Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations

**International Task Force
on Assessment Center
Guidelines**

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Purpose

This document is intended to establish professional guidelines and ethical considerations for users of the assessment center method. These guidelines are designed to cover both existing and future applications. The title "assessment center" is restricted to those methods that follow these guidelines.

These guidelines will provide: (1) guidance to industrial/organizational psychologists, organizational consultants, human resource management specialists and generalists, and others designing and conducting assessment centers; (2) information to managers deciding whether or not to institute assessment center methods; (3) instruction to assessors serving on the staff of an assessment center; and (4) guidance on the use of technology in assessments.

History of Guidelines

The rapid growth in the use of the assessment center method in recent years has resulted in a proliferation of applications in a variety of organizations. Assessment centers currently are being used in industrial, educational, military, government, law enforcement, and other organizational settings. Practitioners have raised serious concerns that reflect a need for standards or guidelines for users of the method. The 3rd International Congress on the Assessment Center Method, which met in Quebec (May 1975), endorsed the first set of guidelines. These were based on the observations and experience of a group of professionals representing many of the largest users of the method.

Developments in the period 1975–79 concerning federal guidelines related to testing, as well as professional experience with the original guidelines, suggested that the guidelines should be evaluated and revised. Therefore, the 1979 guidelines included essential items from the original guidelines but also addressed the recognized need for: (1) further definitions, (2) clarification of impact on organizations and participants, (3) expanded guidelines on training, and (4) additional information on validation.

Since 1979 the use of assessment centers has spread to many different organizations that are assessing individuals representing diverse types of jobs. During this period pressures to modify the assessment center method came from three different sources. First, there had been attempts to streamline the procedures to make them less time-consuming and expensive. Second, new theoretical arguments and evidence from empirical research had been interpreted to mean that the assessment center method does not work exactly as its proponents originally had believed, suggesting that the method should be modified. Third, many procedures purporting to be assessment centers had not complied with previous guidelines because the guidelines may have been too ambiguous. Revisions in the 1989 third edition were designed to incorporate needed changes and to respond to some of the concerns raised from 1979–89.

The 1989 revision of these guidelines was begun at the 15th International Congress on the Assessment Center Method in Boston (April 1987) when Dr. Douglas Bray held discussions with many attendees.

Subsequently, Dr. Bray and Dr. George Thornton solicited additional comments from a group of assessment center practitioners. The 1989 Task Force provided comments on drafts of a revision prepared by Bray and Thornton. A later draft was circulated and discussed at the 16th International Congress held in May 1988 in Tampa.

The 1989 guidelines were written in response to comments obtained at the 1988 Congress and from members of the Task Force. The 1989 guidelines were endorsed by a majority of the Task Force and by participants at the 17th International Congress held in May 1989 in Pittsburgh.

Changes in the 1989 guidelines from prior editions included: (1) specification of the role of the job analysis; (2) clarification of the types of attributes/dimensions to be assessed and whether or not attributes/dimensions must be used; (3) delineation of the processes of observing, recording, evaluating, and aggregating information; and (4) further specification of assessor training.

The current revision of these guidelines was initiated at the 27th International Congress on Assessment Center Methods in Orlando (June 1999) when Dr. David R. MacDonald conducted discussions with a number of assessment center experts in attendance, and also solicited input at a general session regarding aspects of the guidelines needing to be (re-)addressed. A primary factor driving the revision was the passage of a full decade since the 1989 edition. Other factors included an interest in the integration of technology into assessment center methods and recognition of the need for more specific definitions of several concepts and terms.

Input from members of the Task Force for the 2000 Edition was synthesized into a final draft that was presented and endorsed at the 28th International Congress held in May 2000 in San Francisco, attended by 150 participants representing Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Columbia, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Philippines, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

Assessment Center Defined

An assessment center consists of a standardized evaluation of behavior based on multiple inputs. Several trained observers and techniques are used. Judgments about behavior are made, in major part, from specifically developed assessment simulations. These judgments are pooled in a meeting among the assessors or by a statistical integration process. In an integration discussion, comprehensive accounts of behavior, and often ratings of it, are pooled. The discussion results in evaluations of the performance of the assessees on the dimensions/ competencies or other variables that the assessment center is designed to measure. Statistical combination methods should be validated in accordance with professionally accepted standards.

There is a difference between an assessment center and assessment center methodology. Various features of the assessment center methodology are used in procedures that do not meet all of the guidelines set forth here, such as when a psychologist or human resource professional, acting alone, uses a simulation as a part of the evaluation of an individual. Such personnel assessment procedures are not covered by these guidelines; each should be judged on its own merits. Procedures that do not conform to all the guidelines here should not be represented as assessment centers or imply that they are assessment centers by using the term "assessment center" as part of the title.

The following are the essential elements for a process to be considered an assessment center:

1. **Job Analysis**—A job analysis of relevant behaviors must be conducted to determine the dimensions, competencies, attributes, and job performance indices important to job success in order to identify what should be evaluated by the assessment center.

   The type and extent of the job analysis depend on the purpose of assessment, the complexity of the job, the adequacy and appropriateness of prior information about the job, and the similarity of the new job to jobs that have been studied previously.

   If past job analyses and research are used to select dimensions and exercises for a new job, evidence of the comparability or generalizability of the jobs must be provided.

   When the job does not currently exist, analyses can be done of actual or projected tasks or roles that will comprise the new job, position, job level, or job family.

   Target dimensions can also be identified from an analysis of the vision, values, strategies, or key objectives of the organization.

   Competency-modeling procedures may be used to determine the dimensions/ competencies to be assessed by the assessment center, if such procedures are conducted with the same rigor as traditional job analysis methods. Rigor in this regard is defined as the involvement of subject matter experts who are knowledgeable about job requirements, the collection and quantitative evaluation of essential job elements, and the production of evidence of reliable results. Any job analysis or compe-

tency modeling must result in clearly specified categories of behavior that can be observed in assessment procedures.

A "competency" may or may not be amenable to behavioral assessment as defined herein. A competency, as used in various contemporary sources, refers to an organizational strength, an organizational goal, a valued objective, a construct, or a grouping of related behaviors or attributes. A competency may be considered a behavioral dimension for the purposes of assessment in an assessment center if it can be defined precisely and expressed in terms of behaviors observable on the job or in a job family and in simulation exercises. A competency also must be shown to be related to success in the target job or position or job family.

2. **Behavioral Classification**—Behaviors displayed by participants must be classified into meaningful and relevant categories such as dimensions, attributes, characteristics, aptitudes, qualities, skills, abilities, competencies, and knowledge.

3. **Assessment Techniques**—The techniques used in the assessment center must be designed to provide information for evaluating the dimensions previously determined by the job analysis.

Assessment center developers should establish a link from behaviors to competencies to exercises/assessment techniques. This linkage should be documented in a competency-by-exercise/assessment technique matrix.

4. **Multiple Assessments**—Multiple assessment techniques must be used. These can include tests, interviews, questionnaires, sociometric devices, and simulations. The assessment techniques are developed or chosen to elicit a variety of behaviors and information relevant to the selected competencies/dimensions. Self-assessment and 360° assessment data may be gathered as assessment information. The assessment techniques will be pretested to ensure that the techniques provide reliable, objective and relevant behavioral information for the organization in question. Pretesting might

entail trial administration with participants similar to assessment center candidates, thorough review by subject matter experts as to the accuracy and representativeness of behavioral sampling and/or evidence from the use of these techniques for similar jobs in similar organizations.

5. **Simulations**—The assessment techniques must include a sufficient number of job-related simulations to allow opportunities to observe the candidate's behavior related to each competency/dimension being assessed. At least one—and usually several—job-related simulations must be included in each assessment center.

A simulation is an exercise or technique designed to elicit behaviors related to dimensions of performance on the job requiring the participants to respond behaviorally to situational stimuli. Examples of simulations include, but are not limited to, group exercises, in-basket exercises, interaction (interview) simulations, presentations, and fact-finding exercises.

Stimuli may also be presented through video-based or virtual simulations delivered via computer, video, the Internet, or an intranet.

For simple jobs one or two job-related simulations may be used if the job analysis clearly indicates that only one or two simulations sufficiently simulate a substantial portion of the job being evaluated. If a single comprehensive assessment technique is used, then it must include distinct job-related segments.

Assessment center designers also should be careful to design exercises that reliably elicit a large number of competency-related behaviors. In turn, this should provide assessors with sufficient opportunities to observe competency-related behavior. The stimuli contained in a simulation parallel or resemble stimuli in the work situation, although they may be in different settings. The desirable degree of fidelity is a function of the purpose of the assessment center. Fidelity may be relatively low for early identification and selection programs for nonmanagerial personnel and may be relatively high for programs

designed to diagnose the training needs of experienced managers. Assessment center designers should be careful that the content of the exercises does not favor certain assessees (e.g., assessees in certain racial, ethnic, age, or sex groups) for irrelevant reasons.

To qualify as a behavioral simulation for an assessment center as herein defined, the assessment method must require the assessee to overtly display certain behaviors. The assessee must be required to demonstrate a constructed response. Assessment procedures that require the assessee to select *only* among provided alternative responses, such as seen only in multiple-choice tests or computerized in-baskets, do not conform to this requirement. Likewise, a situational interview that calls for only an expression of behavioral intentions does not conform. Neither do "low fidelity" simulations and situational interviews. Though they may yield highly reliable and valid assessment ratings, they do not constitute behavioral assessment required in assessment centers.

Assessment center materials often are intellectual property protected by international copyright laws. Respect for copyrights and the intellectual property of others must be maintained under all circumstances.

6. **Assessors**—Multiple assessors must be used to observe and evaluate each assessee.

   When selecting a group of assessors, consider characteristics such as diversity of race, ethnicity, age, sex, organizational level, and functional work area.

   Computer technology may be used to assess in those situations in which it can be shown that a computer program evaluates behaviors at least as well as a human assessor.

   The maximum ratio of assessees to assessors is a function of several variables, including the type of exercises used, the dimensions to be evaluated, the roles of the assessors, the type of integration carried out, the amount of assessor training, the experience of the assessors, and the purpose of the assessment

center. A typical ratio of assessees to assessors is two to one.

A participant's current supervisor should not be involved in the assessment of a direct subordinate when the resulting data will be used for selection or promotional purposes.

7. **Assessor Training**—Assessors must receive thorough training and demonstrate performance that meets the guidelines in the section, "Assessor Training," *prior to* participating in an assessment center.

8. **Recording Behavior**—A systematic procedure must be used by assessors to record specific behavioral observations accurately at the time of observation. This procedure might include techniques such as handwritten notes, behavioral observation scales, or behavioral checklists.

   Audio and video recordings of behavior may be made and analyzed at a later date.

9. **Reports**—Assessors must prepare a report of the observations made during each exercise before the integration discussion or statistical integration.

10. **Data Integration**—The integration of behaviors must be based on a pooling of information from assessors or through a statistical integration process validated in accordance with professionally accepted standards.

    During the integration discussion of each dimension, assessors should report information derived from the assessment techniques but should not report information 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. Methods of combining assessors' evaluations of information discussed in the assessors' integration sessions must be supported by the reliability of the assessors' discussions.

    Computer technology also may be used to support the data integration process provided the conditions of this section are met.

Non-Assessment Center Activities

The following kinds of activities *do not* constitute an assessment center:

1. Assessment procedures that do not require the assessee to demonstrate overt behavioral responses are not behavioral simulations, and thus any assessment program that consists solely of such procedures is not an assessment center as defined herein. Examples of these are computerized in-baskets calling only for multiple-choice responses, situation interviews calling only for behavioral intentions, and written competency tests.

    Procedures not requiring an assessee to demonstrate overt behavioral responses may be used within an assessment center but must be coupled with at least one simulation requiring the overt display of behaviors.

2. Panel interviews or a series of sequential interviews as the sole technique.

3. Reliance on a single technique (regardless of whether it is a simulation) as the sole basis for evaluation. However, a single comprehensive assessment technique that includes distinct job-related segments (e.g., large, complex simulations or virtual assessment centers with several definable components and with multiple opportunities for observations in different situations) is not precluded by this restriction.

4. Using only a test battery composed of a number of paper-and-pencil measures, regardless of whether the judgments are made by a statistical or judgmental pooling of scores.

5. Single-assessor evaluation (i.e., measurement by one individual using a variety of techniques such as paper-and-pencil tests, interviews, personality measures, or simulations).

6. The use of several simulations with more than one assessor but with no pooling of data (i.e., each assessor prepares a report on performance in an exercise, and the individual, unintegrated reports are used as the final product of the center).

7. A physical location labeled as an "assessment center" that does not conform to the methodological requirements noted above.

Organizational Policy Statement

Assessment centers operate more effectively as part of a human resource system. Prior to the introduction of a center into an organization, a policy statement should be prepared and approved by the organization. This policy statement should address the following areas:

1. **Objective**—This may be selection, diagnosis for development, early identification, evaluation of potential, evaluation of competency, succession planning, or any combination of these.

    An assessment center participant should be told, prior to assessment, what decision(s) will or might be made with assessment data. If the organization desires to make decisions with the data other than those communicated to the participant prior to assessment, the decision(s) should be clearly described to the participant and consent obtained.

2. **Assessees**—The population to be assessed, the method for selecting assessees from this population, procedure for notification, and policy related to assessing should be specified.

3. **Assessors**—The assessor population (including sex, age, race, and ethnic mix), limitations on use of assessors, assessor experience, and evaluation of assessor performance and certification requirements, where applicable, should be specified.

4. **Use of Data**—The process flow of assessment records within the organization, individuals to receive reports, restrictions on access to information, procedures and controls for research and program evaluation purposes, feedback procedures to management and employees, and the length of time data will be maintained in files should be specified. Particularly for a selection application, it is recommended that the data be used within two years of the date of administration because of the likelihood of change in the participant or the organization.

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5. **Qualifications of Consultant(s) or Assessment Center Developer(s)**—The internal or external consultant(s) responsible for the development of the center or of the exercises/simulations for the center should be identified and his or her professional qualifications and related training specified.

6. **Validation**—The statement should specify the validation model being used. If a content-oriented validation strategy is used, documentation of the relationship of the job/job family content to the dimensions and exercises should be presented along with evidence of the reliability of the observations and rating of behavior. If evidence is being taken from prior validation research, which may have been summarized in meta-analyses, the organization must document that the current job/job family and assessment center are comparable and generalized to the jobs and assessment centers studied elsewhere. If local, criterion-related validation has been carried out, full documentation of the study should be provided. If validation studies are under way, there should be a schedule indicating when a validation report will be available.

Assessor Training

Assessor training is an integral part of the assessment center program. Assessor training should have clearly stated training objectives and performance guidelines.

The following issues related to training must be considered:

1. **Training Content**—Whatever the approach to assessor training, the objective is to obtain reliable and accurate assessor judgments. A variety of training approaches may be used, as long as it can be demonstrated that reliable and accurate assessor judgments are obtained. The following minimum training goals are required:

   a. Thorough knowledge of the organization and job/job family or normative group being assessed to provide an effective context for assessor judgments.

b. Thorough knowledge and understanding of the assessment dimensions, definitions of dimensions, relationship to job performance, and examples of effective and ineffective performance.

c. Thorough knowledge and understanding of the assessment techniques, relevant dimensions to be observed in each portion of the assessment center, expected or typical behavior, examples or samples of actual behaviors, etc.

d. Demonstrated ability to observe, record, and classify behavior in dimensions, including knowledge of forms used by the center.

e. Thorough knowledge and understanding of evaluation and rating procedures, including how data are integrated.

f. Thorough knowledge and understanding of assessment policies and practices of the organization, including restrictions on how assessment data are to be used, when this is a requirement of assessors.

g. Thorough knowledge and understanding of feedback procedures, where appropriate.

h. Demonstrated ability to give accurate oral and written feedback, when feedback is given by the assessors.

i. Demonstrated knowledge and ability to play objectively and consistently the role called for in interactive exercises (e.g., one-on-one simulations or fact-finding exercises) when role-playing is required of assessors. Non-assessor roleplayers also may be used if their training results in their ability to play the role objectively and consistently.

2. **Training Length**—The length of assessor training may vary due to a variety of considerations that can be categorized into three major areas:

   a. Trainer and Instructional Design Considerations

      — The instructional mode(s) utilized

— The qualifications and expertise of the trainer

— The training and instructional sequence

b. Assessor Considerations

— Previous knowledge and experience with similar assessment techniques

— The use of professional psychologists

— Experience and familiarity with the organization and the target position(s)/ job(s)/job families or target level

— The frequency of assessor participation

— Other related qualifications and expertise

c. Assessment Program Considerations

— The target position's level of difficulty

— The number of dimensions/ competencies to be rated

— The anticipated use of the assessment information (e.g., immediate selection, broad placement considerations, development)

— The number and complexity of the exercises

— The division of roles and responsibilities between assessors and others on the assessment staff (e.g., administrator and other support staff)

— The degree of support provided to assessors in the form of observation and evaluation guides

It should be noted that length and quality of training are not synonymous. Precise guidelines for the minimum number of hours or days required for assessor training are difficult to specify. However, extensive experience has shown that, for the initial training of assessors who have no experience in an assessment center that conforms to the guidelines in this document, a typical assessment center may require two days of assessor training for each day of the administration of assessment center exercises. Assessors who have experience with similar assessment techniques in other programs may require less training. More complex assessment centers with varied formats of simulation exercises may require additional training; simple assessment centers may require less.

In any event, assessor training is an essential aspect of an assessment program. The true test of training quality should be assessor competence as described by the performance guidelines and certification that follow.

3. **Performance Guidelines and Certification**—Each assessment center should have clearly stated performance guidelines for assessors. These performance guidelines should include, as a minimum, the following areas:

a. The ability to rate behavior in a standardized fashion.

b. The ability to recognize, observe, and report the behaviors into the appropriate dimensions, etc.

c. The ability to administer an exercise, if the assessor serves as exercise administrator.

Some measurement is needed to indicate that the individual being trained is capable of functioning as an assessor. The measurement of assessor performance may vary and could include data in terms of (1) accuracy of rating performance, (2) critiques of assessor reports, and (3) observation as an evaluator. It is important that, prior to their actual duties, assessors' performance is evaluated to ensure that individuals are sufficiently trained to function as assessors and that such performance is periodically monitored to ensure that skills learned in training are applied.

Each organization must be able to demonstrate that its assessors can meet minimum performance standards. This may require the development of additional training or other prescribed actions for assessors not meeting these performance guidelines.

The trainer of assessors should be competent to enable individuals to develop the assessor skills stated above and to evaluate the acquisition of these skills.

4. **Currency of Training and Experience**—The time between assessor training and initial service as an assessor must not exceed six months. If a longer period has elapsed, prospective assessors should attend a refresher course or receive special coaching from a trained assessment center administrator.

Assessors who do not have recent experience as an assessor (i.e., fewer than two assessment centers over two consecutive years) should attend a refresher course before they serve again or be given special coaching by a trained assessment center administrator.

Informed Participation

The organization is obligated to make an announcement prior to assessment so that participants will be fully informed about the program. Ideally, this information should be made available in writing before the center. A second option is to use the material in the opening statement of the center. While the information provided will vary across organizations, the following basic information should be given to all prospective participants.

1. **Objective(s)**—The objective(s) of the program and the purpose of the assessment center. The organization may choose to disclose the dimensions measured and the general nature of the exercises prior to the assessment.

2. **Selection**—How individuals are selected to participate in the center.

3. **Choice(s)**—Any options the individual has regarding the choice of participating in the assessment center as a condition of employment, advancement, development, etc.

4. **Staff**—General information on the assessor staff, including composition and assessor training.

5. **Materials**—What assessment center materials completed by the individual are collected and maintained by the organization.

6. **Results**—How the assessment center results will be used and how long the assessment results will be maintained on file.

7. **Feedback**—When and what kind of feedback will be given to the participants.

8. **Reassessment**—The procedure for reassessment (if any).

9. **Access**—Who will have access to the assessment center reports and under what conditions.

10. **Contact**—Who will be the contact person responsible for the records and where the results will be stored or archived.

Validation Issues

A major factor in the widespread acceptance and use of assessment centers is related directly to an emphasis on sound validation research. Numerous studies demonstrating the predictive validity of individual assessment center programs have been conducted in a variety of organizational settings and reported in the professional literature. However, the historical record of the validity of this process cannot be taken as a guarantee that a given assessment program will or will not be valid or generalized to a new application.

Ascertaining the validity of an assessment center program is a complicated technical process, and it is important that validation research meet both professional and legal standards. Research should be conducted by individuals knowledge-

able in the technical and legal issues pertinent to validation procedures. In evaluating the validity of assessment center programs, it is particularly important to document the selection of the dimensions, etc., assessed in the center. In addition, the relationship of assessment exercises to the dimensions, attributes, or competencies assessed should be documented as well.

Validity generalization studies of assessment center 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 assessment center in a different setting if the job, exercises, assessors, and assessees in the new situation are similar to those studied in the validation research and if similar procedures are used to observe, report, and integrate the information. The validity generalization studies of the predictive validity of the overall assessment rating do not necessarily establish the validity of the procedure for other purposes such as diagnosis of training needs, accurate assessment of skill level in separate dimensions, or the developmental influence of participation in an assessment center.

The technical standards and principles for validation appear in *Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures* (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Inc., 1987) and *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Psychological Association [APA], 1999).

Rights of the Participant

In the United States the federal government enacted the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act of 1974 to ensure that certain safeguards are provided for an individual against an invasion of personal privacy. Some broad interpretations of these acts are applicable to the general use of assessment center data.

Assessment center activities typically generate a large volume of data on an individual who has gone through an assessment center. These assessment data come in many forms and may include observer notes, reports on performance in the exercises, assessor ratings, peer ratings,

paper-and-pencil or computerized tests, and final assessment center reports. This list, while not exhaustive, does indicate the extent of information about an individual that may be collected.

The following guidelines for use of these data are suggested:

1. Assessees should receive feedback on their assessment center performance and should be informed of any recommendations made.

    Assessees who are members of the organization have a right to read any formal summary written reports concerning their own performance and recommendations that are prepared and made available to management. Applicants to an organization should be provided with, at a minimum, what the final recommendation is and, if possible and if requested by the applicant, the reason for the recommendation.

2. For reason for test security, assessment center exercises and assessor reports on performance in particular exercises are exempted from disclosure, but the rationale and validity data concerning ratings of dimensions and the resulting recommendations should be made available upon request of the individual.

3. The organization should inform the assessee what records and data are being collected, maintained, used, and disseminated.

4. If the organization decides to use assessment results for purposes other than those originally announced and that can impact the assessee, the assessee must be informed and consent obtained.

References

The guidelines have been developed to be compatible with the following documents:

American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurements in Education. (1999). *Standards for educational and psychological testing.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology Inc., American Psychological Association. (1987). *Principles for the validation and use of personnel selection procedures (3rd ed.).* College Park, MD.

Glossary

Assessee: An individual whose competencies are measured by an assessment center.

Assessment Center: A process employing multiple techniques and multiple assessors to produce judgments regarding the extent to which a participant displays selected competencies.

Assessor: An individual trained to observe, record, classify, and make reliable judgments about the behaviors of assessees.

Competency: Also called *dimension*. The constellation or group of behaviors that are specific, observable, and verifiable and that can be reliably and logically classified together and that are related to job success.

Dimension: See *Competency*.

Feedback: Information comparing actual performance to a standard or desired level of performance.

High (or Low) Fidelity: The extent to which an assessment center simulation requires the assessee to actually display behaviors related to one or more selected competencies. Fidelity is related to the realism of the simulation as compared to an actual job situation, task, etc.

Job Analysis: The process (typically a combination of techniques such as interviews with and observations of incumbents; job checklists; interviews with upper-level managers/ executives) used to determine the competencies linked to success or failure in a job, job role, or job grouping.

Reliability: The extent to which a measurement process yields the same results (given identical conditions) across repeated measurements.

Simulation: An exercise or technique designed to elicit behaviors related to dimensions of performance on the job requiring the participants to respond behaviorally to situational stimuli.

Validity: The extent to which a measurement tool or process, such as an assessment center, yields useful results. Multiple validities might be measured (e.g., "construct," "content," "face," "predictive," "social") depending upon the questions being explored and the tool or process being investigated.