Challenges in Assessment Centres within the South African Context

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Agenda

• Background to the study
• Method of conducting the study
• Emerging themes
• Conceptual framework
• Recommendations
• Overall conclusion
Background to Study

Ethics broadly refers to being good to self and to others (Rossouw & Van Vuuren, 2010)

Ethics in Assessment Centres is about an assessment procedure and process that is good for all stakeholders
Challenge - ethics cannot be universally defined (Pope & Vasquez, 1998)

What is good, right or acceptable in one context may not be good, right or acceptable in another
Guidelines to regulate the use of AC:

- The Health Professions Council of South Africa;
- The American Psychological Association;
- The Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology of South Africa;
- The Guidelines for Assessment and Development Centres in South Africa (Assessment Centre Study Group, 2007);
- The Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Centre Operations (International Task Force on Assessment Centre Guidelines, 2009)
Background to Study (continued)

Aspects regularly addressed:

• Use of non-Assessment Centre activities

• Need for a clear Assessment Centre policy statement

• Assessor training

• Informed participation

• Validation issues
Aspects regularly addressed (continued):

• Assessment Centres for different purposes
• Rights of the participant
• Conducting Assessment Centres across different cultural contexts
• Cross-national Assessment Centres
Specific research question:

What are the possible ethical challenges in the use of Assessment Centres within the South African context?

The aim of the research:

To gain insights that could assist in finding ways and means to enhance ethical aspects related to the use of Assessment Centres in South Africa
Background to Study (continued)

Gather information from informed users of the Assessment Centre procedure with regard to the above-mentioned research question.
Method Followed

• 2012 Assessment Centre Study Group conference delegates asked to share views on ethical challenges in Assessment Centres (ACs) within the South African context

• Delegates participated in the study on a voluntary basis (N=98)
(1) List 5-8 single word concepts or short phrases that you associate with the notion of ethical challenges in assessment centres

(2) Briefly describe the single most profound incident where you experienced an assessment centre related ethical challenge during your involvement with centres over the years (to operationalise the theoretical constructs identified in question 1)
Analysis

• Responses systematically analysed through process of content analysis

• Major themes and sub themes identified
Focus Group

Themes and sub-themes presented to two focus group sessions

• Johannesburg – morning session

• Pretoria – afternoon session

• Attended by 16 purposively selected participants from industry and academia to facilitate a debate from both sides: scientist-practitioner
Purpose of the Focus Group

Reflect on identified themes

1. Suggest changes to the themes

2. Identify the essence of each major theme

3. Indicate possible solutions to the identified ethical challenges
Themes

1. Universal Ethical Considerations
2. Fairness
3. Bias
4. Culture
5. Ethics and Religion
6. Historical and Legal Considerations
7. Organisational Influence
8. Ethics Concept
9. Properties of Assessment Tools
10. Ethical Assessment Centre Process
11. Interpretation
12. Assessor Competence and Characteristics
13. Personal Values
14. Test Taker Characteristics
15. Disregard for Ethical Decision-Making
Ethical Challenges in AC within South Africa

Universal Ethical Considerations
- Fairness; Bias
- Culture

Ethics and Religion

Historical & Legal Considerations

Organisational Influence

Ethics Concept

Assessment Centre

Ethical AC Process

Properties of Assessment Tools

Interpretation

ASSESSOR:
- Assessment Competence & Characteristics
- Personal Values

ASSEESSEE:
- Test Taker Characteristics
- Personal Values

LEMASA
Unlocking potential.
Universal Ethical Considerations – Single Words

- Do no harm
- Doing right not wrong
- Responsibility
- Accountability
- Transparency
- Confidentiality
- Equality
- Consistency
- Honesty
- Trustworthiness
- Trust
- Integrity
- Respect
- Credibility
Fairness; Bias – Single Words

- Fairness as broad principle
- Fair Application of AC
- Fair Treatment of Participants
- Fair Use of AC Tools and Psychometry
- Cultural Fairness

- Unconscious Bias
- Assessor Bias
- Cultural Bias
- Language Bias
- Bias towards extraverts in verbal exercises
Culture – Single Words

- Cultural Background
- Beliefs
- Multicultural / Global Participants
- Culture Specification
- Cultural Sensitivity
- Cultural Differences
- Language
- Language Barriers
Ethics and Religion – Single Words

- Religion
- Beliefs
- Ethics associated with Religion
- Religious Sensitivity
- Religion Related Content
- Standing by Beliefs
- Clear Conscience
Historical and Legal Considerations – Single Words

- Discrimination
- Employment Equity
- Diversity
- Context
- Perceptions
- Equality
- Classification
- Tolerance
- Complaints
Organisational Influence – Single Words

• Neutral Organisation-related Case Studies
• Organisational Reputation
• Ethical Dilemmas in Corporate sphere
• Organisation View of Ethics
• Balancing Opposing Stakeholder Needs
• The Way We Do Things
• Management Expectations
• Cost
• Time
• Openness to Ethical Considerations by Management
• Negative Implications of Lack of Ethics
• Outspokenness
• Outcomes
• Culture of Ethics – Good Without Doing Harm
• Impact of Unethical Decisions
• Strategic Integration of Ethics
Ethics Concept – Single Words

• Behavioural and Managerial Ethics Competence
• Ethical Culture

Key questions:
• Can Ethics be assessed?
• Tools to assess Ethics?
• Defined and measurable Ethics competencies?
• Cognitive Ethics competence?
• Is it necessary to assess Ethics?
• Multi-faceted Approach
• Broader Dimensions
• Ethics can change according to the situation
Properties of Assessment Tools – Single Words

• Definitions
• Validity – Face Validity; Construct Validity; Content Validity
• Reliability
• Fit-for-Purpose / Relevance
• Design of Exercises
• Results
• Rigour
• Cloning
Ethical Assessment Centre Process – Single Words

- Willing Consent
- Coaching Before Assessment
- Ensure Participant Readiness
- Standardisation
- Robust Process
- Execution
- Sustainability
- Stage of Assessment
- Inclusion of Stakeholders
  - Due Diligence
- Priority
(continued)

- Reference Check
- Honest and Valid Feedback
- Partiality to Clients
- Relevance of Instruments in AC
- Objectivity
- Professionalism
- Disclosure of Competencies Being Assessed
- Storage / Safe Keeping of Material
Interpretation – Single Words

- Different Points of View
- Ethical Scoring
- Appropriate Norms
- Subjectivity
- Positive Negative or Negative Positive
- Shared meaning
Personal Values (Assessor and Assessee) – Single Words

- Agreeableness
- Nobleness
- Considerate
- Sincerity
- Truthfulness
- Tolerance
- Humbleness
- Responsible
- Courage
- Ethical Values
- Justice
- Morality
- Good
- Sensitivity
- Authenticity
- Open
- Right or Wrong
- Character
Assessee Characteristics – Single Words

- Resistant
- Potential
- Impression Management – faking good; social desirability, creating a false expectation
Assessor – Single Words

**Competence**
- Assessor Training
- Assessor Competence
- Proficiency

**Competence in Ethics**
- Lack of Ethics Vocabulary
- Personal Ethics / Personal Understanding of Ethics
- Personal Demonstration of Ethics
Characteristics

• Diversity / Differences Amongst Assessors
• Discipline / Due Diligence
• Fear to be Found Out
• Sharing of Information
• Healthy Assessors
Disregard for Ethical Decision Making – Single Words

- Impartiality
- Corruption
- Racism
- Favouratism
- Nepotism
- Bribery
- Making Appointment Decisions without Validating Data
- Deception
- Inappropriate Conduct
- Lying / Lies
- “Buddy” Assessment
- Sharing of Information – Violating Confidentiality
- Tampering with AC Reliability and Validity Data
Issue: Is an AC a psychological act?

Recommendation – If declared a psychological act, governance would be more regulated; however, not enough psychologists to oversee the running of all AC’s and the interpretation of results from ACs. Therefore, only use sufficiently trained and competent assessors.
Issue: Are all best practice guidelines equally applicable to ACs and DACs?

Recommendation – Perhaps separate guidelines for an AC and for a DAC should be drawn-up.
Issue: Despite all the readily available, published best practice guidelines, how come so many “unethical AC practices”?

Recommendation – Perhaps an international registration body for ACs need to be established to ensure adherence to minimum standards
Focus Group Recommendations: Culture

Issue: Cultural bias

Recommendation – AC designer and AC assessors need to be knowledgeable of different cultures and competent in use of ACs.

Issue: Adverse impact

Recommendation – Calculate and track impact over time, learn from trends
Focus Group Recommendations: Organisational Influence

Issue: Balancing stakeholder needs

Recommendation – beware that all stakeholders are served.

Issue: Organisation’s culture (How we do things here)

Recommendation – Be aware of culture and its impact on the AC. Design possible solutions.
Issue: People chosen despite AC results

Recommendation – Realise that AC results is one of the inputs into the final decision. Therefore, clarify before the AC the decision-matrix and the weight that the AC results will have in the overall decision.
Focus Group Recommendations: Organisational Influence (continued)

Issue: AC results used for intended purpose

Recommendation – Use ACs within the appropriate contexts and conditions – Fit-for-purpose ACs

Recommendation – If the AC results will later on be used for other purposes, all AC participants should give written consent
Issue: Meeting client’s expectation while adhering to ethical professional standards

Recommendation – Balance the needs of ALL stakeholders; Do not chase a contract (customisation should not be at the expense of quality)
Issue: Type of rating sheet

Recommendation – Be aware that the type of rating sheet can impact AC reliability;

Recommendation: Conduct a proper and thorough Job Analysis to inform the AC design
Recommendation – Do continuous research on own AC data and tools – keep record of data; learn from findings and update tools and norms.

Recommendation – Reflect on the value add of the individual AC instrument and continuously improve the AC.

Recommendation – Comply with psychometric test properties as far as possible.
Issue: Feedback

Recommendation – Extremely important aspect; should always take place professionally. Feedback givers should be well trained and should themselves have attended the AC.
Recommendation: - Assessees who are part of the organisation should have access to any formal summary written reports concerning their own performance and recommendations; applicants to an organisation should know what the final recommendation is and the reason for the recommendation.
Issue: Disclosure of competencies being assessed

Recommendation – Improve transparency – participants should know what is being tested and for what reason

Issue: Standardisation

Recommendation – AC manuals should be clear and specific; participants should be guaranteed the same experience and conditions
Issue: Who owns the data? How long is data stored? With whom do you share the information?

Recommendation – Client owns the results, the data remains the property of the AC practitioner; clarify with the client with whom the results may be shared

Recommendation – Assessee informed what records and data are being collected, maintained, used, disseminated
Focus Group Recommendations: Ethical Assessment Centre Process: the Third Party Perspective

Issue: AC materials are often intellectual property of AC designers

Recommendation: Respect copyright and intellectual property
Focus Group Recommendations: Interpretation

Issue: Data integration

Recommendation – Assessors should report comprehensively only on behaviour of assessees during simulations / assessments; not outside of simulations / assessments

Recommendation – All information from all assessors need to be pooled and considered during data integration; integration method should be validated according to professionally accepted standards
Focus Group Recommendations: Assessee Characteristics

Issue: Is the language and complexity appropriate for the assessees and organisation?

Recommendation – Calculate readability index of all AC material; pre-pilot simulations and pilot the AC before roll out

Recommendation – Determine upfront educational levels suitable to go through specific AC
Issue: Assessee fatigue

Recommendation – Conduct a pre-pilot on the simulations and a pilot of the AC; monitor fatigue and adjust if needed
Focus Group Recommendations: Assessor

Issue: The AC may be well designed, but the assessor can make or break the AC

Recommendation – Assessors need to be competent and adhere to ethical standards; continuous training / refreshers
Issue: Assessor expectations of how participants will perform may influence behaviour interpretation

Recommendation – Well structured Observer Report Forms; competent assessors; assessors aware of own expectations

Issue: Assessor fatigue

Recommendation – Conduct a pre-pilot on the simulations and a pilot of the AC; monitor fatigue and adjust if needed
Emerging themes can again be grouped into various contexts:

• International Context,
• National Context,
• Organisational Context, and
• AC context
Ethical Challenges in ACs

International Context

- Multi-National Companies (Impact on Language, Competencies, Simulations and Norms)
- Diverse Cultures
- Diverse Behaviour and Social Norms.
Ethical Challenges in ACs

National Context

- Historic Legacy
- Legal Framework
- Cultural Diversity and Minorities
- Political Framework.
Ethical Challenges in ACs
Organisational Context

• Different Stakeholders
• Management Expectations
• Business Practice (the way we do things)
• Cost
• Time
• View of Ethics
• Openness to Ethical Considerations.
Ethical Challenges in ACs

Assessment Centres Context

• Best Practice Guidelines - Applicable on ACs and Applicable on Assessments in general

• Scientific Rigour

• Professional Behaviour and Ethics

• Fit for Purpose, Fit for Context.
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Ethical Challenges in ACs

International Context

National Context

Organisational Context

• Are these Ethical issues also applicable in other countries?
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