

Project for the Assessment and Support of Key Skills/Competences (PASS)

Definition of Guidelines for Assessment and Certification Models

D4.1 Assessors guide



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Introduction

Dear colleagues and future assessors,

This guide will help you to prepare for competency assessment using the Assessment Centre methodology. Assessors play a key role in the competency assessment process, combining various assessment activities to get a comprehensive and as realistic as possible view of the skills, abilities and behaviour of participants.

This handbook is designed to provide a clear and comprehensive framework for your role as an assessor in the Assessment Centre. It focuses on the key principles, assessment techniques and practical skills needed to assess participants effectively. Our collective efforts are aimed at ensuring optimal assessment that will lead to minimally biased or highly subjective conclusions.

The first chapter will introduce the Assessment Centre as a method and is more theoretical in nature. The second chapter describes the competency clusters studied. The third chapter describes your role as an assessor of competences using the Assessment Centre method.

Thank you for your commitment and readiness to participate in the Assessment Centre process.

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1. Introduction to the Assessment Centre Methodology

To begin with, it is important to be able to imagine the course of the Assessment Centre.

The Assessment Centre (AC) is most often used as a selection method, but it is a method mainly focused for the assessment of soft skills. Thus it is also a suitable method for assessing competences in the context of the PASS project. It is usually used to select employees, which is consistent with the rhetoric used to describe this method.

AC does not just reveal the actual behaviour of the candidate, which can be styled to suit the employer for the position the candidate is applying for (e.g. in an interview), but it also reveals the actual behavioural patterns that the participant uses routinely when dealing with real life situations.

Through AC, the behavioral patterns and level of competence can be observed and described. For example, time-dependent fatigability and the related attention and its oscillations will become apparent, as well as the candidate's acceptance of his/her own responsibility for his/her actions, his/her communication and cooperation in the team - which may indicate his/her dealings with potential clients and colleagues. Preferred task types (e.g., independent of others, team-based, creative, analytical-logical, confrontational, etc.) are also observed. Other specific competences according to the specific assignment are also observed. Our AC focuses on the observation and assessment of four competence clusters with a total of 12 sub-competencies.

1.1. Principles Used in Assessment Centre

The uniqueness of the competency assessment rests on several basic principles:

The principle of multiple eyes: There are always more than one assessor present in the AC. The usual number is 3-5 evaluators (depending on the number of participants). This minimizes subjectivity and natural errors in social perception.

Multi-competency approach: a wide range of competencies, intrapersonal and interpersonal, can be monitored through AC. Specific activities are designed according to the desired competency model.

Multisituational approach: the method focuses on observing participants' behaviour across different types of assignments. Evaluators observe how candidates respond to pressure, how effectively they communicate, and what approach they take to solve the given tasks. The AC uses case studies of different types, model situations, presentations, interviews and other assignments and, if required, also tests.

Objectivity and standardisation: the assessment in the Assessment Centre is based on standardized criteria, which minimises subjective evaluation. This makes it possible to compare the performances of different candidates and to quantify the manifestations of the competencies observed.

Simulation of real-life situations: participants are confronted with tasks and scenarios that reflect the competency in a work context.

1.2. Advantages and Disadvantages

AC has its advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include the aforementioned acquisition of large amounts of data on participants, finding patterns of their behaviour, and the ability to observe participants interacting with others in relatively realistic model situations, which other methods tend not to allow.

Advantages also include the greater objectivity guaranteed by a larger number of trained observers/assessors. Observers can be external to the company (experts) or internal (after training). External evaluators generally have a detached and unbiased perspective in the assessment, while internal observers

can evaluators are better at assessing whether the candidate is a good fit in terms of the company's corporate culture and work team philosophy. Thus, it is possible to observe undesirable aspects in the candidate's behaviour that may not fit in with the company's corporate culture, which is what many companies pay attention to.

If the AC is well prepared, we can say that it has a higher validity compared to other methods, mainly because each competency is observed multiple times during the AC.

The Assessment Center method is very flexible, so we can adjust it according to different positions and competencies being assessed. The assessment obtained using this method is comprehensive and multifaceted. All participants (i.e. candidates and assessors) learn through new experiences during the AC.

Another advantage of the AC is its complexity. Unlike a selection interview, candidates cannot prepare for the Assessment Centre as well because they do not know exactly what to expect. Moreover, they work under stress and are given unexpected and unusual tasks.

On the other hand, however, there is the high level of work needed to prepare and implement the AC. The implementation of the AC itself usually takes several hours. It is preceded by extensive preparation, which includes a detailed job analysis, a suitably selected competence model with a precise definition of the individual competencies required, the selection or preparation of model situations, and the preparation of premises and facilities. Disadvantages also include the limited number of participants that can undertake the AC at the same time. Only a small number of candidates can participate in the AC, ideally 6-8, maximum 12. Furthermore, several observers are required to act as evaluators in the AC, which also increases the cost of the AC.

1.3. Types of Assessment Centres

In the most general sense, the Assessment Centre is a method for assessing the competence of participants. The practical use of the Assessment Centre can have several purposes. Depending on which of the purposes we decide on, we need to adjust the methods used, the processing of the outputs and the communication with the participants during the implementation and in providing feedback and sharing the outputs after the AC is over.

Probably the most typical purpose is the use in the context of staff selection and the hiring process, as already mentioned.

The assessment centre can include internal and external candidates in one group or they can be assessed separately. The aim of such an Assessment Centre is to select the most suitable candidate.

Another possible form of the Assessment Centre is the so-called Development Centre, which focuses on identifying development potential in existing employees and developing them.

Another interesting use of the Assessment Centre is to measure the effect of development. In this case, the AC is done twice: before the development programme starts and after the programme ends, in which case making adjustments to the AC materials and activities is necessary. The data thus obtained is then compared to determine the level of improvement.

In some cases, however, the purposes of use may overlap. For example, we can create a Development Centre to identify opportunities for further development of employees, but at the same time this method will function as an internal Assessment Centre for selecting the for a managerial position.

1.4. General Guidelines for Executing an Assessment Centre

In the first phase of AC preparation, it is important to define the purpose, i.e. what information the AC is supposed to provide.

Subsequently, it is necessary to describe the competencies to be addressed in a sufficiently specific way. The quality and success of the whole AC then depends on a properly designed competence model. There are different views on the number of competencies - however, it should not exceed 12 competencies. The same competencies should not be repeated or overlap too much. A very important part of developing a competence model is the so-called operationalisation - i.e. the precise and specific definition of competencies for the assessors to work with.

Subsequently, specific activities and the AC programme are designed on the basis of the description of the competencies. Each competency is monitored in several activities. Care is taken to maintain the timeframe and the variety of activities.

When planning the implementation of the AC, additional necessary assessors are trained, material are produced and location-related preparations are made.

The actual implementation of the AC can be a one-off event or an identical version is repeated several times depending on the number of participants. During the implementation of the AC, the evaluators take careful notes.

At the end of the implementation there is a meeting of the evaluators and a summary of the results and the evaluation of the candidates. The subsequent formulation of outputs is determined by the needs of the AC and the client.

It is also appropriate to evaluate how well was the AC executed and if it can be further improved. Feedback sessions with the participants may also take place.

2. The Assessed Competencies

The chapter first describes the general definition of the competencies monitored within the proposed AC, and then points out further detailed descriptions of the monitored competencies and how to work with them.

2.1. Description of the Competence Model

Below you will find a list of 5 Clusters of competencies monitored through the defined sub-competencies. Each of the listed sub-competencies is monitored. Individual competencies can also be tracked separately as needed, select the appropriate activities for a specific AC accordingly.

2.1.1. Competence Cluster 1: Communication

Assessment Scope:

Communication is a broad term that encompasses various aspects and fields.

In our project we will assess two basic communication competences:

Presentation: Presentation is the process of conveying information, ideas, or thoughts to an audience in a clear way. It is important in various professional and personal situations, such as work presentations, school presentations, or public speaking. We will measure the ability to pass on key thoughts and clear messages.

Understanding: We will check the ability to understand the key information and essence of the message that has been communicated, without biases, prejudice, preconceptions, assumptions and interpretations.

ESCO Mapping:

Communication: *Exchanging and conveying information, ideas, concepts, thoughts, and feelings through the use of a shared system of words, signs, and semiotic rules via a medium.*

2.1.2. Competence Cluster 2: Teamwork

Assessment Scope:

Teamwork competences are essential for success in professional settings. Sub-competencies related to teams and teamwork are:

Effective communication skills: Effective communication is essential for successful teamwork. This sub-competency involves using active listening, clear and concise language, and nonverbal communication to exchange ideas and information with confirmation of the mutual understanding with the counterpart.

Resolving conflicts: Conflicts are inevitable in any team setting. This sub-competency involves recognizing and addressing conflicts in a constructive manner, such as through active listening, understanding, negotiation and compromise.

Collaborating effectively: Collaboration involves working together towards a common goal. This sub-competency involves recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of team members and cooperating with them to achieve the team's objectives.

ESCO Mapping:

Teamwork Principles: *The cooperation between people characterised by a unified commitment to achieving a given goal, participating equally, maintaining open communication, facilitating effective usage of ideas etc.*

2.1.3. Competence Cluster 3: Leadership

Assessment Scope:

Leadership competencies are the skills, abilities, and knowledge that leaders possess. These competencies can be divided into sub-competencies that help leaders develop their skills and become more effective:

Decision-making skills: Decision-making skills are the ability to make sound decisions based on available information. This includes data collection and analysis, critical thinking, problem-solving, and risk management.

Strategic thinking: Strategic thinking is the ability to think long-term with an overview and develop plans to achieve goals. This includes analysing data, identifying trends, synthesising, and developing strategies to address challenges and opportunities.

Empowering others: This sub-competency involves empowering team members to take ownership of their work and contribute to the team's success. It includes leadership, assigning the tasks, delegation, feedback, developing others and motivation. It also involves recognizing and celebrating individual and team achievements.

In addition, communication, interpersonal and team skills and innovation are part of the leadership competence as well, but are covered by other clusters described in this document.

ESCO Mapping:

Leadership Principles: *Set of traits and values which guide the actions of a leader with her/his employees and the company and provide direction throughout her/his career. These principles are also an important tool for self-evaluation to identify strengths and weaknesses and seek self-improvement.*

2.1.4. Competence Cluster 4: Creativity and Innovation

Assessment Scope:

Creativity and innovation competencies are essential for success in various fields, including business, education, and the arts:

Creative thinking: Creative thinking is the ability to generate new and innovative ideas looking from different perspectives. This includes brainstorming, design thinking, mind mapping, and other techniques for generating ideas.

Flexibility and adaptability: Adaptability is the ability to adjust to new situations and changing circumstances. This includes being flexible and open to new ideas and approaches.

In addition, problem solving and collaboration are part of the creativity and innovation competence as well, but are covered by other clusters described in this document.

ESCO Mapping:

Innovation Processes: *The techniques, models, methods and strategies which contribute to the promotion of steps towards innovation.*

Develop Creative Ideas: *Developing new concepts and creative ideas.*

2.1.5. Competence Cluster 5: Intrapersonal Skills

Assessment Scope:

Problem-solving competences involve the ability to effectively identify, analyse, and solve problems. Stress resilience, on the other hand, refers to the capacity to adapt and adjust to challenging situations.

Problem solving: Ability to solve the problem in an efficient way to achieve the required goals.

Stress resilience: Ability to prevent and overcome stress and to cope with challenging situations under pressure.

ESCO Mapping:

Solve Problems: Find solutions to practical, operational or conceptual problems in a wide range of contexts.

Resilience: Maintain a positive attitude even in difficult situations, learn from failures and cope with stress.

2.2. Procedure for Monitoring Competencies Under the Proposed AC

As there are several differently experienced assessors observing candidates in the AC and it is essential to avoid inconsistencies in the assessment, it is necessary to describe the individual competencies in such a way that they can be understood by all assessors equally. In order to avoid loose observation, the so-called scaling of competencies is used. Scaling is not universal; it comes in different forms. Scaling is done by determining the optimal and minimal manifestation of a given competency and its mean values in such a way that each observer knows which number to choose for a given manifestation of the participant's behaviour.

For the purpose of the specific AC in the PASS project, the competency model proposed above is used. A uniform five-point scale (plus one more level titled: not observable, can not be assessed) is used for all subcompetencies.

However, practical experience shows that this scale is too coarse and in some cases a more detailed assessment is needed. Therefore, it is possible to assess the intermediate level with a + sign. It is recommended to use this rating for participants who have clearly demonstrated a particular level of competence but are better than others equally rated. At the same time, they are not so good that they should be rated higher :

Assmnt	Pts.	
F	-1	Fail - unacceptable results
NA	0	Not observable, cannot be assessed
-	1	Bellow average performance
0	2	Average performance
+	3	Above average performance
++	4	Excellent performance

TABLE 1 ASSESSMENT SCALE

In the supplementary table (Evaluation of competences _complete) you will find one competence cluster with all relevant competences on each sheet. The manifestations of each sub-competence are described in the above scale, including a description of the manifestations of the indicators of these sub-competences. The indicators are the concrete manifestations of the sub-competence in the nuances of the specific behaviour. Such detailed descriptions allow raters to unify and quantify their ratings within the AC.

3. Assessment Centre Preparation

Before the implementation of a specific AC, the following steps in particular need to be addressed during the preparatory work:

1. selection of the competences to be monitored, sub-competences
2. Implementation format - online/offline
3. Establishing a schedule for the specific AC
4. Nomination and training of AC assessors

3.1. Selection of Competences to Be Monitored

The complete AC is designed to track only selected competencies or sub-competencies as needed by specific participants. Therefore, decide whether to monitor all competencies, then the AC schedule suggested below can be used, or only selected ones. Determine the final AC schedule accordingly.

3.2. Implementation Format - Online/Offline

Choose the format of the implementation not only with regard to the competences to be monitored, but especially with regard to the availability and accessibility of participants and assessors. The AC is also designed for the possibility of online tracking via one of the available platforms. This implementation brings with it some specificities for the organisation and the assessment of the competences. For the more performance-assessed competences (intrapersonal and methodological) the online assessment is comparable to face-to-face participation. For competences involving social and relational variables (interpersonal), the online form is obviously limiting.

In general, especially for less experienced assessors, the assessment of interpersonal competences is easier on-site (i.e., everyone meets in one place for a certain period of time).

For online implementation, technical details - assigning tasks, sharing outputs, monitoring in groups, eliminating the dissemination of AC materials further, etc. - need to be thought through according to the specific capabilities of the implementer.

For on-site implementation, a suitable space, usually a conference room(s), needs to be provided according to the competencies being monitored or activities planned.

3.3. Setting up a Specific AC Schedule

The creation of a specific schedule is based on the competencies being monitored. In the proposed AC, one or two activities are identified as the main, primary activities (dark colour in the matrix) for monitoring each sub-competency, while other activities are additional (light colour). Necessary breaks should be taken into account within the schedule. It depends on the concept of the individual tasks and their time distribution. When participants have a break, the observer assessors leave for joint meetings, which should take place several times throughout the AC. The moderator (facilitator) prepares the materials for the next activities during the break.

A detailed methodological description is produced for each activity, including the activity flow, evaluation indicators, participant assignments and possible evaluation criteria (Activity descriptions).

ACTIVITIES		Presentation activity	Holiday story	Case study Dealership	Role Play	Case study Corporate Transformation	Drawing	Creative use of an item	Transcript	9 dots	Camels	In Basket	Decision Making Test	Math
COMPETENCE														
Cluster 1: Communication	Presentation													
	Understanding													
Cluster 2: Teamwork	Effective communication skills													
	Resolving conflicts													
	Collaborating effectively													
Cluster 3: Leadership	Decision-making skills													
	Strategic thinking													
	Empowering others													
Cluster 4: Creativity and Innovation	Creative thinking													
	Flexibility and adaptability													
Cluster 5: Intrapersonal Skills	Problem solving													
	Stress resilience													

TABLE 2 MATRIX OF ACTIVITIES AND COMPETENCES MONITORED

ASSESSMENT SCHEDULE				
ACTIVITY	COMPETENCES	ADDITIONAL COMPETENCES	TIME REQUIREMENT	eight-member group
Presentation activity	Presentation	Creative thinking	3 min. per participant + 5 min. preparing	30
Holiday story	Understanding	---	15 min.	15
Case study Dealership	Effective communication skills Resolving conflicts Collaborating effectively	Decision-making skills Flexibility and adaptability Problem solving	60 min.	60
Role Play	Effective communication skills Empowering others	Resolving conflicts Decision-making skills Stress resilience	15 min. per participant (possibly in parallel with "In Basket")	90
Case study Corporate Transformation	Decision-making skills Strategic thinking	Understanding Effective communication skills Empowering others Problem solving	40 min.	40
Drawings	Creative thinking	Flexibility and adaptability	5 min.	5
Creative use of an item	Creative thinking	Flexibility and adaptability	5 min.	5
Transcript	Flexibility and adaptability		15 min.	15
9 dots	Flexibility and adaptability	Creative thinking Problem solving	15 min.	15
Camels	Problem solving	Creative thinking	25 min.	25
In Basket	Decision-making skills Problem solving	Collaborating effectively Strategic thinking Stress resilience	30 min.	30
Decision Making Test	Stress resilience	Problem solving	15 min.	15
Math	Stress resilience		10 min.	10

TABLE 3 TIME REQUIREMENTS FOR ACTIVITIES

The AC schedule shown includes only net time for activities with no breaks included. The net time for a group of 8 is approximately 6 hours.

3.4. Nomination and Training of AC Assessors

Before the actual implementation of the AC, it is necessary to decide how many and who the observers will be. Their role is crucial in the AC competency assessment process. Many sub-competencies do not have clear performance criteria for assessment, and thus the proficiency and experience of the assessors significantly affects the resulting validity of the assessment.

The number of assessors depends on the number of participants in the AC, at a minimum there should be 3. It is possible to follow the recommended ratio of 1:2, where the former is the number of assessors and the latter the number of participants. Data show that more raters increase the reliability of the evaluation.

A moderator (facilitator) guides the entire AC programme. His/her main task is to introduce the candidates to the whole AC process, to provide them with the basic organisational requirements, to assign the tasks, to prepare the material background, to keep track of the time and to answer the candidates' questions. The involvement of other assessors in this depends on the agreement - they can be completely passive, but they can also ask the participants for more information, their feelings and experiences etc.

Observers should be experienced or at least sufficiently trained. Despite this precaution, however, all observation is subject to perceptual errors, i.e. the classic errors to which every human being is subject on an unconscious level when perceiving other people. A well-developed capacity for self-reflection is therefore essential for the evaluator.

In particular, the training of assessors requires full understanding of the content of the competences being assessed and the individual manifestations within specific scales. Familiarity with the specific AC schedule and matrix of activities and competencies is also necessary.

This material is also used for the purpose of training assessors and can be adapted as needed. Therefore, the role of the assessor and aspects of the assessment of competences within the AC are described in more detail below.

4. The Role of the Assessor and Competency Assessment

Prior to the actual implementation of the AC, this chapter will discuss the observers (observer evaluators or observer assessors). As part of the aforementioned training of evaluators, a participant-led self-experience within the AC is also appropriate. It allows especially novice evaluators to better understand the dynamics of the AC, the nature of the various activities and the observed behaviours.

In particular, the training includes a discussion of the criteria and competencies that we assess in participants.

Evaluators should be instructed on how these competencies are manifested in the individual's behavior and be familiar with the specific manifestations of the competency clusters (Evaluation of competencies _complete) .

In addition, it is necessary to alert evaluators to common errors in observation and evaluation that they should avoid.

It is also useful to teach evaluators how to take notes on individual participants during the AC, or to familiarise them with the recording sheets. These notes are essential during the final evaluation meeting so that the evaluator has opinions supported by concrete arguments from observations during the different tasks.

4.1. The Role of the Assessor

The assessor (evaluator) is the person who is responsible for evaluating the performance of participants within the AC. The main roles of the evaluator include:

- observing and evaluating participant behavior and performance during various exercises and simulations;
- recording and documenting participant performance in a standardized format;
- collaborating with other assessors to reach consensus on the overall rating of each participant;
- providing input for possible further AC implementation towards improvement.

Overall, evaluators play a critical role in ensuring a fair and reliable way of assessing the skills, abilities and potential of participants in the AC.

Each assessor should have certain knowledge, qualities and skills. Knowledge can include knowledge of the workings of the human psyche and knowledge of personality psychology that stems from the fields of psychology and human resource management. Equally important are the personal dispositions of evaluators - in particular, personal maturity, self-reflection and openness.

The skills of a good evaluator can be divided into socio-psychological (social perception, communication skills, managing disagreements and conflicts) and working with information (see description-assessment-interpretation below).

4.2. Competence Assessment

The main questions in competency assessment are "what are we assessing" and "how should we measuring it". What we assess is described by the competence clusters and detailed descriptions of the levels of each competence. The second question has three important components:

- behavioral observation,
- recording behaviour,
- classifying behaviour.

Observations

Observation lays in the deliberate, purposeful, systematic and planned perception of the external objective manifestations of an individual or a social group (the object of observation) by an observer (the subject of observation) and in the recording (registration) of the observed phenomena. Observation is so common that we consider it a relatively easy and simple process. However, the ability to focus on individual performances, to identify relevant behaviours and to filter out irrelevant information as is needed in the role of evaluator is not a given. This is especially true given our tendency to describe people in terms of their personality characteristics (e.g., fun, sociable, ...) rather than in terms of their behavior. Evaluators need to be able to identify and describe specific behaviours. Using terms that do not describe specific behaviours, e.g. "he is not sufficiently motivated, should show more enthusiasm", are not specific enough.

The main problem with observation seems to be the interference of the different rates of judgement that are associated with observation. The same phenomenon may be interpreted more or less differently by two independent observers. This problem can be countered by setting a relatively large number of units of the observed behaviour which are as small as possible, thereby reducing the demands on the subjective interpretation by the evaluator. To avoid this phenomenon, the competency model contains a summary of competencies and a description of their minimum, average and maximum levels. Evaluators will be introduced to the core competences and their minimum, average and maximum levels through the document titled *Evaluation of competences _complete*. They will also be taught which activities allow the observation of which competences.

Recording behaviour

When the evaluator observes a behaviour, he/she should record it. This enables checking the consistency and reliability of the assessment and allows to check that the assessors are targeting the same types of behaviour. This recording allows for later discussion.

We have not introduced a structured recording sheet for the raters as part of the methodology, so as not to encourage the rater to categorise the participant or directly describe their characteristics.

The recording sheet can be created during the preparation of the AC according to the specific needs and preferences of the evaluation team. There can be a pre-made recording sheet according to the competencies in the tables, or narrative observation can be chosen. In the case of narrative observation, the competencies are listed in the margin of the record sheet, the rest of the paper is free for the actual notes. Thus, observers write all the manifestations of the competences freely, often annotating the candidates' direct speech and, during breaks, using their notes to determine on what scale the candidates are.

Classification of behaviour

Observers neither intervene during the model situations, nor do they comment, criticize or praise the behavior or the candidates themselves. This could influence, motivate or cause undesirable behavioural changes in the candidates.

Each task is followed by a group meeting of assessors, a quick assessment of the participants and scaling of the observed competences. This is done without the participants' presence. Observers should always confer well away from the candidates, preferably in another room. This also applies when dealing with major issues (programme shifts or other complications) Candidates should always have the impression that everything is proceeding as planned without disruption. These issues should be eliminated by good preparation before the actual implementation. It is also important to be very careful with one's own notes, not to leave them anywhere loose, especially not to allow participants to look at them.

At the end of the official programme, the evaluators negotiate the final classification of each participant in each sub-competency evaluated. The key is that they must agree. The agreement is not an arithmetic average of each participant's marks, but a true agreement of all on one mark. Thus, everyone must have the grades thought out and written down in advance, they must know why they have graded in this way (justify - i.e. not

"I felt that ..." but "he did so and so and that is why I gave him grade x"), the consensus is reached through negotiation.

The first negotiation is usually very different, i.e. it is necessary to have as many arguments as possible as to why the assessor has given the assessee a certain mark - this is especially important for new assessors.

The outcome of the AC is a final grade for each individual sub-competency (not a jumble of numbers for individual tasks and characteristics) - this final grade includes the development of the observed characteristic throughout the AC.

4.3. Possible Errors in Competency Assessment

Usually we tend to jump straight into the interpretation (evaluation): "He acted too directive". It is also common to express an evaluation based on our very subjective feeling: "I didn't like his directivity". This way of processing observations leads to errors. That is why we need to be able to distinguish three levels of information processing in our observation and evaluation:

- description;
- feeling;
- interpretation.

Description

This is a registration of what I see. In describing it, I do not imagine what the behaviour that I see might mean. It is clear that within the participants' perception of behaviour, any description we give already involves some interpretive schema, but it is useful to try to separate description from this. Description is characterised by behavioural language.

Feeling

The evaluator himself experiences various emotions during the AC that affect the observation itself. It is useful for the evaluator to be able to distinguish these emotions from description and interpretation. The ideal is an observer who is aware of what he/she is experiencing during the observation and has no need to mask it from himself/herself, who understands his/her experience and can step away from it.

Interpretation

After differentiating what I saw and what I felt, I can focus on "how it feels in my head". That is, how I interpret what I think a particular manifestation means. Every evaluation is a bit of a hypothesis, which I have to keep verifying by further observation and comparison with the observations of my colleagues. Interpretations are related to the criteria being observed – the competencies.

Evaluators should be experienced or at least sufficiently trained. However, despite this precaution, each observation is burdened by the aforementioned perceptual errors. In particular, the following phenomena, which cannot be eliminated, but only reflected, need to be addressed.

- **Implicit inference** is an unconscious error in which we may feel closer to one of the participants because he/she reminds us in some way of someone we know or are close to. These can be specific facial features, stature, but also behaviour, speech, intonation, etc. In this case, we automatically attribute to the candidate those characteristics that our close person has, which may bias the evaluation.
- In the **halo effect**, we can infer certain traits based on a specific trait (e.g. age, profession, nationality, education, etc.). For example, there is a perception that glasses are worn by intelligent people in the population, so we are likely to attribute higher intellect to candidates with glasses or we will tend to overestimate them.

- At the beginning of AC, we should avoid the **first impression effect**. According to various sources, first impressions are formed between 30 seconds and 2 minutes. We form a construct of what the person is like based on the opening words, their appearance or demeanor. This framing is very difficult to avoid. It is also very difficult for many people to break down and change into a different image.
- The **primacy effect** is a similar error. We may find that in the first model situation some of the participants are very skillful. Again, we may form an impression of this person and then adjust our assessment during the AC based on that impression. In practice, it then looks like the assessor overestimates the candidate and has much better marks than the others. The assessor should be open, critical and able to accept the objections of others enough to adjust or recognise that this perceptual error is occurring.
- A very well-known error (or defense) is **projection**. Just as a film is projected onto a screen in a magnified form, so too can we "project", which means transfer our qualities, values or attitudes in a magnified form onto others, in our case onto the candidates. However, it can also be the other way around, where we put our own negative qualities into the candidate and exaggerate them to make our own more acceptable. This classic form of mental defence can be dangerous, especially when evaluating and interpreting.
- It is also worth pointing out an error called **central tendency**. In general, we want to avoid extreme values, so we prefer to choose values closer to the center. If we have a competence model scaled between 0 and 4, observers may prefer scores close to the center, i.e. 1 to 3. Such scores can be avoided by specifically defining the individual scores on each competence scale.
- The last of the perceptual errors mentioned is **attribution error**. Attribution error is characterized by the fact that if a participant succeeds in completing a task, raters may attribute this to the external environment or chance (e.g., suitable environmental conditions, materials, etc.), but if the participant fails to complete the task, the observer will attribute the failure to the participant's characteristics (e.g., participant's disorganization, excessive attention to detail) rather than to the possibility of influence from the external environment.

The above effects tend towards **confirmation bias**. Confirmation bias is a cognitive bias in which an individual prefers or seeks information that confirms their existing beliefs or expectations. This phenomenon leads individuals to tend to prefer and place more weight on information that agrees with their existing beliefs and, conversely, to ignore or downplay information that does not. In the context of AC, it can affect participants' evaluations by having evaluators selectively perceive and interpret information in a way that confirms their assumptions about the candidate. This can lead to inaccurate decisions as evaluations may be influenced by prior beliefs, despite the availability of objective data.

Perceptual errors cannot be fully eliminated even with careful preparation or training. Many of them are on an unconscious basis. Therefore, it is essential to be familiar with them and to know how they can affect us in our evaluation.