

The Validation Question

We are sometimes asked about the validation of our Exercises, often due to people drawing parallels with the way in which psychometric instruments are validated. However, it is important to recognise that the nature of Assessment & Development Centre Exercises and the many ways in which they can be used is very different to the highly standardised way in which psychometrics are used. Whilst psychometrics lend themselves to normative comparisons of the performance of individuals from different organisations, the same is not true for Assessment & Development Centre Exercises. Indeed the very nature of off-the-shelf Exercises is such that they are used by a wide range of organisations in many different ways, without any involvement from A&DC, so it is difficult to provide meaningful validation data, as the following points explain:

Variations in what an Exercise is used to measure (different Criteria and different standards)

Some clients will use some or all of the Criteria recommended within the Guide For Assessors, whilst others will use a different subset of our recommended Criteria. However, some clients choose to replace these Criteria with their own. Consequently, no two organisations may seek to use an Exercise to measure the same Criteria, but even if they did, they may be looking for different standards of performance on those Criteria, as dictated by the demands of the job against which people are being assessed. Furthermore, as organisations will also be using different rating scales with different scale definitions, the results cannot be reliably compared across (or even sometimes within) organisations for any particular Exercise.

Variations in how an Exercise is administered

Some organisations will adhere strictly to the recommended timings of an Exercise, whilst others will adjust the timing to suit the requirements of the Assessment Centre timetable. Different organisations may run the same Group Exercise with different numbers of Participants, thus creating different group dynamics. Some will decide to allow some pre-reading time, whilst others may not. Some organisations will use highly trained and skilful Roleplayers in One-to-One Exercises, whilst others may choose to use less experienced staff in such a role. All of these factors inevitably undermine the value of comparing the performance of Participants across organisations as there are too many variables to take into account. Indeed it is often challenging enough to adhere to the best practice of ensuring a fair and consistent basis of assessment within the organisation.

Variations in Assessor standards

Given that Assessment & Development Centre Exercises, unlike psychometrics, rely on the skills of the Assessors to accurately assess a Participant's performance, there is an inevitable risk of inconsistencies due to a lack of Assessor reliability. Thus variations in the level of experience amongst Assessors and the quality and duration of their training will strongly impact on the reliability and validity of the results.

Variations in Exercise and Participant Level

An Exercise may be used to assess potential and may therefore be set at a higher level than the Participant, or it may be used by another client to identify development needs in Participants operating at that level. Again so many variations make direct comparison meaningless.

All of these considerations make it very difficult to provide reliable validation evidence for a particular Exercise. Even if an organisation provided us with their validation of an Exercise, it would only show that it was valid for that organisation and for that explicit purpose, not that it was valid for your own, given all of the reasons above.

So how can we reassure you?

Fortunately, the lack of hard validation data should not be a cause for concern as the following points highlight:

- We know that the format of our Exercises work effectively as they have been used successfully for well over a decade in many hundreds of organisations, who often comment on the increased objectivity gained through the use of our Materials.
- Many of our clients have a long history of purchasing our products. We would be happy to supply you with references for you to ascertain their satisfaction with the reliability, quality and professionalism.
- We recommend that if you wish to ascertain how suitable the Exercises are for your organisation, you should carry out a trial with some of your current staff. This will give you the opportunity to ensure the Exercises measure the Criteria required and it will also provide you with an internal benchmark. A&DC will be happy to assist you with this trial if required.
- Finally, if you do decide to use our Materials but are still concerned about the question of validation, then we strongly suggest that you follow best practice and undertake an internal validation study to establish the validity of the Exercises for your explicit purpose within your organisation. We would be delighted to help you with this if required.