

Practical Benefits from Theories of Psychology and Decision Making

Dr. George C. Thornton III
Colorado State University
Assessment Center Global Village

Colorado State University

*Plenary Session, ACSG Conference, 18 – 19 March 2021
“Turning Theory into Practice and Promising Beginnings”
South Africa*



“There is nothing so practical as a good theory.”

“The best way to understand something is to try to change it.”

Kurt Lewin, 1951

(Thornton & Lievens in Schlebush & Roodt)



Set the scene for the conference

Relevance of theory for many topics
and presentations

Theories provide direction for new
beginnings



3 Take Aways

Theories provide practical guidance for the

Design

Implementation

Evaluation /Validation Research

of assessment centers



Helpful Psychological Theories

Personality

Social psychology

Perception

Psychometrics, Measurement

Learning/Development/Training



Interactionist Theory

behavior is a function of the interaction of characteristics of both the person and situation.

$$B = f (P \times E)$$

This provides guidance for competencies to assess and the design of exercises



Implications

Carefully choose competencies

Carefully build simulation exercises

**Assess and report both behaviors
relevant to competencies AND
differences of performance in different
situations**



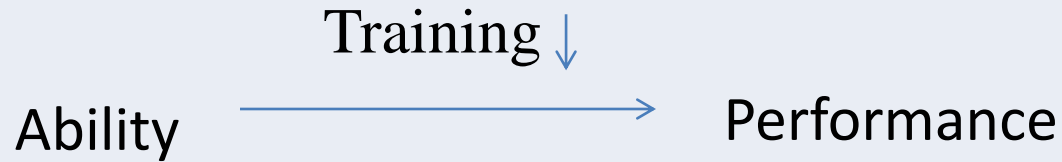
Forms of Theories: How are things related

Hypothesis

$$B = f(P \times E)$$

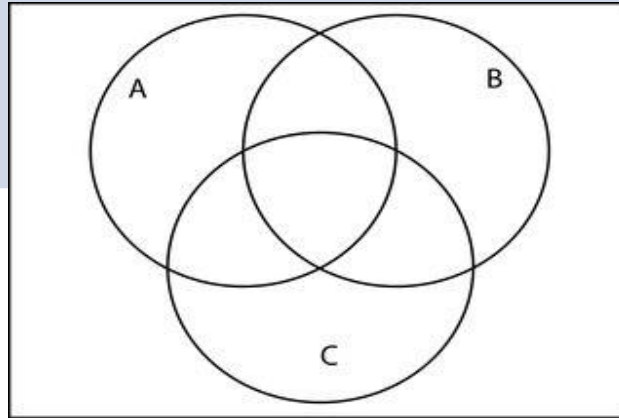
Forms of Theories: How are things related

Models
“boxes and
arrows”



Forms of Theories: How are things related

Venn
diagram



Theories Related to Conference Presentations

Watch for...

Ask about ...

Could theory improve...



Baczynska, Simonenka, Hartog and others deal with competencies.

Taxonomies of Competencies provide guidance of what we know and do not know about human capabilities, and which one are amenable to change in a developmental AC.



Implications

Existing taxonomies of competencies tell us

- * Assess small number of competencies
- * Use agreed upon definitions

Implications

- *Some are amenable to change - “developable”
- *Some quite resistant to change –
Cognitive abilities, personality
- *Some can be changed if assessees are convinced specific behaviors can be changed

Self-efficacy Theory (Dweck)



Implications

Build confidence of trainee

Give simple behavioral definitions of competencies

Provide testimonials about change

Show past evidence of change



Presentations by Oosthuizen and Bronkhorst deal with the processes of ORCE

Observe

Record

Possible?

Classify

Realistic?

Evaluate

Realistic Accuracy Model (Funder)



Realistic Accuracy Model

- **Pick observable competencies**
- **Build simulations to elicit observable behaviors**
- **Train assessors to watch for probative behaviors**
- **Use Frame of Reference to train how to rate performance**

(Funder)



Benefits of Theories

Theories provide guidance when:

- *no research

- *mixed advice

- *no AC experience

- *help us have confidence we really *know* what we know



We *know* something if we have:

Practical
experience



Research
evidence

Theory tells us *WHY*



Psychometric Theories

Measurement Theories

Reliability- several observations

(Ghiselli)

Validity – diverse observations

(Cronbach)



Trait Activation Theory

One of the most useful theories in guiding AC

(Tett)



Trait Activation Theory

Behavior related to a trait will be demonstrated if it is elicited by situation calling for that trait

A situation is relevant to a trait if it provides cues relevant to a trait

Strong situations elicit same behavior from all people; weak situations elicit behavior only from people who are high of the relevant trait (Tett)



Applications of Trait Activation Theory

Design instructions, case material, role-players, follow-up questions to elicit relevant behaviors

Train role players to give relevant prompts

Train assessors to observe responses elicited by features of the exercises

Set the strength features to accomplish the purpose of the AC



Promising Beginnings

Two topics with:

- *relatively little research
- *lack of standardization
- *little guidance for practice

Theory provides promise!



We need new beginnings for
Features of Situations
And
Evaluation and Validation of
Developmental Assessment Centers



We need better Taxonomy of Situational Characteristics

Other useful taxonomies

Cognitive abilities

“Big 5” (7) personality



Beginning taxonomies of situations:

VUCA (Bennett)

CAPTION (Paragon)

Diamonds (Rathman)

Exercise Characteristics
(Hoffman)



Beginnings of Psychological Situations: CAPTION

Complexity
Adversity
Positive valence
Typicality
Importance
Humor
Negative Valence



Beginnings of Psychological Situations: DIAMONDS

Duty

Intellect

Adversity

(Mating)

Positivity

Negativity

Deception

Sociality



Evaluation and Validation of Developmental Assessment Centers

Decision-Based Evaluation Model
of training programs

(Kraiger)



Decision-Based Evaluation Model

Training Content and Design	Design Delivery Validity of content
Change in Learners	Cognitive Affective Behavioral
Organizational Payoffs	Performance Results Transfer (Afsouran)



Decision-Based Evaluation Model

Training Content and Design	Design Delivery Validity of content

Decision-Based Evaluation Model

Change in Learners	<p>Cognitive Affective Behavioral</p>



Decision-Based Evaluation Model

Organizational Payoffs	Performance Results Transfer



3 Take Aways

Theories provide practical guidance
for the

Design

Implementation

Evaluation /Validation Research

Of Assessment Centers



Resources

Kraiger, K. (2002). *Creating, implementing, and managing effective training and development: State-of-the-art lessons for practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schlebusch & Roodt. *Assessment Centres: Unlocking People Potential for Growth*

Thornton & Lievens (in Schlebusch & Roodt).
Theoretical Principles Relevant to Assessment Center Design and Implementation

Thornton, Rupp, & Hoffman. *Assessment Center Perspectives for Talent Management Strategies*

Thornton, Mueller-Hanson, & Rupp. *Developing Organizational Simulations: A Guide for Practitioners, Students, and Researchers*



Contact

George.Thornton
@colostate.edu

