that there are different ways to approaching a situation and to agree on alternatives that might be more effective to their current approach. It might be useful to explore the use of Narrative technique in this context to achieve transformational learning. According to White and Epston (1990), the narrative mode does not lead to certainties, but varying perspectives and that is exactly what any management development method (like the Collaborative Centre) is expected to achieve in a post-modern paradigm. A specific management style cannot necessarily be prescribed to managers, but they have to become aware of possibilities and they have to learn new ways of dialoging the organisation to be able to facilitate organisational learning. Hopefully these new perspectives would lead to the adoption of more functional managerial/leadership styles, as the situation requires. As Hofstede (1993) states: "We are trying to mold management style based on western theories, but most managers experience difficulty applying this because of context".

KAS KOEKEMOER: ASSESSMENT CENTER PRACTISE FOR CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAMS

Since the start of Assessment Centers, multiple dimensions or competencies are assessed during multiple exercises. During these exercises participants receive the same functional and / or level of appointment and the exercises are administered in a linear sequence to produce an individual profile of the participant. The results are presented in a matrix type format with the same competencies on one side, the same exercises on the other and the scale allocated in pre-determined cells where these competencies can be measured well.

With the implementation of cross-functional teams in organizations, the need to develop and to administer an assessment center for the entire team arose. The current assessment center methodology does not cater for the assessment of staff from various functions and levels in the same center, as well as to produce individual profiles and a team profile, and had to be redesigned.

This presentation will report on an exploratory study on the effect of Narrative Technique on the experience of candidates of the debriefing and feedback after an assessment centre simulation.

WEA VAN HEERDEN: ASSESSING CUSTOMER FOCUS IN A FINANCIAL INSTITUTION.

We assisted a client to conceptualize and design an assessment centre to measure customer service of front-line staff. This comprehensive process focused on:

- Designing a customer services competency model and creating an ideal position profile for front-line customer service staff
- Assessing the suitability of current incumbents through an in-depth assessment centre
- Designing a number of behaviourally-based interventions to address key gaps identified, in a way that promoted self-awareness and insight
- Conducting focused and regular follow-up sessions to assess retention and progress against an agreed personal development plan.

MARISA BORN: SCORE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ETHNICALLY DIVERSE APPLICANTS AND THE EYES OF THE ASSESSOR.

It is through the subjective perception of an assessor that the evaluation of an applicant takes place in assessment centre exercises. This presentation explores the relationships between ethnicity and scores on selection devices in which judgments of assessors are involved. Demographic and perceived inter-group similarity and policy capturing of assessor information processing will be among the explanatory frameworks.