



# ***Aims, Uses, Design and Running of AC and DCs***

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***.... and how they can increase you  
organization's effectiveness***

Anthony Wilson



# Today's Agenda

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- Theory
- Practice
- More theory
- More practice
- Tips, guidelines, further reading, checklists as we go along
- Summing up



...and concerning theory...

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*“In theory, there’s no difference between theory and practice, but in practice there is.”*

*Jan L. A. van de Snepscheut*



# Assessment Centre

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- used to fairly discriminate between candidates for jobs and enable an organization to make well-informed decisions to select or reject individual applicants
- used to help decide on promotions



# Development Centre

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- used to help participants learn about their competence, so they can decide on development plans



# Assessment Centre

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- Multi method
- Multi assessor
- Feedback to management is the key deliverable
- Detailed feedback to candidates happens much less often



# Development Centre

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- Multi method
- Multi assessor
- Measures gaps in actual vs. desired performance levels
- Feedback to delegates crucial
- Feedback to organization very useful



## A Typical AC/DC

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- Or to understand preferences, gain insight into motivation, resilience, flexibility etc.
- Or to gather information about how they might fit into a team, what leadership and subordinate styles they might be more comfortable with.



# ACs and DCs

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- Can look very similar
- Can even have identical activities
- Use the information gathered for different purposes
- The differences are seen mostly in post centre events



## ACs and DCs:

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Standardized evaluation of behaviour:

- Multi dimensions/competencies
- Multi assessment method/exercise
- Multi assessor/observer
- Multi candidate, participant, delegate



## ACs and DCs: Thornton

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“Trained assessors observe the behaviours and make independent evaluations of what they have seen.”

“These multiple sources of information are pooled by the assessors in an integration discussion.”

Thornton, G. C. (1992) *Assessment Centers in Human Resource Management*, Addison-Wesley



## ACs and DCs: Thornton

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“An essential feature of the assessment centre method is the use of situational tests to observe specific behaviours of the participants.”



# Assessment Centre

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- A combination of information about a candidate's
- behaviour (e.g. what candidates actually do, how they solve problems, carry out tasks, gather information),
- ability (what they can do when given standardized tests),
- personality (what they report that they prefer to do and some of the reasons why)



# Benefits of the Assessment Centre method

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- Quicker identification of talent
- More Organizational Effectiveness
- Freer movement of talent across organizational boundaries
- People with possible negative credentials and experience have assessment opportunity
- Fewer people promoted beyond their level of competence



# Benefits of the Assessment Centre method

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- Builds talent pool
- People with potential but “not yet ready” for promotion identified and developed
- Greater belief in fairness of organization and selection and promotion decisions



# Benefits of the Assessment Centre method

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- Proven to be a very objective and fair method of deciding selection and promotion
- Relevant because they assess performance against the required competencies for the job
- Candidates have opportunity to demonstrate their competencies in several different settings – e.g. one-to-one, group, written



# Benefits of the Assessment Centre method

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- Assessment process suits the exact need of the organization
- Process of selection is felt to be both fair and comprehensive even by those who don't get appointed – so organization's image enhanced



# Benefits of the Assessment Centre method

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- Line managers more closely aligned to future needs of organization through insight developed when acting as assessors. Helps them make better day to day decisions.
- Line managers understand better how to evaluate their own and subordinate's performance



# Example one-day AC or DC

## - overview

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- Introduction
- Ability tests and personality questionnaires
- In-tray exercise
- Fact finding exercise
- Case study and presentation exercise
- Roleplay exercise
- Group exercise – leaderless or assigned roles



# Example one-day AC/DC – in detail

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- Brief Introduction, house arrangements, why you're here, what will happen etc.
- Ability tests: e.g. verbal reasoning, numerical reasoning, diagrammatic or abstract reasoning
- Personality questionnaire, e.g. 16PF, OPQ, OPP

# An (unlikely) example of a completed Assessment Matrix

COMPETENCIES	In-tray	Group	Presentation	OPQ 32 i	Verbal Reasoning	Numerical Reasoning	Overall Rating
Leadership		3		3			3
Planning and Organizing	3			3			3
Persuasiveness		3		3			3
Problem Solving Analysis	3			3	3	3	3
Oral Communication			3	3			3
Written Communication				3	3	3	3
Action Orientation	3			3			3
Strategic			3	3	3	3	3
Interpersonal Sensitivity		3		3			3
Flexibility		3		3			3
Personal Motivation			3	3			3
Commercial Awareness			3	3			3



# Scoring: percentiles and stives (Standard Fives)

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<u>Percentile</u>	<u>Stive</u>
< 6.68	1
6.69 - 30.85	2
30.86 - 69.15	3
70.16 - 93.32	4
93.33 - 100	5



# Scoring: stives, described

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1. Poor
2. Marginal
3. Acceptable
4. Good
5. Outstanding



# Scoring: stives, described

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1. Displays few or none of the behaviours typical of the competency
2. Displays some of the behaviours typical of the competency
3. Acceptable or average: displays about half of the behaviours typical of the competency
4. Displays many of the behaviours typical of the competency
5. Displays all or nearly all of the behaviours typical of the competency



## Example AC/DC

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- Other instruments e.g. CPP to measure cognitive functioning, EQ-i to measure Emotional Intelligence
- A DC might additionally use other measures e.g. MBTI, Belbin Team Types Inventory



## Example AC/DC

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- Purpose of ability tests: to measure their abilities against those of a fairly large number of others (norms) – you can tell if they have abilities better/worse than most people in norm group
- BUT – you have to know what level of ability is needed for the job



# Extracts from reports generated by the test publisher's software

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- They are generated for psychologist's use.
- They can often be quite blunt and hardhitting
- They are often not "sanitized" or "softened" as an executive report or a report to the candidate



## Example A, verbal reasoning

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- *“A’s performance on the verbal reasoning test places him within the middle band when compared to the reference group.*
- *His score is typical of the comparison group, suggesting that his verbal reasoning ability is as strong as most other people’s.”*



## Example A, verbal reasoning

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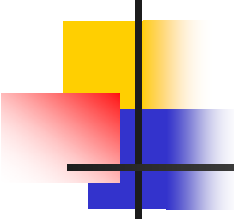
- *“While he will be able to understand instructions and explanations without too much difficulty, it may take him a little time to fully appreciate the logic underlying complex arguments.”*



## Example A, verbal reasoning

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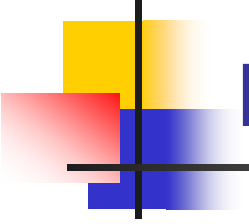
- *“As able as most to use words in a logical, rational way he should be able to explain concepts with which he is familiar with with a fair degree of clarity.”*



## Example B, numerical reasoning

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- *“B's performance on the Numerical Reasoning Test places her in the 'below average' category when compared to the reference group.*
- *This suggests that B will not be as proficient as most when working with numbers and may have a little difficulty fully understanding complex numerical problems.”*



# Example B, numerical reasoning

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- *“Although she should be able to benefit from further training in this area such instruction will need to be structured, focusing upon specific skills rather than abstract concepts”*



## Example C, abstract reasoning

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- *“C’s score on the Abstract Reasoning Test shows that she has performed at an above average level when compared to the reference group.*
- *This indicates a high level of natural or fluid ability.”*



## Example C, abstract reasoning

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- *“This should enable her to grasp new and complex concepts which fall outside of his previous experience with relative ease.*
- *Fairly quick to learn, she should put training and instruction to good use.”*



## Example D, abstract reasoning

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- *“D’s score on the Abstract Reasoning Test is noticeably weak when compared to the reference group.*
- *As a consequence, he is likely to have some difficulty fully appreciating new and abstract concepts which are outside of his previous experience.”*



## Example D, abstract reasoning

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- *“He is likely to require a structured approach to learning which focuses upon the more concrete and practical aspects of a task.”*



# Example F, personality questionnaire

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Gives insight into preferred:

- Interpersonal Style
- Thinking Style
- Coping Style
- Team Role Orientation
- Management Style
- Subordinate Style
- Selling Style



## Example F, personality questionnaire

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*“A very moody person F is extremely excitable and quite easily upset. Temperamental and quick to take offence she is very easily annoyed by trivial matters. Quite anxious, she is inclined to worry about things, and come away from situations feeling that she could have done better.”*



## Example F, personality questionnaire

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*“Having a fairly trusting nature, F will tend to take people at face value. Not particularly inclined to question others' motives, she will generally see little reason to hide her true feelings from close friends and colleagues. Not prone to be cynical or sceptical she will generally believe what others say without being unduly credulous.”*



## Example F, personality questionnaire

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*“F is likely to lack spontaneity, placing importance instead on self-discipline and self-control. Inclined to enjoy jobs that require following set procedures and systems she will tend to prefer to work within well-defined structures and rules. While she is a little more conscientious and persevering than most, she is not unduly obsessive about attending to fine detail.”*



## Example G, personality questionnaire

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- OPQ can generate a report on a set of generic management competencies
- This makes it very useful as dimensions in Assessment and Development Centres



# Example G, personality questionnaire

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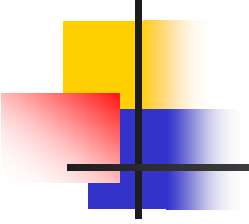
- Definitions and behavioural examples of generic competencies are often very close to an organization's own competencies.
- Sometimes only name change is needed, if the behaviours are the same.
- Sometimes a blending of two or more competencies is needed

# Inventory of Management Competencies

Professional Qualities	Entrepreneurial Qualities	Personal Qualities
Specialist Knowledge	Commercial Awareness	Interpersonal Sensitivity
Problem Solving and Analysis	Creativity and Innovation	Flexibility
Oral Communication	Action Orientation	Resilience
Written Communication	Strategic	Personal Motivation

# Example G, OPQ Inventory Of Management Competencies (IMC) report extract

Personal Qualities						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Is quite supportive and sympathetic to colleagues in need.</li> <li>✓ Consults others and encourages them to contribute.</li> <li>✗ Finds some difficulty in holding back criticism of others' views.</li> <li>✓ Values co-operation somewhat more than competition.</li> </ul>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Interpersonal Sensitivity</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Slightly more comfortable when working with a routine.</li> <li>✗ Generally demonstrates the same style of behaviour.</li> <li>● Moderately inclined to follow the consensus decision.</li> <li>✓ Is fairly optimistic when faced with change.</li> </ul>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Flexibility</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Finds it easy to remain relaxed.</li> <li>● Unlikely to be overly upset by negative feedback.</li> <li>● Will retain a moderate degree of control over emotions.</li> <li>✓ Is fairly likely to take an optimistic and positive view.</li> </ul>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Resilience</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗✗ Very low levels of energy may limit sustained output.</li> <li>✗ Unlikely to be highly driven by career ambition.</li> <li>✗ Is quite unlikely to be motivated by the prospect of winning.</li> </ul>	1	2	3	4	5	<b>Personal Motivation</b>

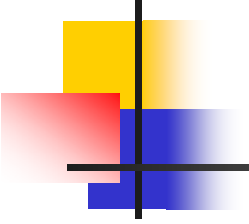


# BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ i)

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## Intrapersonal EQ

- Self Regard
- Emotional Self Awareness
- Assertiveness
- Independence
- Self Actualization

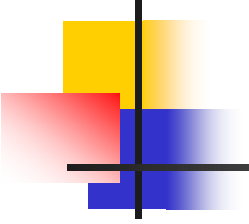


# BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ i)

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## Interpersonal EQ

- Empathy
- Social Responsibility
- Interpersonal Relationship

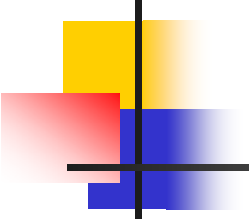


# BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ i)

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Stress Management

- Stress Tolerance
- Impulse Control

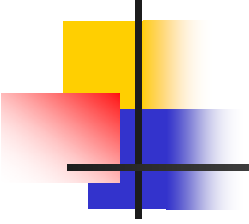


# BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ i)

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## Adaptability

- Reality Testing
- Flexibility
- Problem Solving



# BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ i)

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General Mood

- Optimism
- Happiness



# Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)

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Identifies cognitive functioning trends and tendencies such as:

- strengths and development areas in terms of problem solving
- capacity to deal with various levels of complexity
- potential to improve current cognitive functioning
- a suitable work environment



# Example H: Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)

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G. has an EXPLORATIVE style. She:

- Likes to constantly investigate a problem.
- Thoroughly explores many different kinds and sources of information.
- Checks information carefully and precisely, even repeatedly.
- Ensures effective exploration by asking 'what is relevant?'.



# Example H: Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)

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- Focuses on the information that she thinks is relevant to the problem.
- May explore and check so much that she gets confused and becomes ineffective.
- May explore without purpose when confronted with unfamiliar information.



# Example H: Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)

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G has a REFLECTIVE style. She:

- Tends to explore and consider information very carefully.
- Constantly compares and links new elements into existing information structures.
- Checks own application of task instructions.



# Example H: Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)

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- Has a very careful approach and revisits information once it has been processed.
- May work relatively slowly (though is capable of working at a greater pace) but does monitor pace.
- Is slow, careful and thorough, to avoid making mistakes due to omission or misinterpretation of information.



# Example H: Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)

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Current level of work: Diagnostic

People who are best suited to the Diagnostic work environment may have an analytical \ sequential approach, following clear, linear procedures to diagnose and solve problems that are not always obvious.



# Example H: Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)

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They do this by using their existing knowledge and experience together with theoretical knowledge to interpret information (such as symptoms), and asking either/or questions to help them decide how to solve the problem.



# Example H: Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)

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These people often have specialist or good technical knowledge in their field. For example, a nurse has strong technical knowledge, yet will need to ask a patient questions to reach a correct diagnosis.



# Example H: Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)

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A specialist motor mechanic will also use practical experience and theoretical knowledge to determine why a car has broken down and how to best fix it..



# Example H: Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)

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People who reflect the Diagnostic work environment are often first-line managers, dealing with people face-to-face and supervising those who perform direct operating tasks.



# Example H: Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)

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Those preferring this type of work environment tend to learn by capitalising on memory of their theoretical / specialist knowledge base and practical experience



# Example H: Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)

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Potential Level of Work: tactical

People who are best suited to Tactical work environments, usually work with whole operating systems – particularly with the interaction between tangible intra-system components. They tend to plan, structure, measure, control and pull information together in order to achieve a pre-specified goal.....



# Example H: Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)

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.....Examples of roles reflecting the Tactical work environment are doctors, lawyers, company secretaries, financial advisers, project managers, chief engineers and departmental or business unit managers.



# Example H: Cognitive Process Profile (CPP)

## SPEED

“Speed” and “power” are separate constructs as far as cognition goes.

H shows the following preferences in terms of speed-related factors as measured by the CPP

Dimension	Percentile Score	Description
SPEED	35	Pace of problem solving
QUICK INSIGHT	46	Speed at which new concepts are grasped
PACE CONTROL	58	Most time spent on most difficult aspects
QUICK CLOSURE	54	Tendency to jump to conclusions



## Example H: Cognitive Process Profile (CPP): Metacognitive Awareness

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**\*:\* Compared to the rest of her profile, G already shows a relatively high level of self-awareness in monitoring her own cognitive responses in terms of certain criteria (such as relevance, precision, coherence, clarity, purpose, etc.). Those who already show an awareness of their thinking can easily learn from their mistakes and tend to develop their cognitive potential at a faster rate than those lacking self-awareness.**



# What's in an In-tray or In-basket

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- Memos
- Letters
- Telephone messages
- Reports
- Balance sheets
- Faxes

*Usually between 10 and 30 documents*



# Typical In-tray scenario

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- Participant newly hired
- Previous incumbent left suddenly (or died)
- Some pressing problem causes him to be out of contact from work
- She comes in on Saturday to catch up with items in predecessor's in -tray



# Typical In-tray scenario

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- No one else is in the office, the phones don't work, her cellphone is broken
- Company is described as is her role and position
- A company organogram is provided

Time allowed is about 1.5 hours for a 10 item in-tray to about 3 hours for a 20 – 30 item in-tray



# Typical In-tray scenario

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- Decisions are needed straight away
- Typical competencies assessed could include:
  - Problem Solving and Analysis
  - Action Orientation or Decision Making
  - Written Communication skills
  - Creativity
  - Planning and Organizing



# Typical In-tray problems

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- Employees complain about their colleagues' performance
- The participant's secretary has made appointments for her
- The MD welcomes her and wants a proposed solutions to problems by Friday
- Key employees are unhappy and resign
- The sales people are complaining about the production people



# Typical In-tray problems

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- Close scrutiny of sales figures/balance sheet reveals poor performance of some products or regions
- A merger is about to happen, some departments/branches may need to be closed
- A previously good performer has become demotivated and is upsetting others
- There is an allegation of sexual harrassment/racialism/homophobia/bribery/fiddling expenses



# Typical In-tray problems

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- The end-of-year function has to be organized
- An important client is complaining of poor service
- Car park spaces need to be allocated
- The participant must be in two places at once – or reschedule her diary



# In-tray

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- Sometimes candidates must group together items which relate to the same issue, provide a name for the issue, and prioritize it.
- Sometimes they simply write responses on the in-tray items



# In-trays

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Difficulty levels can be adjusted by

- the number of items,
- the complexity of each item,
- the number of tasks the participant must do
- the time allowed

In-trays can be operational (tactical), strategic, or a combination of both



# In-trays

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May include

- red herrings,
- trivia,
- time-wasters
- and irrelevancies

In-trays can be operational, tactical, strategic, or a combination of all three



## Example of a part of an in-tray report: Planning and Organizing – score 2

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X managed his time well. He completed the task in the time allocated to him, paid similar attention to all elements of the tasks and dealt systematically and methodically with the information presented.

His prioritization was marginal. He was unable to differentiate between what was urgent and what was important. He specified a deadline in only one action.



# Example of a part of an in-tray report

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He did not indicate his objectives. He could have greatly increased the value of his output from these tasks if he had remembered to say clearly, what was to be done, what result he expected, who was to do it, by when and if there were intermediate milestones.

He failed to incorporate into his action plans, any monitoring and evaluating procedures to measure progress and ensure success.



# Example of a part of an in-tray report

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While he did delegate on one occasion, for example he delegated training, he did not specify the results he wanted to obtain.

On another occasion he said he would compile a list of names, with dates, for training. This could rather have been delegated.

His action plans, while they would have served as a personal *aide memoir*, or “to do” list, would have failed as a blueprint from which he and others could work



# Fact-finding Exercise

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- Sometimes an in-tray may be interrupted with another, short exercise
- Fact-finding is a good example.
- Participants instructions may state they have to have a brief meeting at some time during the in-tray exercise time



Activity

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Observed fact-  
finding exercise



# Fact-finding exercise competencies

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- Concern for Others/Diversity Citizenship
- Problem Solving and Analysis
- Judgment and Decision-making
- Impact and Influence



# Concern for Others/ Diversity Citizenship

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Considers the needs and difficulties of others and takes an active interest in their feelings, capabilities and perspectives in order to assist. Acts with integrity, warmth and concern. Works effectively, cooperatively and amiably with persons of diverse backgrounds



# Problem Solving and Analysis

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- Identifies and defines problems, extracts key information from data and develops workable solutions. Makes systematic and rational judgements based on relevant information. Can combine information from different sources. Makes credible inferences and assumptions from information gathered.



# Judgment and Decision-making

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- Recognizes and defines problems and opportunities, generates and evaluates more than one courses of action, evaluates constraints, risks and outcomes and selects a viable option to address the problems. Makes reasoned decisions which are not impulsive. Can make quick decisions when pressurized. Does not procrastinate or over analyze. Prepared to act independently. Can explain and justify his/her decisions.

Fact Finding Exercise Rating Sheet (Notes about the competency have been added for convenience)

Candidate's Name..... Date..... Assessor.....

Competency	Positive Evidence (behaviors)	Negative Evidence (behaviours)	Rating (1-5)
<p><b>Concern for Others/Diversity Citizenship</b>                      Considers the needs and difficulties of others and takes an active interest in their feelings, capabilities and perspectives in order to assist. Acts with integrity, warmth and concern. Works effectively, cooperatively and amiably with persons of diverse backgrounds</p>			
<p><b>Problem Solving and Analysis</b>                      Identifies and defines problems, extracts key information from data and develops workable solutions. Makes systematic and rational judgements based on relevant information. Can combine information from different sources. Makes credible inferences and assumptions from information gathered.</p>			
<p><b>Judgment and Decision-Making</b>                      Recognizes and defines problems and opportunities, generates and evaluates more than one courses of action, evaluates constraints, risks and outcomes and selects a viable option to address the problems. Makes reasoned decisions which are not impulsive. Can make quick decisions when pressurized. Does not procrastinate or over analyze.Prepared to act independently. Can explain and justify his/her decisions.</p>			



Activity: Group Exercise

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# Bursary Committee



# Competencies to assess

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## **Leadership**

- Motivates, encourages and empowers all in the group to reach organisational goals. Leads by example



# Competencies to assess

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## **Strategic Thinking**

Shows a broad view of issues.  
Doesn't get bogged down by detail. Sees the global picture.  
Appreciates the longer term impact of events and decisions

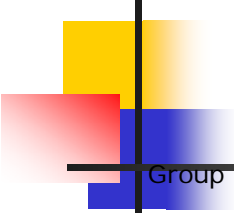


# Competencies to assess

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## **Persuasiveness**

Influences others group members. Gets them to accept his/her point of view. Gets others to agree with him/her.



Group Exercise Assessor's Rating Form

Participant's name..... Date..... Assessor.....

Competency	Positive evidence (behaviours)	Negative evidence (Behaviours)	Rating (1-5)
<b>Leadership</b> Motivates, encourages and empowers all in the group to reach organisational goals. Leads by example			
<b>Strategic Thinking</b> Shows a broad-based view of issues. Doesn't get bogged down by detail. Sees the global picture. Appreciates the longer term impact of events and decisions.			
<b>Persuasiveness</b> Influences others group members. Gets them to accept his/her point of view. Gets others to agree with him/her.			



# Data Integration Session

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- A chaired meeting of assessors where each assessor gives their observations of behaviour and say what score they have allocated.
- Discussion takes place, assessors may challenge each other
- The product of the meeting is a set or agreed, reasoned scores.



## Activity: Group Activity

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**O no, it's the  
*"Villages"* group  
exercise!**



## A Rough Guide to steps to take when designing and implementing an AC

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1. Consider the organization's strategy
2. Do a Job Analysis
3. Chose tests and exercises that will adequately assess performance in those behaviours (remembering 1 and 2)
4. Train Assessors
5. Pilot your AC
6. Evaluate processes and results
7. Make amendments
8. Roll out the AC Programme



# Strategy

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- Where is the organization going?
- Where is the industry it's in going?
- What competencies must it's people have to get it where it plans to go?
- What competencies (talent pool) does it have now?
- What are the gaps/shortages?



# Job Analysis

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- What is the content of the job?
- What are its products / services / outputs / deliverables?
- Who are its suppliers and customers?
- Who does the incumbent report to?
- Who reports to the incumbent?
- What competencies are needed to do this job and at what level?



# Competencies

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- Competencies are observable behaviours that enable good job performance.
- They are independent of:  
    qualifications, and  
    experience



# Competencies

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Competencies consider only the attributes, characteristics, skills, abilities and motivation to complete job tasks satisfactorily.



# Reliable Research Techniques

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- **Structured interviews e.g. Behavioural Event Interviews with job incumbents and/or their managers,**
- **Focus groups,**
- **Surveys,**
- **Questionnaires,**



# Reliable Research Techniques

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- **Repertory Grid**
- **Observation,**
- **Job Performance assessments compared with Key Result Area**
- **Own/competitor literature desk study, annual statements, market literature (e.g. job advertisements)**
- **Other research material: TV, Internet, movies, newspapers...**



# Research Techniques

- **Thematic Review,**
- **Content Analysis,**
- **Semantic Analysis,**
- **Analyzing Panel,**
- **Prioritizing Techniques,**
- **Statistical Analysis (e.g. competencies of individuals versus achievements of Key Results)**



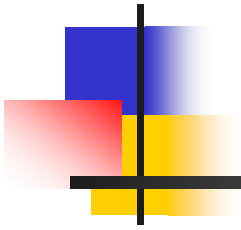
# Competencies

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**The relative importance of each competency in the set of competencies required for good job performance should be determined and a weight assigned.**

# 3

## Assessor Selection and Training



*An area where it is very easy to  
fall flat on your face*



# Assessors

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- **Composition of the board of assessors should be reasonably similar to the candidates in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, religion, physical ability etc.**
- **Typical ratio of participants to assessors is two to one.**



# Assessors should

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- **Be good observers**
- **Be good listeners**
- **Be able to record, classify, rate and interpret behaviour in a consistent manner, and**
- **Discuss conclusions to reach consensus**



# Assessors

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**must have a demonstrated ability to observe, classify and rate behaviours and perform such things as competency-based, structured interviews and roleplays**



# Assessor Training

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- **Assessors can be trained using video taped roleplays.**
- **Experienced assessors must be periodically retrained and their performance evaluated.**



# Assessors

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- **Ideally assessors will have taken part in the process to determine the competencies required.**
- **They must understand, in depth, the competency profile and the rationale behind it.**

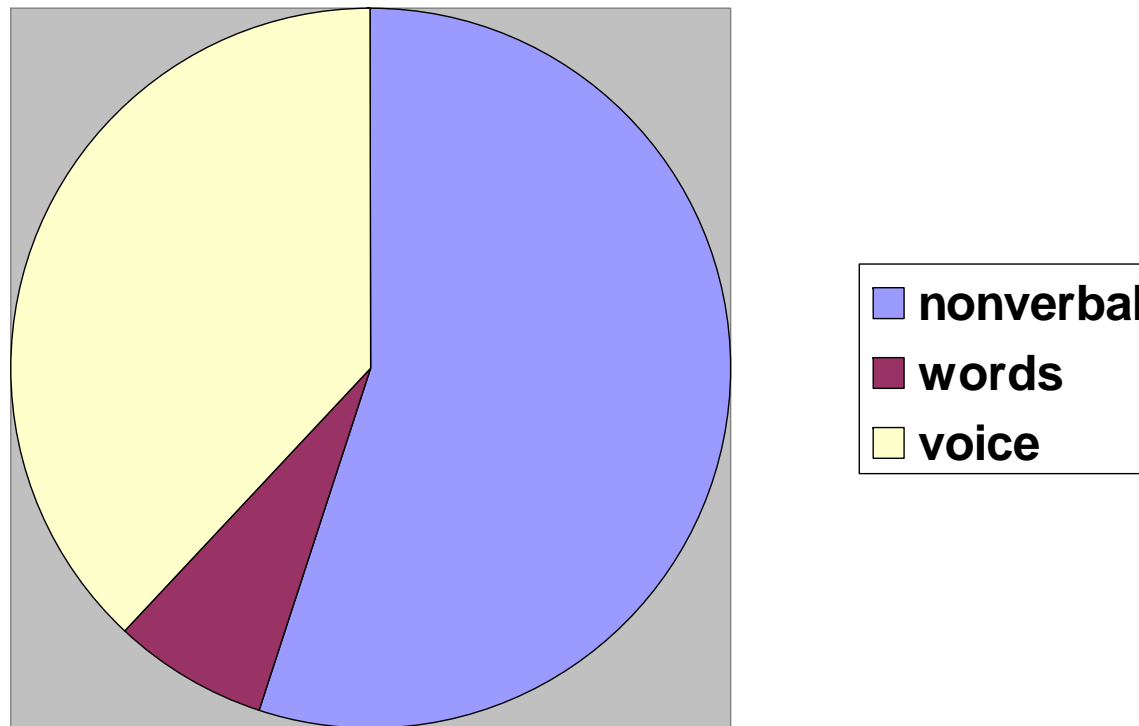


# Assessor Training

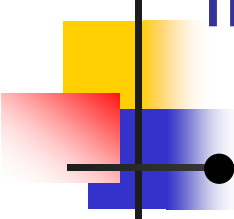
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- **To reduce the risk of a successful legal challenge, assessor training should be thorough**
- **many authorities recommend not less than 3 days.**

# How meaning is typically derived from first impressions



# Predictable sequence of observation in first meetings

- 
- Skin colour (if it stands out)
  - Gender
  - Age
  - Facial impression
  - Eye contact
  - Body movement



# Predictable sequence of observation in first meetings

---

- Personal space
- How they're dressed
- Touch (all the above 55% of meaning)
- Voice (38% of meaning)
- Words (7% of meaning)



## The key skills...

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- To suspend judgment and withhold evaluation to until after the rating phase
- To watch and listen unobtrusively, without reaction such as nonverbal feedback, so as to lessen the “observer effect”



## The key skills...

---

- Recording accurately all observations without considering their relevance, importance (withholding judgment and evaluation) like a “human video camera”



# Is it an Inference or a Behaviour?

## • Inference

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an interpretation of a behaviour

*She was rude.*

## • Behaviour

what actually people do (both verbal and non verbal) *She stood up, poked her tongue out at John, shouted, "You pig! I hate you." walked out of the room and slammed the door*



## Example

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- *“Raised voice tone and volume, spoke faster, waved pen at John, animated face, leaned forward - said, “You’re wrong” x3 quickly, chuckled, wiggled in chair.”*



## Rather than:

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- Got excited and put John down
- Aggressive
- Nasty, rude sort of bugger



# Suggested personal qualities of assessors

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- Can demonstrate empathy, warmth, genuineness
- People trust them
- No personal “hidden agenda”



# Suggested personal qualities of assessors

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- Self awareness
- Able to “melt into the background”
- Able to be self-effacing



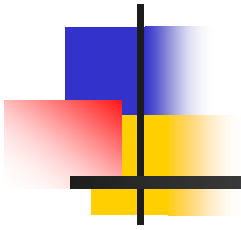
# Suggested personal qualities of assessors

---

- Keen observers of human nature
- Able to mask their reactions and feelings when needed

# 5

## Pilot Implementation



*Fix the glitches before you do it  
for real*



# Piloting

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- Is a “dry run” or “dress rehearsal” – make it as real as you can
- Time exercises and work out logistics
- Check if instructions are clear
- Use it as practice/training for administrators and assessors
- It's often seen as irrelevant, expensive, and time-consuming



# Piloting tips

---

- Do it for real, check it out with volunteers playing the part of participants who are similar to the future participants
- Involve all the assessors and administrators
- Record everything that you do



# Piloting tips

---

Hold an After Action Review. Ask:

- What went well? badly?
- What wasn't understood?
- Was the time estimate correct?
- Are the materials OK?
- Any additional materials needed?
- Was the difficulty level right?
- Was it easy to observe and score?

# Facilitating an AC



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## Transparency not Mystique

Increase transparency and acceptability by telling all candidates about

- the competencies required for the job
- and the selection methods you will use.
  - preferably in advance.

# Facilitating an AC



---

## **INFORM PARTICIPANTS:**

- In writing beforehand and/or in the opening discussion. Include:
  - Purpose of AC
  - What an AC entails, what it is
  - A short description of simulation exercises
  - Information about observers

# Facilitating an AC



---

## **INFORM PARTICIPANTS:**

- How results will be used
- When and how feedback will be given and by whom
- Give a written timetable and outline of the day(s)
- Confidentiality

# Facilitating an AC



---

- The aim is to produce a situation where participants can do there best.
- They may be very nervous or tense.
- You want them keen to do well, but fairly relaxed
- Demonstrate your expertise and authority – show that you know what you are talking about

# Facilitating an AC



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- Answer their questions
- Address their concerns
- Put them at their ease
- It can help to find out what they have been told about the AC.
- They may have false impressions – put them right

# Facilitating an AC



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- During the AC – be around, assessors will not be able to leave the room, they may need your help.
- Collect all question and answer papers and scrap paper used for note – preserve confidentiality.
- Make sure assessors do not score during exercises – prevent leakages

# Behaviour Observation



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- Participants are observed by trained assessors (observers).
- Observers watch and listen unobtrusively.
- Observers postpone judgment at this stage.
- Assessors get a valid picture of how the person will perform in target job.
- Assessors observe different participants in each simulation.

# Behaviour Observation



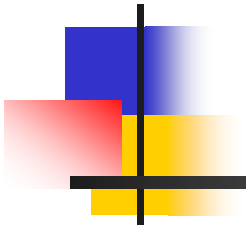
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- *Assessors have a demonstrated ability to observe, record and classify behaviour in dimensions, including knowledge of forms used by the center*

Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations, International Task Force on Assessment Center Guidelines, endorsed by the 28<sup>th</sup>. International Congress on Assessment Center Methods, May 4, 2000 San Francisco, California, USA

8

## Write-up and Evaluation



*Getting it all down on paper*



# First write down all the evidence

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- an accurate description of behaviour observed, esp. non-verbal
- notes of detail of content of what was said.
- provide examples
- verbatim quotes if possible
- indicate number of contributions and results (was the person ignored)

**DO NOT INTERPRET OR EVALUATE YET**



# Note: nonverbal behaviour can include

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- Positioning
- Posture
- Eye Contact
- Facial Expression
- Head movements
- Gestures
- Voice production



## ... then evaluate

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- Complete a structured rating form.
- Weigh up behaviours recorded
- Compare against list of competencies
- Decide on effectiveness of behaviour
- Support statements with evidence
- Evaluate each behaviour separately
- Then evaluate each competency separately



# Remember an assessor must

---

Be aware of his or her own

- Alertness/tiredness/boredom/irritation/impatience to get home/hunger/thirst/
- Current feelings and mood, interest level, resentment



# Remember an assessor must

---

Be aware of his or her own

- Health, sense of well being, optimism/pessimism
- Feelings towards participants  
**including** initial, partially conscious, reactions based on irrelevancies like appearance, voice, gender etc



## Note:

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The aim is not to eliminate all irrelevant subjective impressions, (that would be impossible) but for the assessor to be aware of them and take them into account

*i.e. correctly compensate – neither over nor under compensating*



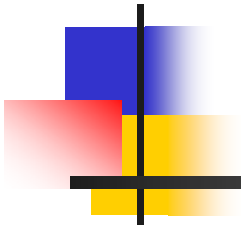
# Beware of the common rating errors

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- Leniency
- Harshness
- Central tendency
- Response bias
- Halo effect
- Cloven hoof effect
- Stereotyping
- Contrast effect
- First impressions
- Recency

9

## Moderation meetings



*Meetings, bloody meetings!*



# Moderation meetings

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- Data from exercises, tests and interviews are integrated
- Assessors share their observations
- Assessors agree on evaluations



# Moderation meetings

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Care:

- Be aware of theories of group dynamics. One is that groups go through these stages.



# Group Development Stages

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- Being Polite
- Why we're here
- Bids for power and influence
- Being constructive
- Synthesis
- Groupthink



## Be aware

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- That some members may be more dominant than others and need encouragement
- That there may be pressure for the less experienced assessors to agree too readily



## Be aware

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- Good assessor training and adequate piloting can help to avoid these pitfalls
- Remember, disagreement can be healthy- investigate it
- Assessment aims towards objectivity – it never quite gets there.



10  
Reporting

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*What the client really wants*



# Written Report

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- Indicates purpose of the assessment
- May have to diplomatically explain to the client what an AC is and why it was used.
- Defines competencies assessed



# Written Report

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- Describes exercises and tests briefly
- Details each participant's strengths and development needs
- May indicate overall potential for success in the target position



# Written Report

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- You may wish to produce two separate lists for your client to assist in her or his Employment Equity Planning.
- e.g. List A: Previously (or Historically) Disadvantaged Individuals
- List B: Non – Previously (or Historically) Disadvantaged Individuals
- Or List A: females and List B: males



# Feedback

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*“Information comparing actual performance to a standard or desired level of performance.”*

*Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations, (2000)*  
International Task Force on Assessment Center Guidelines



# Why bother giving feedback?

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- Ethical:

*stops the power going to your head,  
cuts out "funny business"*

- Legal:

*people have a right to know*



# Why bother giving feedback?

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- Fairness:  
*they gave their time, now give them something back*
- Motivation:  
*helps keep all parties interested, that the AC was for a real purpose and not just to give the HR department something important looking to do*



# Why bother giving feedback?

---

- Control of distortion:  
*keeps you in charge of propaganda,  
stops wrong impressions,*
- Participant development:  
*helps them*
- Interpreter development:  
*helps you*



# Why bother giving feedback?

---

- Consumer information and opinion collecting:  
*helps you find out how well received the AC was, how to improve it next time*
- Public Relations:  
*being helpful, Mr. or Ms. Nice Guy*



# Why bother giving feedback?

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- Marketing:

*the participant may want to use your expertise one day, especially in a high-level AC.*

*You never know.*



# Points to remember

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- How will the participants get feedback?
- Timely feedback, both written and spoken is best (within a month of the AC)
- Individual, face-to-face feedback in private is better than written feedback alone
- Some feedback of a general nature can be given in groups – confidentiality must be maintained



## Feedback to Participants

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- RSA courts have held that employees and applicants have the same right to feedback
- Must be told what of any recommendations made to the AC client
- Should be allowed to read any reports about them (but not necessarily keep them or have copies)



## Feedback to Participants

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- To maintain test security, details or copies of actual AC exercises should not be disclosed
- Participants must be told what records will be kept, for how long and what use they will be put to.
- If data is used for any other purpose, participants have to be informed and asked their permission.



# Feedback

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- Feedback is most useful when linked to a Personal Development Plan – ideally linked to an organization's Succession Plan
- If psychometric tests are included in the AC, feedback must be given by a suitably qualified person.



# Feedback aims

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- to give truthful and objective information about the participant's performance in the AC
- to enhance the participant's self-esteem and sense of worth and dignity



# The person giving feedback (Feedbacker? Feeder back?)

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should model the following behaviours:

- being **empathetic**,
- showing **warmth and respect** and,
- being **genuine**



# Recommended Reading

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- A golden oldie: Assessment Centers in Human Resource Management by George Thornton
- A useful freebie (at least I think it's free):  
Guidelines for Best Practice in the Use of Assessment and Development Centres – SHL Group



# Recommended Reading

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- An excellent article (about 18 pages) serendipitiously found on the Net at

<http://www.maru.co.nz/Articles/id4.htm>

Entitled: *“Welcome to some articles I have written over time which you may find useful - Assessment Centres”*