IPAC
INTERNATIONAL PERSONNEL ASSESSMENT COUNCIL

ASSESSMENT COUNCIL NEWS

President's Message

Marty Alber, 2019 IPAC President

May 2019

We are only a few months away from the 2019 conference and I cannot express how excited I am. The first few months of my presidency at times has been challenging but we have made great strides and the leadership of past presidents, current board members, and committee chairs have given me the guidance and support needed to make steady progress forward.

Marty Alber, 2019 IPAC President

As I have expressed previously, I want IPAC to grow in the breadth of innovations and practices so our organization is a resource for those who are just beginning in the field or veterans. I would like to see our emeritus members forming mentorships with members who are new or in mid-career to share their guidance and wisdom. There are still a vast number that do not know our name but through expanded marketing efforts and collaboration with sister organizations the word is getting out that we are an organization that individuals need and want to be active members of.

IPAC can be the change agent to impact and revolutionize the assessment field. We may be closer than you think. I cannot wait to see you all in Minneapolis.

SWAG Spring Event Registration Now Open

The Southwest Assessment Group (SWAG), a Chapter of the International Personnel Assessment Council (IPAC), invites you to our upcoming event, **"Adverse Impact: What Is It? How Do We Deal With It?"** on May 10, 2019, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Louisiana Tech Academic Success Center, 6220 E. Texas St., Building H, Bossier City, LA 71111.

Immediately following the event, please join us for a Happy Hour Social at The Missing Link, 504 Texas St., #100, Shreveport, LA 71101.

We'd love for you to experience this great program and learn more about the IPAC community and the benefits of being part of our membership. IPAC provides members and others in the field with easily accessed and varied opportunities to learn, share, experience, and teach state-of-the-art recruitment and merit-based assessment practices.

The program includes a presentation by Frank Igou, Associate Professor of Industrial-Organizational Psychology at Louisiana Tech University and the Coordinator of Louisiana Tech's Industrial-Organizational Psychology Master of Arts Degree Program; and Dennis Doverspike, Ph.D., ABPP, President of HR Litehouse (Doverspike Consulting LLC).

This full-day workshop will provide beginner-to-intermediate-level practitioners with information about adverse impact from technical, legal, and practical perspectives.

Registration includes lunch. For more information, please visit the IPAC website.

GLEAN Spring Event Registration Now Open

The Great Lakes Employment Assessment Network (GLEAN), an IPAC Chapter, invites you to **"Think Forward on Assessment: Best Practices and a Case Study on Assessment Centers"** on Friday, May 17, 2019, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Roosevelt University Chicago Loop Campus, 425 South Wabash, Room WB 317, Chicago, IL 60605.

The program includes a presentation by Warren Bobrow, Ph. D., All About Performance; and Marty Alber, Ph.D., Test Administration and Assessment Coordinator, Personnel Board of Jefferson County; IPAC President.

The full-day event will include a three-part, forward-looking glance of personnel selection and the specific value that assessment professionals bring to the process. In the afternoon, the event will feature an interactive presentation on the process of creating and validating legally defensible assessment centers.

Registration includes breakfast and lunch. For more information, visit the IPAC website.

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Testing Programs and the Epic Quest for Suitable Alternatives: Series #2

Emilee Tison, Ph.D., Associate Principal Consultant, DCI Consulting Group, Inc.
and Mike Aamodt, Ph.D., Principal Consultant, DCI Consulting Group, Inc.[1]

Abstract: This article is the second installment focusing on the search for suitable alternative selection procedures, as prescribed by the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures (1978). We present a discussion on what it means for an alternative selection procedure to be suitable – weaving together the UGESP definitions, psychometric principles, and practical considerations.

Keywords: Suitable Alternative, Validity Evidence, Construct Space

As discussed in our previous article, the requirement to seek and evaluate *suitable alternative selection* procedures emerged from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Guidelines (*EEOC Guidelines*), which were relied on in two landmark Supreme Court cases: Griggs v Duke Power Co. (1971) and Albemarle Paper Co. v Moody (1975). In 1978, the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures (*UGESP*) offered guidance on the topic of *suitable alternatives*. This historical understanding provides important context for interpretation, as does the existing legal framework. If a testing program produces differential pass rates between protected class subgroups (e.g., sex, race/ethnicity), that gives rise to a legitimate adverse impact claim, employers can share validation research to defend against the claim. In response, plaintiffs may try to rebut the validity evidence by arguing that an equally valid *suitable alternative* with smaller subgroup differences should have been implemented instead. In other words, in the burden shifting framework of disparate impact cases, the question of *suitable alternatives* typically arises after issues of job relatedness/business necessity are initially satisfied.

Despite this general guidance, specific guidance on identifying and evaluating *suitable alternatives* is relatively scarce. Furthermore, there is no agreed upon framework – legal or I-O based – to evaluate (a) what constitutes a *suitable alternative* and (b) what efforts are required to seek out a suitable alternative. This can lead to unreasonable or less than persuasive recommendations around *suitable alternatives* in practice. Interpretation of the *UGESP* and research coming out of the I-O world highlight existing points of disagreement among experts – and are centered primarily on the diversity / validity dilemma (e.g., Ployhart & Holtz, 2008); case law is sparse and generally focuses on cost and feasibility concerns.[2] In this follow-up installment of our series, we propose criteria for evaluating potential suitable alternatives – to specifically address *what characteristics of an alternative assessment qualify it as 'suitable'*.

From a logical evaluation of I-O principles, we posit that at least three conditions must be met for an alternative selection procedure to be properly considered suitable:

• It must cover the same or similar predictor construct space as the assessment it is intended to replace;

• The strength of the validity evidence must be at least as strong as that of the assessment it is intended to replace;

• It must not require excessively more cost or time to implement, administer, score, or maintain relative to the assessment it is intended to replace.

We posit these three conditions based on two premises. First, there is a robust literature indicating the multidimensionality of both the predictor construct space and the performance construct space (see Rotundo & Sackett, 2002; Campbell, McCloy, Oppler & Sager, 1993). Not only are the potential assessment constructs

wide and varied – there is variance in the degree of relationship between predictor constructs and the different dimensions of job performance. Second, validity should be viewed as the strength of evidence that an assessment is measuring what it is intended to measure and that the assessment provides an indication of related behavioral phenomena - that *validity is a property of inferences* (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Given the array of psychological constructs that may be measured as part of a pre-employment selection procedure, and the multi-dimensionality of job performance, simply suggesting to measure more constructs falls well short of thoughtful consideration of *suitable alternatives*.[3]

The Predictor Construct Space

Although UGESP defines a *suitable alternative* as a selection procedure that is *substantially equally valid* to a different selection procedure, no additional guidance is provided to clearly address what constitutes *substantially equally valid*. As you can imagine, the idea of a *suitable alternative* is often over-simplified and thought to mean there is research indicating that two selection procedures have similar validity coefficients. Such a perspective ignores that the two procedures may be measuring substantially different characteristics and are predicting substantially different aspects of work performance.

Although there may be situations where observed validity coefficients associated with cognitive ability and personality inventories are similar in particular situations,[4] cognitive ability tests are typically associated with higher racial subgroup differences than are personality inventories. If one were to consider a personality inventory a *suitable alternative* for a cognitive ability test, one would be ignoring that the two selection procedures measure different underlying constructs and predict different on-the-job behaviors.

Validity is a judgment pertaining to the "truth of, correctness of, or degree of support for an inference" (Shadish, et al, 2002). Therefore, it follows that a characteristic of *substantially equally* valid is, in part, the measurement of the same or very similar characteristics and making inference about the same work-related behaviors.

The Strength of Validity Evidence

The next logical evaluation of *suitable* is whether the prediction of the same work-related behaviors is equally robust. UGESP does attempt to identify factors to consider when evaluating the validity of alternatives:

> *In the case of a criterion-related validity study, the factors include the importance of the criteria for which significant relationships are found, the magnitude of the relationship between selection procedure scores and criterion measures, and the size and composition of the samples used. For content validity, the strength of validity evidence would depend upon the proportion of critical and/or important job behaviors measured, and the extent to which the selection procedure resembles actual work samples or work behaviors. Where selection procedures have been validated by different strategies, or by construct validity, the determination should be made on a case-by-case basis.*

In our view, the strength of the validity evidence must be at least as strong as that of the assessment it is intended to replace to be suitable (and, in *UGESP* terms, *substantially equally valid)*. It is important to note that this is a complex issue, and the nuances involved in evaluating validity research is outside the scope of this article – though important to consider.[5] These complexities in practice often mean that this evaluation is considered on a case-by-case basis.

Cost and Time Considerations

A notable omission from the *UGESP* guidance on determining *suitable alternatives* is a consideration of cost, timing, and other practical realities. These considerations are relevant to whether investigations of alternatives exceed the threshold of reasonable effort (*a topic to be discussed in the next installment of this serie*s) – a notion that is supported through court interpretation of suitable alternatives. A good example of this is *Johnson v. City of Memphis* (2014):

The court should have accounted for the City's legitimate interests in test security and practicability in

assessing plaintiffs' proffered alternatives…factors such as cost or other burdens of proposed alternative selection devices are relevant in determining whether they would be equally as effective as the challenged practice in serving the employer's legitimate business goals…financial concerns are legitimate needs of the employer.

The concept of practical constraints is not new to I-O practitioners, which is one reason why the *SIOP Principles* (2018) note that circumstances matter. As such, we suggest that, a final property of *suitable* is that the alternative must not require excessively more cost or time to implement, administer, score, or maintain – relative to the assessment it is intended to replace.

Conclusion

Our recommendations for a rational framework to *evaluate suitable alternatives* is not intended to discount other important considerations in the identification, evaluation, and use of selection procedures. As mentioned previously, there may be important reasons to consider different selection procedures and methodological approaches – one such example is the use of composite measures. This approach, among others, is often used to attempt to improve selection systems and to reduce the adverse impact of decisions produced by those selection systems. Even *UGESP* notes that combining different selection procedures into composite measures can be a useful option to consider.

Whenever the user is shown an alternative selection procedure with evidence of less adverse impact and substantial evidence of validity for the same job in similar circumstances, the user should investigate it to determine the appropriateness of using or validating it in accord with these guidelines. This subsection is **not intended to preclude the combination of procedures into a significantly more valid procedure***, if the use of such a combination has been shown to be in compliance with the guidelines"* **(emphasis in bold added)**.

That said, it is insufficient to simply point to validity generalization estimates and generic adverse impact reduction strategies when pursuing the identification and selection of a suitable alternative; whether a particular approach truly reflects a *suitable alternative* is context dependent and in part a function of the aforementioned considerations.

Taken together, the framework presented here suggests that a *suitable alternative* to a selection procedure under consideration is one that taps the same or similar job-relevant characteristics, has equally strong validity evidence, and produces smaller subgroup differences (while considering legitimate business interests).

Important questions to consider during the search for *suitable alternatives* include:

• Is there an alternative selection procedure that is intended to measure the same or a highly similar characteristic(s)?

• Is there sufficient evidence that the procedure effectively measures such characteristics, under similar circumstances?

• Is there approximately equal job-related evidence for that procedure as for the initial procedure?

• Are the costs or time to implement, administer, score, or maintain associated with the alternative procedure similar to the initial procedure?

• Are sub-group differences in scores obtained from that procedure meaningfully smaller than those for the procedure being considered?

In the follow-up installment to this series, we hope to discuss considerations around *reasonable effort* or the burden required of the employer in the identification of *suitable alternatives*.

[1] We would like to thank Dr. Kayo Sady for considerable input and guidance in finalizing this article.

[2] Case law themes will be discussed in a future installment of this series.

[3] Determining the representativeness of the performance space to target during selection is an important consideration, albeit more often in line with understanding the deficiency and job relatedness of a selection procedure.

[4] In predicting organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), meta-analytic estimates have shown corrected correlations of 0.23 and 0.22 for general mental ability and conscientiousness, respectively (see, Gonzalez-Mule, Mount, & Oh, 2014 and Chiaburu, Oh, Berry, Li, and Gardner, 2011).

[5] As an example, when considering criterion validity, it is unlikely that a feasible evaluation of two criterion studies of similar phenomena under similar circumstances will occur in practice.

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2019 IPAC Conference
July 14 – 17, 2019
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Join us for our annual conference in Minneapolis, MN, July 14 – 17, 2019! This year's conference is shaping up to be a truly memorable event, with an impressive lineup of keynote speakers and engaging pre-conference workshops.

This year's keynote presentations include:

• Dr. Harold W. Goldstein, Dr. Charles A. Scherbaum, and Dr. Kenneth Yusko: "Modern Perspectives on the Assessment of Intelligence"

• Dr. Paul Sackett: "What's New in the Testing and Assessment Literature That's Important for Practitioners"

• Dr. Sandra Hartog: "Maximizing Virtual Assessments in an Age of Accelerated Development"

• Dr. Paul Hanges: "Assessing Strategies for Reducing Adverse Impact"

• Dr. Lori Foster: "Using Behavioral Insights and Artificial Intelligence to Minimize Bias and Maximize Potential"

Our pre-conference workshops provide an invaluable opportunity to take a deep-dive into current innovations in a small group setting.

This year's pre-conference workshops include:

• Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Recruitment
• Developing Work Simulations: Building a Rich, Accurate Assessment
• Creating a Comprehensive Leadership Assessment & Development (LeAD) Program
• How to Measure Personality Right: Know-How and Tips for the Practitioner
• Student, Early Career, and Future Leader Inaugural Consortium

In addition to the many conference sessions and activities hosted by the IPAC conference, Minneapolis has an abundance of things to do in and around the town. According to the Minneapolis Convention & Visitors Association, the city boasts a dramatic riverfront skyline, three professional sports stadiums within 1.3 miles, so much art you're literally surrounded by it and a theater on almost every corner. It has a culture committed to perfecting the craft of the brew, the best park system in the nation, and a foodie paradise where you can get Nordic cuisine for breakfast, Ethiopian for lunch and this thing called a "Jucy Lucy" for dinner – and, cocktails on a Ferris wheel.

As always, we are excited to host several evening events for attendees to network and connect with professionals in the field. Keep checking the conference website.

We hope to see you in Minneapolis this summer!

Conference Sponsorship Opportunities Available

IPAC is offering a diverse array of opportunities to sponsor and support our annual conference, held in Minneapolis, MN, July 14 - 17. As a sponsor of the IPAC annual conference, you can build connections with top professionals, academics, and talent in HR, I-O Psychology, and related fields across the private sector and municipal, state, and federal governments.

IPAC offers four levels of sponsorship, each with unique options to spotlight and represent your organization. Our sponsorship options range from Bronze ($650) to Platinum ($5,000), and include such benefits as guaranteed exhibitor space, access to pre- and post-conference attendee mailing lists, and recognition on the IPAC website and signage.

Additional benefits at each level include:

• Bronze: 10% discount on advertisements in the conference program
• Silver: Place your organization's logo on items distributed to all attendees, or sponsor a keynote speaker
• Gold: Host the Hospitality Suite, or place a full ad on the back cover of the conference program
• Platinum: Host the Welcome Reception, or Monday night Social Event

Options are also available for organizations who cannot attend the conference, which include dedicated ad space in our conference program, as well as literature inserts provided in the registration materials for conference attendees.

Don't miss out on the beneficial opportunity to become an IPAC conference sponsor! For more information on conference sponsorship opportunities, contact sponsor@ipacweb.org or visit the IPAC conference sponsorship website.

Attention Students: Call for Volunteers!

We need student volunteers to help with registration and assist conference attendees and presenters. Student Members who volunteer at least 8 hours receive FREE conference registration. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact conference@ipacweb.org or visit the student opportunities page for more information.

Two Assessment Specialists and an Interviewer

Zollie Saxon, Alaina Ploski and Jody Lecheler

Louisiana Tech University doctoral student Zollie Saxon, interviewed Alaina Ploski, M.S. an Assessment & Development Specialist for Jefferson County Commission (Birmingham, AL), and Jody Lecheler, M.S. an Assessment & Development Specialist for the Personnel Board of Jefferson County (Birmingham, AL) to gain a boots-on-the-ground perspective of what it's like to work in selection and assessment today. Ploski & Lecheler talk about their experiences working in Birmingham, the things that best prepared them out of graduate school for entry-level work for Industrial-Organizational psychologists and offer advice for those interested in similar positions.

Alaina Ploski graduated from Eastern Kentucky University with a Master of Science in Industrial-Organizational Psychology and in June of 2016 joined Jefferson County Commission where she works in the Human Resources in Employee Selection as an Assessment and Development Specialist.

Jody Lecheler graduated from Western Kentucky University with a Master of Science in Industrial-Organizational Psychology. She worked for the Maryland Department of Transportation as an Employee Selection Specialist prior to taking on the position of Assessment and Development Specialist in Employment Testing for the Personnel Board of Jefferson County.

Tell us a little about yourself; How did you get to where you are, what is your current position, what your responsibilities are, and how long you have been in your position?

Alaina: I am an Assessment and Development Specialist for the Jefferson County Commission. I work in Human Resources; the division is called Employee Selection. I'm responsible for carrying out secondary job analyses which involves analyzing job analysis data and then holding meetings with Jefferson County subject matters experts (SMEs). Through the job analysis process, we then move to test development where we make employment tests. For a long time, this meant structured interviews, but now we're moving into simulation territory, which has been neat. After we create our employment tests, we administer and score and analyze the data. There's a lot of report writing as well. That's kind of an overview of my responsibilities at work.

For school, I went to Butler University for undergrad and Eastern Kentucky University for my Master's in I-O Psychology.

How long have you been with Jefferson County?

A: I have been with Jefferson County since June of 2016.

Z: What lead you to that position?

A: When I was in my second year of graduate school, of course you're doing all that fun applying for jobs everywhere stuff. I cast a broad net. I was willing to go anywhere, which I think you kind of have to be in I-O because there are a lot of different avenues you can take. So, I applied for this opening, and they called me for an interview, and here I am.

Z: Jody, I'm going to switch over to you for a minute, what about you?

Jody: I did my undergrad at Ball State University in Indiana, with a major of Psychology and History. I then went to Western Kentucky University for my Master's in I-O Psychology. After I graduated with my Master's, I first went to work for the Maryland Department of Transportation as an Employee Selection Specialist. There I screened applications and did some job analysis and created some tests. I wasn't there too long before I ended up getting the job at the Personnel Board of Jefferson County as an Assessment and Development Specialist.

We do the preliminary selection for the jurisdictions in our purview. I consider the Personnel Board of Jefferson County kind of like an umbrella. We're over a bunch of other jurisdictions, so any municipality within the county, including the county, falls under our purview. Anyone who applies for any job in any municipality within the county, or for the county, applies through us. It's our job to do minimum qualification development, making sure the minimum qualifications are appropriate for jobs and then getting the applicants that the jurisdictions need. We also do preliminary testing. So, if we have a large applicant pool and the County needs a list of eligible candidates, we're going to do some sort of test to provide a rank order of those individuals. We're in charge of developing those tests, administration, assessment and analysis. Our other responsibility is we have to study all the jobs within the merit system. Our merit system is all the municipality and county jobs that fall under the Personnel Board. There are over 600 jobs in our merit system, so our job is to study these jobs in a 5-year cycle, so every job is studied at least every 5 years. We make sure that the minimum qualifications for a job are up to date, and we have updated job analysis data, and updated KSA (knowledge-skills-ability) data. So, when we do develop minimal qualifications or test we have an accurate representation of what we need.

Z: I bet you have been able to see a lot of fun things doing that, that's a lot of jobs to look through.

J: Yeah, I've enjoyed it a lot. Right now, I'm working on Health Inspector jobs, so I get to go out with health inspectors to restaurants. Last year I worked on Corrections Officers, so I got to go to jails within the county. That was interesting. I work on the Public Safety Team, so our jobs focus around law enforcement and fire personnel, so we create and develop and administer the promotional tests for police and fire series.

Z: I have a quick question, what do you use to create the tests? Do you use any software to generate the tests, any item banking?

J: We have an internal system for creating what we call an OJAQ – Online Job Analysis Questionnaire. And we have an internal software that we use to send a link to our SMEs, and we do different ratings for each of the work behaviors. Like they'll rank what percentage of time they spend doing each work behavior (that were found through the job analysis), and then they also rate the tasks, and then the KSAs they do a series of ratings – How important it is on the job, if its needed at entry, how critical it is, and if having that KSA differentiates between a good or bad employee.

We use a new test every time we administer a test. And for the promotional test specifically, we bring in external SMEs from all over the country. For example, we just did the Police Sergeant test, so we'll bring in four SMEs that are Sergeant level and four SMEs that are Lieutenant level – they supervise Sergeants. We'll bring them in to develop the test. We do this for test security reasons. so, we bring in external people who don't know anyone in the area that would apply for the job. They also help with the assessment. We take a lot of steps to preserve test security. Now for jobs that are not promotional we do use internal SMEs which is usually the supervisor or a department head of the position we're testing for. Alaina do you want to explain who you use?

A: Yeah, can you ask that question again, so I can be clear if you were asking about computer software or subject matter experts?

J: We don't use an item bank for test development.

A: No, and we don't either. That is, in addition to being a test security concern for us. We don't use item banks although, we have borrowed certain situations and altered them in order to better fit the job. But not so much in an item banking sort of way.

J: Most of our tests are very situational, so we don't have many items that could be used across jobs. We use critical incidents to develop the items. We'll give them a very specific incident/situation and we'll ask them how they would handle it.

*Following a post-interview follow up we would like to clarify that neither the Personnel Board or Jefferson County generally use multiple-choice test job knowledge tests for civil service system jobs. The position of both the Personnel Board and Jefferson county is that job knowledge tests should be designed in a way in which candidates are allowed to apply the relevant job knowledge to realistic situations. This is done by utilization of the testing facilities within the Personnel Board and Jefferson County via their assessment process (i.e., structured interviews) with a large number of job candidates.

Z: Jody, coming back to a question earlier, I may have missed this, but how long have you been with the Personnel Board of Jefferson County?

J: I'll be here two years in May.

Z: This is taking it a step back a little bit, thinking back to your undergraduate days, what drew you to I-O psychology?

A: So, when I was in undergrad, I was trying to take what I thought were really fun psychology elective courses, and when I was a sophomore all the seats were filled up in the ones I really wanted to take. So, there were seats left in I-O. I had never been interested in I-O, but since there were seats left, I was like "Well I guess I'm taking I-O this semester," and it turns out it was the best thing I could have done. I met my professor who taught the course, who was so enthusiastic and ecstatic about I-O psychology, and that's what her PhD was in. The possibility of improving work with evidence-based practice really appealed to me on top of the enthusiasm that our professor shared with the course. It just really struck a chord with me and I thought that was a good way for me to make my little difference in the world. So that's what initially drew me to the field.

Z: Is that what drew you towards selection as well?

A: Yeah, that's consistent. When I got to graduate school and had my selection course, it was interesting to me to see how you can actually apply the literature and do things the "right" way and get really good people in the door to your organization.

Z: Jody, How about you?

J: I started my undergraduate and George Washington University, and I remember my Intro to Psych there, and it was probably one of the first days when they briefly talk about all the areas of psychology. My professor mentioned I-O psychology, though looking back he talked more about ergonomics, I remember him saying something about how keyboards were laid out. But I thought it was interesting, so I went home and did my own research. So then when I transferred to Ball State, I was fortunate there to have a professor that was an I-O. So, he taught an I-O psychology course and an advanced I-O psychology course, so I was lucky cause I know a lot of undergrad programs don't have that opportunity. I was always interested in business, but I was too stubborn to take economics, so I wasn't a business major. But I always liked the people aspect of business, so when I found I-O psychology it was a good fit for me. Same when I did my grad school, I liked that selection is more... numbers based. It's not as

soft as organizational psychology in my opinion, and work is just so important to everyone's livelihood. And I just think it's so important that we can get the right people into the right jobs, and hopefully in a job they enjoy and will do well in.

Z: Don't worry, you're talking to two very selection-sided people.

J: Oh ok good!

A: You know, I find it funny I ended up in selection because all through my undergrad and grad school I felt that I was more on the organizational side of things. The more warm, fuzzy stuff. I'm happy to have this experience in something that I didn't think I would.

Z: So, looking back, from your current position to where you've been, what do you think has best prepared you to be able to competently perform your current job. This can be from previous positions, undergrad, grad school, or training in your current position.

J: The most important thing that we do is we have to establish relationships with SMEs. We cannot do our jobs without the SMEs. So, throughout grad school, the best thing we did was have projects where we went into the field to work with business and have to talk to people and work with actual businesses. Similarly, when I had my internship, I just think it's so important that we learn to work with people and that we learn how to talk to people and tell them what we need and what we do without getting too technical. In school we learn all the academic language and lingo, but we're in field and have to talk to our SMEs they may not understand adverse impact or content validity, so we really have to break it down and explain why it's beneficial for them, and for them to help us. Because we couldn't do what we do without our SMEs.

A: True. I'm going second everything that Jody said. But also, the content knowledge that I gained in selection in grad school, so just learning that foundation of here's what selection is and here's how you should go about doing it. And then coupling that with our on-the-job training when we got here. A lot of it deals with, "let's put this in terms our subject matter experts can understand." Because that's how we get them to buy in to our process and that's how we get them to trust us. So, learning that piece through grad school, projects, or our on-the-job-training when we arrive here, learning how to speak that language is important.

Z: Most definitely. Jody, I want to hop back on something you said a second ago. You said your grad program had you work out in businesses. Was that more like an in-house consulting firm or was it on your own type of work for finding a business to work with during your master's program?

J: Our professors would find the jobs for us with local organizations. We worked with a manufacturing plant in the area or local non-profits. For our job analysis class, they would have us go out and write a job description for one of the positions. For a training class, we developed a training course evaluation. We'd talk to subject matter experts and find out what KSAs were needed. So, our professors would set it up for us, but they were local organizations, but they weren't affiliated with Western Kentucky.

Z: Now you also said you did some of that work in your internship too, now was that internship the job for Maryland Department of Transportation, or was that something separate?

J: It was something else. My internship was a summer internship in between my first and second year of grad school. I worked for a poultry processing plant. And I worked primarily with employees in the debone department. The plant in general had a lot turnover and a lot of temp employees, because as you can imagine in a manufacturing type setting, has their own issues. So, I essentially created a survey to find out what improvements could be made to improve the jobs of those employees. And looking back it

was more on the organization side of I-O, but I think that was a really good experience in creating surveys and working with people. I talked with so many employees about their jobs and how they could be happier at work. I think it was a good experience working with SMEs and at different levels of the organization. I had to work with everyone from the front-line workers, supervisors, managers, HR professionals. And I did the presentation to the C-Suite at corporate headquarters. So that was a really good experience learning how to work with every level of an organization. And that's how our jobs are now. We study jobs everywhere from custodians to laborers up to supervisors up to the director level employees. We really do have to be able to work with SMEs at every level in order for them to buy in to what our process is.

Z: Alaina did you complete an internship in your grad program or maybe in your undergrad?

A: I did not do an internship. Most of the work I did in graduate school was through practicum projects. We'd have a different practicum each semester. So sometimes our professor would seek out our projects, but other times it was up to us to find something. So, in our job analysis course it was up to us to find a job and do a job analysis on it. Whereas in Jody's program, the businesses they worked with were not necessarily a part of her graduate school, some of the projects we worked on at Eastern Kentucky, were a part of the school. So, for example, we did a workload analysis for a department at the school and then there were a couple other projects we did with the university. On top of those we also had good experience of getting out there in the local community and doing projects with them as well.

Z: Alright, what type of… Alaina you had mentioned this, on-site training that you get, and I guess in as much detail as you can or… What type of training did you receive that enabled you to do your job currently?

A: When I got here, we had a pretty extensive onboarding process. So, we have a procedural manual that was gone over with me in a lot of detail. And then we also had Siena Consulting who works with Jefferson County, and a long time ago worked with the Personnel Board. But there were two consultants here at the time I arrived, so myself and my coworker who came on at the same time, spent a lot of time with the consultants and they coached us through how we meet with the SMEs, what questions do we ask to get the information we need, and how do you relate to certain types of people. Like Jody said, we're doing this process with front-line employees all the way up to directors or deputy directors at some point. So, it was important for us to learn that. What are the differences, if any, in how we hold these meetings? After, they would coach us, and then they would hold meetings and we would watch them, sort of like a shadowing model. Then they would turn us loose and sit with us in meetings and after the meeting where they would watch us they would hold feedback sessions with us. One of the consultants was known for his feedback sandwich. So, he would tell us what we did well and then what we could improve on and then end on a good note. So, it was really a lot of coaching on behalf of the consultants and my coworkers.

Z: How about you with your experience at the Personnel Board?

A: I want to second the thing Jody said about peers. When I came on, fellow Assessment and Development Specialists who had already been there, also helped train us and walk us through certain processes, too.

Z: So, this kind of sounds like a mentor system? Was it a formalized one or kind of an informal one?

J: I'd say it's more informal. You weren't necessarily assigned to someone. But there may be someone that gravitates more towards another. So, with our onboarding it was developed by two girls, and one of the girls was on my team. And she sat right by me, so I could always ask her a million questions. So, I was lucky in that regard. But I think in any team that we work on, someone is always there who is willing to help you and that you can follow around.

Z: So, I have a feeling I kind of know where this answer is going, but I'm going to ask anyways. What are some of the things that you learned on the job or along the way that have been the most helpful?

J: So, you obviously can't know how an organization works until you're there. So, having a procedural manual that was specific to the Personnel Board, I wouldn't have known that until I got here. How we run certain meetings. Or especially the different forms and reports we have to fill out, those are very specific to our organization. I feel like that's the main thing, but as we said earlier, I feel like our grad programs set us up for working with people, but then it's our job to figure out how the organization works and how they want us to work with people.

A: Yeah, on top of that, one of the most important things I have learned since being here is Microsoft Excel. We really emphasized SPSS in undergrad and grad school, and I really think we could have used more focus on Excel. So that's been a challenge for me, is trying to master all of its functions.

J: I am fortunate that I did learn SPSS though, because they expect us to know syntax and they expect us to run our reports in SPSS. So I definitely feel, even though I didn't remember everything, that I had a little bit of an advantage having learned that in grad school. So, I think that I was fortunate to learn SPSS, but some Excel work would be helpful as well. I also want to add, project management. Obviously in school you have assignments and such, but I think you really learn project management when you get into a job like this. Because we're working on ten jobs and we have to study all the jobs, coordinate with SMEs, and we have to set our own schedule and really keep on top of things to get things done by a specific deadline.

Z: So, what has been the biggest challenge for you in your current position? Whoever would like to go first.

A: So this is funny, cause I'm going to say Excel again. Learning that has been a hurdle, I'm not the most tech savvy person Like Jody said earlier, I too, am thankful for having learned SPSS all those years because we do so much in that in terms of our analyses. But then another challenge that I would like to mention is having to deal with difficult people. And by difficult people I mean people who may not necessarily see a need for our selection process. Because there are people out there who like to go with their gut when it comes to hiring. And that's been a hurdle that you kind of get used to over time, but at the beginning that was challenging for me.

J: And to add on to what Alaina was saying, I feel like a lot of the time we meet people and they'll tell you about their jobs, but sometimes it turns into a venting session about their pay grade. So sometimes we have to explain our purpose for meeting with them. Fortunately for us we're always there as part of the survey. And part of our survey is that classification and compensation does salary surveys. I don't work in class & comp, but a lot of the time we have to explain to them the process of compensation and how it's determined, and everyone wishes they made more money, but we have to overcome that a lot.

Z: So I'm going to skip a little bit a head, so you mentioned the consent decree, and how some of the ways it impacts Jefferson County employees and hiring practices, like being unable to hire based on their gut. So, in what ways aside from that has the consent decree impacted your work?

A: Well that's an interesting question for me, because it's all I have known since being here. You have to cross all of your t's and dot all of your i's. You can't really leave anything unexplained or undocumented, it has to be complete from start to finish and wrapped up with a bow on it. You can't cut any corners, documentation is sincerely the key. You have to document everything you do, and I'm talking so far as like everyone you contacted… Say you're working on the job of plumber, and we have to search for external subject matter experts as well as meeting with our internal subject matter experts. So, when you're calling, and it does involve cold calling, you have to keep a record of everyone you called and the

outcome of that phone call. And it ends up going in our reports, so I would say that the consent decree has impacted the rigor of the reporting that we do. The last thing that I'll mention is, the volume of work and the speed at which its done. Not only do you have to be careful, but you have a lot of work and you have to get it done quickly, because a lot of these jobs had to be filled yesterday.

Z: Jody, what about your side of things?

J: I don't really have as much to say on this one, fortunately the Personnel Board is no longer under consent decree. We still have leftover effects from it though, our procedural manual that we use is an outcome of the consent decree.

A: And, for Jody, we have to contact the Personnel Board analysts quite a bit because our process starts with their data.

J: Our organizations, even though we are separate, we collaborate quite a bit. And we understand that the County is under consent decree. So, we try to help them out whenever we can.

Z: That's great that they work so hand in hand; I can imagine things would be much more difficult if they did not. What are some things about working for Jefferson County and the Personnel Board that may have surprised you or caught you off-guard, not necessarily in a bad way, but that you weren't expecting?

J: I think for me; the volume of work was most surprising. Like I said, we have over 600 jobs in our system, and those all have to be studied in a 5-year cycle. Just that alone is a lot. Also, I think I was surprised by how almost "by the book" things are. I think we learn things in school and we're like "this is nice, but this will never how it will be in the real world," but it kind of is. Obviously, nothing is exact, but how we develop our tests by using critical incidents and linking test components to KSAs and demonstrating that they're related to the job. I think I was surprised especially with public safety and promotional exams at how "by the book" they are, for obvious reasons. I like that aspect of my job and feel good about the job we do knowing that at the end of the day we did it to the best of our ability and in all fairness to all candidates.

Also, the only other thing was autonomy. How much of our work is by ourselves. We get an assignment and we're expected to go. And our deadline may not be until 6 months from now, and we're expected to do all that work. Our supervisor is there if we need assistance. I think the amount of independence we have was surprising to me, especially at an entry level job.

A: Yeah, I would second most of what Jody said for things that I found surprising as well. And for Jefferson County, what really surprised me is the amount of history that is here. So, this consent decree has been going on since the 70s and 80s. I came to understand that the consent decree had been going on so long, not only because people were so resistant to change, but it actually is a culture shift. You have to change your processes and with that you're changing the culture that has been long-standing within an organization. Also, work takes more time because our recruitment department has to make a good faith effort in recruiting diverse candidates in addition to us doing a rigorous job analysis. You can't just go out there and say, "Hey this job is posted, apply." You have to really try to get a good diverse quality list of candidates to sign up for the test. There's a lot that goes into it.

J: People joke a lot about how the government is slow to get things done but being on the other end of it we understand why it's so slow, because we're waiting on another step in the process to get done. So for example, people will take a test and they won't see the results until months and months later and I understand that can be frustrating. But we bring in external subject matter experts for all assessments to ensure tests are scored fairly, but we can't just bring them in every week when we have a test that was administered. We build up a bunch of tests that can all be administered in a week, but that may take

a couple months. It can be slow moving sometimes and frustrating for candidates, but there is a reason. I think for the Personnel Board, too, that was surprising to me, the complexity of the organizational structure. Like I said, we are an umbrella organization for 20 municipalities or other jurisdictions, so we have ones that are large like Jefferson County or Birmingham which are really large organizations and then we have some that are really small. So when we develop tests we have to consider that some situations may not apply. Smaller jurisdictions jobs may encompass more than in a larger one where they are more specialized, so we have to really take that into account when we're developing tests. We want to make it fair for all jurisdictions and be representative of what they need.

Z: For each of the positions you are in, what aside from probably Excel, what should an entry-level person prepare? What skills should they build before applying to those types of positions?

J: We are entry-level positions, and the requirement for our jobs is to have a masters in I-O, so beyond that, you don't really need… formally you don't need anything else. But I think it helps if you have projects with external organizations or internships. I think they take that into consideration. They want people who show that they've done a little extra, even if it's small projects. I think just writing that on an application is important. It seems minor but even when you're trying to apply for entry-level position, I think you need to put that on there because it shows you've done something else.

A: I also think that taking the time to teach yourself, or take the time to hone in on the technical aspects of I-O. Do your homework in the very literal sense. Take responsibility for your own learning. Because that's really going to help prepare you for the kinds of things you will face when you get into a job like this.

Z: So, this may not yield any other input from you, but I'm going to go ahead and ask. Aside from what you just said, for those who are interested in doing similar work to yourselves, would you give similar advice? Not necessarily in those same positions, but in similar entry level positions Assessment and Development Specialists, what advice would you have for those people?

J: I think at the undergraduate level, do research on graduate programs to make sure they're practitioner focused and not academic focused if that's your end goal - to work in an organization in a position such as ours. I think it's better to have that experience of working in the field. Doing research is great and has its own benefits, but if it's your end goal to work in the field, do research on the program and what its focus is.

A: On top of that, ask questions of professionals. Really reach out there. A lot of us, those who work in the field, are happy to talk about what we do and why we do it. And if people are interested in doing selection or something similar, just do everything you can to learn about it, because that's really going to help you decide if that's what you really want to do and understanding how it really works instead of imagining what it's probably like. Also, thinking about how you can integrate science into practice. Fortunately, there are grad programs out there that really focus on practice. However, the literature we read, we read for a reason. So, if you think broadly about what you read in terms of the literature and how you can actually integrate that to real world action in the work place.

J: I think we say it all the time and it seems cliché, but networking is beneficial. Our field is really understanding of how important it is to get an understanding of the job and do a realistic job preview. Even our organization have had undergrads here who might be interested in I-O come and shadow us for a week, or even a day. So I think if you see who's out there in the community, our field is really understanding that it's important to see if this is the job you really want to do and what you want to go into. So, looking for those opportunities definitely won't hurt.

Z: What are some of the most interesting, or what you would call rewarding aspects of your job?

J: For me, I think, like I said, people's livelihood is their job, so it feels good knowing that people are getting placed in jobs. Also working in public safety testing, it feels good, at the end of the day, although it's a lot of work, to know that the best candidates are getting promoted to higher ranks. And that's public safety, so ideally that should reflect in our community. I think that's a rewarding aspect for me. And I really like learning about the wide variety of jobs, that's been interesting. There's so much more to jobs than you would ever think. And I think people like to talk about their jobs, they get to talk about themselves and what they do. So, it's nice to go out there and be like "Let's talk about you" and "Let me hear what you do for a living." And then I get to learn about cool jobs along the way.

A: The multitude of jobs is really rewarding. I've got to study from painter to land planning and that's really rewarding to learn about jobs you may not have thought twice about. Or even encountered in your lifetime. And then also, fulfilling a need that the county has, has been rewarding for me. I worked on a selection test for Painters and then we hired about seven painters. The other day I was going up the elevator, and I saw some of the new painters painting the elevator lobby. And I was just happy to see that people are in jobs, they seem to be enjoying it. And then also yesterday, I was walking back to my office and I saw one of my subject matter experts, she stopped to thank me. She said you all are doing such good work, we have such great people coming in and that really helps us achieve our department goals. So just being able to support the goals of other departments along with our own it has been really rewarding to me.

Z: So, I guess on the more human side of this, what would you say people need to know about Jefferson County or the Personnel Board so far as, how affordable is it to live in the Birmingham area, and you've kind of already touched on that it's an entry level position so it's great for people coming right out. But what would you say about that cost of living and that work/life balance?

J: Both Jefferson County and the Personnel Board pay us well for the area. The cost of living in Jefferson County and the Birmingham area is reasonable.

A: Yeah, it's great, and Jody and I have been here around the similar amount of time and both of us are now homeowners. So, it's a really affordable place to live and they're really renovating the downtown. There's a lot of fun things to do, great places to eat. I didn't expect this when moving to Birmingham, but there are even great places to hike and get outside.

J: I think a lot of people when they think of Birmingham, think of its ugly history, but it has changed. People say that even five years ago, it wasn't a good area to be in, but they've done a lot of improvements and they're trying to make it a good place. I think Birmingham's not as bad as people think, and it is an affordable place to live.

You asked about our work/life balance and ours, at the Board. I work my 40 hours a week and I get to go home, and I don't take work home with me, it's not allowed for test security reasons. I definitely don't hate that. So, for us, I think work life balance... I couldn't ask for anything better.

A: Work life balance at Jefferson County, is consistent with the Personnel Board. We are also not allowed to take work home for test security purposes. But there are times that we're going to be at work late during the week if we have several reports due. Or for example, we administered our first work sample with the Roads and Transportation Department, and we worked on a Saturday. Candidates for those jobs often work weekends or during the week and their schedules aren't always 8-5 Monday through Friday. So, we went out to the camp on a Saturday and administered the work sample for those who maybe worked on the Friday. It can get a little inconsistent with the typical Monday through Friday 8-5.

J: Yeah, we're in a great location too. We're like 3 hours from Nashville, 2 hours from Atlanta, you can get down to New Orleans in a few hours.

A: The beach is within driving distance, too.

J: It's really a great location, you can do a lot of easy, quick weekend trips from here.

Z: Is there anything else you all would like to add to this? We're kind of running a little over on time and I want to be respectful of that.

A: I have been planning on saying this the whole conversation, but I want everyone to know that: Strangers are subject matter experts you haven't met yet. People are their own sources of knowledge and experiences.

Z: Great! Thank you. You have been awesome and thank you so much for being willing to talk with us today. Our goal for this is to really get a boots-on-the-ground perspective, and I think you all have provided a great view on this.

About the ACN

The ACN is the official newsletter of the International Personnel Assessment Council, an association of individuals actively engaged in or contributing to the professional, academic, and practical field of personnel research and assessment. It serves as a source of information about significant activities of the Council, a medium of dialogue and information exchange among members, a method for dissemination of research findings and a forum for the publication of letters and articles of general interest. The Council has approximately 300 members.

The next ACN will be published in July. The submission closing date for the July publication is June 15. Prospective authors are invited to send in their articles, research reports, reviews, reactions, discussion papers, conference reports, etc., pertaining to the field of personnel research and assessment. Topics for submission include, but are not limited to:

- Technical
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- Book reviews

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