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The Talent Development Centre as an Integrated Positive Psychological Leadership Development and Talent Analytics Framework

Frederick Wilhelm Stander and Llewellyn Ellardus Van Zyl

Abstract The purpose of this chapter is to explore the value of an integrated Talent Development Centre (TDC) approach as a dynamic, hybrid, positive psychological leadership development and talent analytics framework within organizations. Specifically, the chapter aims to explore the modern idea of the TDC, its theoretical underpinnings and its practical and procedural application to meet the development demands of inter-connected-, dynamic- and digital organisations. The chapter is structured through three core components: Firstly, an overview is provided on the evolution of the TDC as a hybrid assessment and development centre. The purpose-, function-, and differentiation between assessment—and development centres are presented. Secondly, an argument is made for the adoption of a developmental and learning orientation towards TDC's—supporting a positive organisational intervention approach while expanding on the theoretical premise of competency-based learning and assessment design. Thirdly, key principles for the successful implementation of a contemporary TDC is put forward; responsive to the demands of a dynamic and expansive work context driven by a number of emerging trends. Recommendations are provided pertaining to the role of TDC's in integrated succession planning, leader readiness, talent calibration and intervention mapping on both individual—and group level.

Keywords Training and development · Talent development · Talent development centre · Leadership development

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1 Introduction

The Assessment Centre (AC) is a widely recognised, integrated and process-driven assessment methodology utilised to evaluate the aptitude, competence and potential of people (Reynolds, McCauley, & Tsacoumis, 2018). It is a multi-tiered assessment methodology which refers to a “structured process whereby a group of participants are exposed to multiple assessment methods, that are observed by a team of trained assessors, who evaluate participants against a predetermined job-related competence profile, whereby decisions are made by pooling shared data” (Ballantyne & Povah, 2017, p. 7). In contrast to traditional assessment techniques, it utilizes various data-points to evaluate behaviours in order to accurately predict future work performance and potential (Hay, 2017; Thornton, Mueller-Hanson, & Rupp, 2017).

These data-points are obtained through a multitude of methods ranging from simulations, sociograms, exercises, case studies, 360-degree evaluations, psychometric assessments and behavioural interviewing (Ballantyne & Povah, 2017; Volante, Valenzuela, Diaz, Fernandez, & Mladinic, 2018). Assessment Centres are administered by specialized professionals, most often Organisational Psychologists or Human Resource Professionals, who are trained in mapping behaviours, work-preferences, personality and orientation to particular capability frameworks (Iles, 1992). This integrative approach is experienced by participants as being fairer, more objective and generally better received than traditional assessment methods (Bell & Arthur, 2008); even by non-selected candidates (Lawson, 2018). As such, the AC is seen as the premium for recruitment, selection and promotion practice as it is both a rigorous and multi-dimensional assessment method (Volante et al., 2018) and positively experienced by participants (Boudrias, Bernaud, & Plunier, 2014; Lawson, 2018).

It is therefore not surprising that the application of ACs has expanded into developmental interventions to assist with the professional growth of people capability within organizations. (Turner & Nichol, 2016). Drawing from the original AC methodology proposed by Howard and Bray (1988), the Development Centre (DC) emerged as a collection of workplace simulations and other assessment metrics that provide individuals with practice, feedback and coaching on a set of predefined developable behavioural competences or positive capacities that are crucial for professional success (Rupp, Snyder, Mitchell-Gibbons, & Thornton, 2006). Behavioural competences or positive capacities are selected based on their importance for success, that it is amenable to change and believed by senior management to be improvable (Rupp et al., 2006). Where ACs solely focus on the assessment or diagnoses of capability, or person-job fit, the DC emphasizes experiential learning, self-reflection, and professional development based on the diagnostic or assessment results (Hermelin, Lievens & Robertson, 2007). In effect, the DC serves a dual function as both an assessment and development tool (Kudisch, Ladd, & Dobbins, 1997). Kurdish et al. (1997) differentiate many developmental applications of DCs, such as identifying employees’ training needs, customizing fit for purpose developmental plans and giving immediate on-site feedback for leadership development. The DC, as developmen-

tal instrument, stresses phenomenon-based learning through real-time competency or capacity-based assessment, and active feedback aimed at professional/personal development and career growth (Lawson, 2018). Specifically, the DC provides clear, accurate feedback on the assessment process and facilitates the direct involvement of management in the planning and development process but highlights the importance of self-development and professional growth. Unlike ACs, DCs ensure that the competencies or capacities being assessed are transparent and great care is taken to ensure a psychologically safe learning environment, where experimentation and exploration are encouraged (Thornton et al., 2017).

Considering this gradual expansion of ACs' scope into DC's, the rigorous process of application and the (frequently) high associated costs thereof, one would argue that greater documentation of the approach as a developmental option to large organizations would exist (Thornton & Rupp, 2005; Thornton, Rupp, & Hoffman, 2014). However, quite the opposite is true, with limited research, best-practice guidelines and frameworks available to practitioners (Ballantyne & Povah, 2017; Lawson, 2018; Thornton & Rupp, 2005). Moreover, no research material is available in addressing how either ACs or DCs can support the development of people in the future world of work, where clear patterns have emerged as relevant to Human Capital Development, including the increasing importance of employee experiences, the need for hyper-connectivity, real-time feedback, the workplace eco-system, and technology (Deloitte, 2018). In this chapter we explore the modern idea of the Talent Development Centre, its theoretical underpinnings and its practical and procedural application to ensure it meets the demands of an inter-connected, dynamic and digital workplace.

2 The Definition of a Talent Development Centre (TDC)

A Talent Development Centre is a hybrid positive psychological leadership assessment and development intervention which aims to identify and develop leader-readiness, talent and leader capability, bench strength for key positions, person-organisation fit, potential and capacity for upward mobility into more complex roles. Specifically, its purpose is to (a) assess and develop leader capability, (b) provide real-time people analytics aligned to the organisational strategy and (c) aid talent mapping, career pathing and succession planning.

Its hybrid application is focused predominantly on two domains. Firstly, it is geared towards unlocking validated, applicable talent analytics that inform the succession planning efforts of organizations by making data-driven talent review conversations possible. Through its integration of data from various sources, the TDC offers a robust overview of the capability of an individual against several cognitive-, personality-, behavioural-, and competency dimensions. In this regard, the TDC answers to an increasing demand from global organizations to apply more sophisticated people analytics frameworks for the purpose of steering business continuity and supporting growth through a data-driven HR and Talent Management strategy (Boudreau & Cascio, 2017; Fechey-Lippens, Schaninger & Tanner, 2015).

Secondly, the TDC is a positive psychological leadership development intervention. Sosik and Jung (2018) argue that contemporary leadership development in organizations requires an entire new approach; focusing on real time challenges and setting leaders up for success within the highly complex and ambiguous contexts they function in.

The leadership development function has continued to evolve, becoming increasingly methodical and fit-for-purpose, integrating multi-source feedback to address real developmental needs and shifting away from a classical Training—towards a process—driven approach where continuous feedback cycles lead positive behavioural change (McCleskey, 2014). This is aptly summarized by Day et al. (2014, p. 64): “Training typically involves providing proven approaches to solve known problems but the challenges facing contemporary leaders tend to be too complex and ill-defined to be addressed successfully through such relatively short-term interventions”.

A TDC seeks to address this challenge by introducing phenomenon-based learning in a simulated, real-world environment, leveraging technology whilst continuously challenging the leader to engage, problem-solve and solution challenges typically faced at the next level of complexity. In this manner it becomes a stretch learning intervention, aimed at developing readiness and the capability of talent pools within organizations. Guenole, Chernyshenko, Stark and Drasgow (2015) comment that ACs/DCs can effectively provide the opportunity for situational judgement and contextual leadership development. In this regard, the TDC aims to do just that, making use of a diverse range of simulated exercises, structured and non-structured interviewing, case-studies, 360° assessment, carefully selected psychometric instruments and technological developmental actions.

Although it may seem as though there is a considerable overlap in the techniques employed in ACs/DCs (Lawson, 2018; Thornton et al., 2014) and the TDC, each approach fundamentally differs in respect of a number of parameters ranging from its purpose, the use, the role of the participant, the focus of the activity, the visibility of the content being assessed, the extent towards which feedback is provided to the amount of feedback provided, the length of the assessments and the amount of assessment methods (see Table 1 for a side by side comparison). The TDC capitalises on the strengths of both ACs and DCs in order to provide a dynamic process through which positive leadership capacities can be assessed, developed and mapped.

3 Theoretical Framework of the TCD

A TDC is positioned as a positive organizational intervention, based on its departure point of leveraging the unique strengths, potentialities and virtues of a leader towards developing a distinctive leadership brand or identity. Positive organisational interventions have its origin within the Positive Organizational Scholarship and are geared towards supporting, enhancing and further maturing the positive or strengths-based capabilities of individuals, with the view of supporting these individuals to more

Table 1 Functional comparison between ACs, DCs and TDCs

Function	Assessment centre	Development centre	Talent development centre
Purpose	Assessment for personnel selection	Assessment, development and transfer of learning	Leadership capability and capacity development
Experience	Diagnostic	Experiential learning, self-reflection	Phenomenon-based learning
Role of participant	Assessee	Active participant	Active participant
Focus	Overall performance or person-job fit	Competency improvement	Competency and capacity development, talent mapping, accelerated development
Visibility of assessment domains	Non-transparent	Extremely transparent	Specified for the HR function/individual participant
Exercises	Few and generic	Many and Job Related	Multiple fit-for-purpose—highly specific to context
Developmental strategy	None	Guided by company	Guided by individual, supported by company
Feedback	Pass/Fail and provided upon completion	Extensive feedback at multiple points during the DC	Extensive feedback before, during and continuously after the TDC
Assessors/observers	Fewer assessors, more participants	1 assessor/observer per candidate	Multiple assessors/observers per candidate
Candidates	External (potential candidates)	Internal (all interested)	Internal (high potential leaders)
Target position	Vacant position	Current/future position	Future position (promotional)
Length	Once-off (1–1.5 days)	Once-off (1.5–2 days)	Continuous structured process (up to 12 months)

Adapted from Rupp et al. (2006), Thornton et al. (2014)

readily attain work goals and meet performance targets (Martin, Karanika-Murray, Biron, & Sanderson, 2016; Winslow et al., 2017).

Positive organizational interventions have increasingly been utilized by large corporations to support talent, through methods including but not limited to job crafting (Van Den Heuvel, Demerouti, & Peeters, 2015), strengths-based development initiatives (Salanova, Llorens, Acosta, & Torrente, 2013), strengths-based coaching (van Zyl, Motschnig-Pitrik, & Stander, 2016; van Zyl & Stander, 2013), self-directed learning (Hezlett, 2016), career mapping (Hirschi, 2011), meaning-making (van Zyl, Hulshof, & Dickens, in press) and situational development of leaders through leveraging of psychological capitals (Day et al., 2014; McCleskey, 2014). A TDC is very purposefully presented as a positive organizational intervention as one of its core purposes is to highlight key leader strengths, virtues and potentialities; which the leader can leverage for the full expression of individual leadership potential, in turn benefitting the organization.

As such, the TDC draws from the positive organisational practice framework suggested by Salanova et al. (2013, p. 110) as it is “a systematic, planned and proactive effort to improve employee processes” through a positively framed heuristic framework which (a) sources data from multiple sources, (b) employs both quantitative and qualitative positive capability assessment methodologies, (c) data is processed/analysed at both the individual and collective level and follows a multi-levelled assessment process, (d) it integrates theories from positive organisational psychology, (e) both subjective and objective individual indicators are utilised and finally (f) a customised, personal leadership development trajectory is developed, implemented and tracked. Here, the focus is primarily on the assessment of leader capability and development thereof from a strengths-based capacity crafting and resource optimisation perspective (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). This strengths-based developmental focus disperses much of the anxiety and antagonism leaders usually experience when being subjected to forms of assessment (Cameron, 2012; van Zyl & Rothmann, 2014, 2012) and results to increased commitment to both the process and the organisation (Olckers, van Zyl, & Van Der Vaart, 2017).

A second prominent theoretical element of a TDC is its alignment with competency-based development. Gangani, McLean, & Braden (2006) comment that the development of an agile human resource and leadership force can only be facilitated by articulating a clear organizational success profile. By bringing a well-defined framework of key capabilities, attributes and skill sets required to the fore, organizational strategic drivers can be supported through individual, team and organizational efforts, herewith making greater performance possible (Müller & Turner, 2010; Naquin & Holton, 2003; Northouse, 2018). When planning a TDC, great time and effort is spent in understanding an organization’s particular strategy, growth goals, macro-contextual environment as well as the current business challenges it faces. This aid in understanding the type of leader necessary to not only successfully navigate these elements but who will thrive in these conditions (Elkington, Steege, Glick-Smith, & Breen, 2017). This leads to the construction of fit-for-purpose defined capability matrix; a competence model describing key attributes, orientations, values, abilities and experiences needed to lead within an

organization (de Heer & Porskamp, 2018). When the competence model is clear, the selection of methods to gather data and measure a candidate against that model becomes possible (Ballantyne & Povah, 2017).

4 Seven Core Principles for the Delivery of a Successful TDC

In order to deliver a comprehensive TDC, seven key principles must be adhered to. This will support the delivery of a TDC as a hybrid leadership development and mapping intervention whilst providing a compelling learning opportunity to leaders.

Principle 1: Ensure contextual development

For a TDC to be successfully implemented, deep thought into the contextual realities and the associative challenges which the organization face is required. Leadership does not occur in a vacuum, but instead reflects responsiveness of shared value creation within the macro eco-system in which the organization functions. Shamir and Howell (2018) argue that an organizational context is deeply related to the expression of leadership behaviours and that situational factors, growth strategy, culture and market drivers inform directly the type of leadership required within a particular organization. A human resource development approach, and by extension the design of a TDC, can never be contemplated without firm understanding of the organization's growth goals, imperatives, key performance indicators, strategy and ecological systems (Canals, 2014; Garavan, Watson, Carberry, & O'Brien, 2016; Vohra, 2014). Canals (2014) established that leadership development must focus on the specific (global) functions leaders in large organizations must fulfil, and that there should be alignment between an organization's purpose and its leadership development approach.

As such, the TDC should be developed alongside senior executive management, to ensure that the content, direction and initiatives are fit-for-purpose, relevant and contextually crafted (Marshall, Coleman, & Reason, 2017). Further, through active involvement in the design process, executive management buy-in is obtained which is crucial success factor for any strategic human resource development initiative (Mendenhall et al., 2017). A participatory action research approach, which focuses on a process of co-constructionism, should be employed to contextually explore the current organisational environment with the senior executives. This type of action research should involve (a) An orientation through which the context of the TDC is discussed and contextual information obtained, (b) formal contracting through the mutual clarification of expectations, (c) developing recognisance to deeply explore the nature of the business, its context and challenges, (d) co-construct a broad understanding of the leadership capabilities required for formative functioning at each organisational level, and (e) ensuring that the TDC is clearly aligned to the overall business strategy (James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam, 2008; Marshall, Coleman, &

Reason, 2017). This iterative process ensures that the TDC is a customized solution, which is aligned to the strategic drivers of the organisation.

When designing a TDC, this must be kept top of mind. The selection of psychometric batteries, the development of simulations, the assortment of exercises/case studies, the line and structuring of interviews and the contemplation of post TDC developmental activities must be done along the guidance of the specific leadership attributes required to drive an organization forward; and must be directly reflective of the strategic and operating environment of the organization. Only then can mapping be done against a clearly defined profile and can the TDC deliver on its dualistic mandate of developing leaders whilst generating comparative data that can meaningfully contribute to succession planning efforts.

Principle 2: Work from a clearly defined capability matrix

Closely related to the first principle, it is important to be clear on the totality of leadership attributes required within an organization when a TDC process is undertaken. This seemingly simple endeavour is made complex through two elements in particular. Firstly, there is the continuing strife for understanding what leadership talent and potential entails. There is much dispute in the literature over the definition of leadership potential and talent. Clinton (2018) describe leadership potential as a dynamic combination of self-mastery, authenticity, awareness, ability to inspire, creation of purpose, demonstrating of agility, creating synergistic relationships and developing others through energy and presence. Silzer and Church (2009) delineate potential as knowledge, values, demonstrated performance, motivation and aspiration, adaptability, learning orientation, personality and cognitive ability. Northouse (2018) argues that the definitions of leadership capability (i.e. the combination of talent and potential) are wide and non-specific. Clients may use blanket terms for concepts and capabilities, which may imply various elements. For example, “good communication skills” is often identified by senior management as an important competency (Hopkins, O’Neil, & Stoller, 2015). However, “good commutation” may refer to emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills through to effective conflict management or effective teamwork (Rider & Keefer, 2006). For an organization to successfully deliver a TDC process, it must be very clear on its definition of leadership potential and seek to identify, map and develop leaders according to a clearly defined model.

A second challenge relates to identification of sub components of leadership dimensions. It is well established that leadership contains a multitude of behaviours, traits, values and approaches, and within these elements there are widely defined sub dimensions (Church & Silzer, 2014; Marshall-Mies et al., 2000; Mueller, Goncalo, & Kamdar, 2011). When conducting a TDC, one must be very clear on these sub elements, and work from a model that is broad enough to render multi-method assessment possible, but at the same time well-defined to provide for constructive, focused developmental feedback to the participant. In our exposures, leadership capability and predictive potential resides broadly in competence, ability, experience and values, with a wide variety of sub elements tied into these domains.

<div>COMPETENCE</div> <div>(Example Sub-dimensions)</div> <div>Strategic visioning</div> <div>Developing talent</div> <div>Results driven</div> <div>Managing change</div>	<div>EXPERIENCE</div> <div>(Example Sub-dimensions)</div> <div>Leader Accomplishments</div> <div>Relating to others</div> <div>Career progress</div> <div>Crises Leadership</div>
<div>ABILITY</div> <div>(Example Sub-dimensions)</div> <div>Verbal reasoning</div> <div>Numerical reasoning</div> <div>Abstract orientation</div> <div>Problem solving</div>	<div>VALUES</div> <div>(Example Sub-dimensions)</div> <div>Care</div> <div>Ownership</div> <div>Innovation</div> <div>Drive for excellence</div>

Fig. 1 Simplistic example of a capability matrix

This architecture provides a framework only, with the leadership model of the organization, the key experiences and upward mobility transitions required for a role of higher complexity within that organization, the ability to navigate and manage complexity and ambiguity and the organizational values as a charter to which various sub elements can be attributed to. At the onset of a TDC, great time is spent with an organization to understand its leadership approach and in turn populate a meaningful capability matrix against which mapping can be undertaken, both at the individual and group (comparative analytics) level. Figure 1 presents an example of a simplistic capability matrix centred around the assessment of leader competence, -experience, -ability and -values.

Principle 3: Deploy various methods of data gathering

Once the capability matrix is in place, appropriate assessment methods need to be selected or developed in order to accurately measure the sought behaviour. In application, a TDC requires the deployment of a multi-method approach in assimilating information on a candidate. This includes psychometrics, simulations, interviewing and post TDC developmental activities. These are briefly explored below.

Psychometrics

In selecting a psychometric battery for a TDC, the first principles of the process must be well-considered. There are a great deal of psychometric distributors (often referred to as test providers) operating globally, with products varying in scientific rigor, applicability, assessment domains and administration methods. Kline (2014) remarks that there is a real need for contemporary psychometrics to move beyond the social sciences towards a positioning within the empirical sciences, ensuring herewith that reliable decisions can be made based on the data these tools render. In this regard, significant progress has been made, with mathematical and statistical techniques applied to the leading instruments, enhancing cognitive, behavioural and emotive predictive insights (Cipresso & Immekus, 2017). In selecting a psychometric battery for a TDC, a number of key considerations are at play. Firstly, it must be clear what the instrument seeks to measure, and one must be able to directly relate this to the capability matrix against which the candidate is measured. For example, it is not sufficient to assess generic personality in a TDC, as the question relates to leadership. A balanced battery of leadership style, work-role orientation, potential leadership risks (often referred to as “derailers”) and strengths-based capability is therefore needed. When assessing for cognitive capacity, the domains of critical reasoning required of the leader must be considered. Secondly, the battery must be appropriate to the specific organizational level. Ensure that established norm groups are in place pertaining to regional application, job level and demographics. Thirdly, ensure the method of application is user-friendly, can be administered fairly and consistently and safeguards the dignity of the candidate. Curtis (2017) comments that psychometrics provides a meaningful tool for coaching, career counselling and leadership program preparation. To enable this, psychometric batteries must be administered in a method that promotes the leader’s experience of the overall process.

Simulations

A great deal of effort goes into the design and roll out of fit for purpose simulations in a TDC. The word “simulations” is used here to reflect the real-life application of the various case studies, exercises and immersive experiences produced (Herd, Alagaraja, & Cumberland, 2016). Where often traditional assessment centres have made use of generic exercises to map behaviours, successful contemporary TDC’s seek to establish true and reflective leadership experiences that prospective candidates will likely encounter at the next level of leadership complexity (Guenole et al., 2015; Volz-Peacock, Carson, & Marquardt, 2016). Simulations should be developed against the core challenges as mentioned in Principle 1, and the effect validated on a smaller scale before large scale deployment (Denscombe, 2014; van Zyl, Efen-dic, Rothmann, & Shankland, in press). For fairness in application, simulations are generally conducted on three levels: The individual level, which provides one-on-one interactions, problem solving, presentation and conversations; small group level, where a group of leaders are divided into sub units within which they must work together to attain a particular performance outcome, and large group level, where leaders must negotiate and collaborate toward outcomes in a larger team, applying

influence and persuasion. This modality ensures different leader personalities have opportunity to express their strengths in different settings.

For enhanced accuracy, reliability and validity, a multi-rater system is used, where experienced and trained professionals in Organizational Behaviour (for example Work and Organizational Psychologists) have the opportunity to map outcomes and demonstrated behaviours as well as debate each other based on clearly defined criterion, evidence and a well-defined capability matrix (Thornton et al., 2017). This also provides rich and multi-perspective feedback to the participants on a TDC, with reflection and input from various professional angles. With the availability of technology, simulations and the experience associated with it can greatly be enhanced, driving real time leader engagements, leveraging virtual teams and supporting global reach.

Interviewing

A comprehensive TDC provides a candidate with an opportunity to demonstrate key experiences in an individual setting. In succession planning within organizations, the health of a leadership pipeline is defined by readiness and capacity within talent pools to move into roles of higher complexity (Hess, Barss, & Stoller, 2014; Sharma & Sengupta, 2018). To this end, a structured career interview based on a well-defined pipeline methodology is a greatly useful tool. During interviewing, the emphasis is not on technical proficiency, or actual quantity of experience in number of years, but rather on demonstrable evidence on the part of the individual that he/she was able to successfully negotiate leadership challenges at different transitional career periods. The principles of competency- or behaviour-based interviewing must be adhered to here, to ensure the solicited information is credible and evidence driven (Peregrin, 2014; Potgieter & Van der Merwe, 2002). This includes a thorough analysis of the dimensional elements required for transition to a role of higher complexity, clear behavioural classification and segmentation, rating scale consistency and mitigating for potential rater bias. The interview must also be conducted with a clear reference to the organization involved, to inform key experiences required from leaders at particular levels.

Principle 4: Construct a process and not an event

Deloitte (2018) delineate the movement towards career experiences as a key part of the transformative learning journey in the new world of work. Day et al. (2014) confirm this, explaining that leadership development in a dynamic, changing and fast paced working environment must be proactively positioned, anticipatory of future challenges and solution-orientated. A TDC is designed to be a comprehensive learning experience, narrating leadership challenges from various perspectives and providing the individual participant with an opportunity to contemplate deeply about core learning themes; which are then reflected upon during different stages of the learning journey. To achieve this, a comprehensive process flow is required, with include a proper pre-TDC orientation, socialization and positioning effort (both on behalf of the organization and the partner delivering the TDC); an integrated TDC experience

Fig. 2 An example of a TDC process

supported by on-site learning, technology support and activation of learning activity; as well as an interactive post-TDC process, re-emphasising learning themes and driving individualized developmental needs, through such interventions as coaching, fit-for-purpose learning assignments, training interventions and real-time feedback (see Fig. 2). Built on the pillar of thorough reporting, a blueprint is constructed, based on individualized needs and considering the future aspirations of the leader. This matures the traditional assessment centre, which is largely driven as a single source event with a purpose of gathering data, to an integrated, comprehensive and immersive leadership development experience.

Coupled with a process orientated view of implementing a TDC, a clear and transparent communication and reporting strategy needs to be developed, negotiated with all stakeholders and implemented. Clarifying expectations around the delegate relationship between confidentiality, conflict of interest and benevolence needs to occur at the onset of the process. Each stakeholder needs to be made aware of what information will be shared, to whom and for which purpose. A TDC process’ reporting strategy needs to embrace the principles of clarity and transparency and positive ethics in order to effectively navigate the dynamic relationship between the stakeholders.

In its design, the TDC comprises two layers of data: an Individual- and Group layer (see Fig. 3.). Data obtained on the individual level is used to assess leader capability and to construct a specified Leader Map and tailored personal development plan. All the data obtained during the course of the intervention is shared with the leader. All individual level data is aggregated to group level in order to map overall organisational leadership capability and to aid in succession management practices. Group level data is used for benchmarking, understanding and predicting talent trends and to ensure that the organisation is able to respond to dynamic cross-functional talent related needs. Raw data should *never* be shared with any party outside of the intervention team.

Principle 5: Lead a data driven approach

The significant maturation of strategic Talent Management in particularly large, global organizations has rendered a data-driven people analytics approach as a key pre-requisite in the Succession Planning function (Newhall, 2015; Rothwell, Jackson, Ressler, Jones, & Brower, 2015). With this view in mind, TDC’s are developed

TDC Data	Group level	Overall capability mapping	Readiness	Dimensional reporting	Talent GRID positioning	Group Comparative data
	Individual level	Individual dashboards	Psychometric Reporting	Leader Mapping	Individual Development Plans	Action Item Tracker

Fig. 3 An example of a TDC reporting process

and constructed specifically for the purpose of Talent Review Communities in organizations. These communities are succession planning projects conducted with the view of identifying and mapping talent for key positions, supporting business continuity in deploying, rotating and promoting talent into core positions and strategic roles, allocating investment into the right candidates and the right developmental interventions (both at individual level and group wide) and countering talent attrition by methodically managing the business’s talent pools and pipelines (Morrison, 2015; Schepker, Nyberg, Ulrich, & Wright, 2018).

- The robust data generated through a TDC enables several outcomes:
- It provides procedural intent in the talent review conversations led at executive and senior managerial level in the business.
 - It provides a data-driven approach to identify future leaders, earmark candidates for critical roles, assign special assignments and conduct talent requirements for key business functions.
 - It provides a validated audit of the organization’s leadership pools at different levels, identifying key areas of focus for attraction, retention and promotion of talent.
 - It supports business continuity by actively maturing an agile and responsive leadership force within the organization through tailored and data-informed developmental intervention.
 - It accelerates the readiness of high potential talent through allocating developmental investment in the right areas, individuals and communities.
 - It reduces business disruption and counters vulnerability in the market by promoting individuals who are ably equipped to negotiate challenges at the next level of leadership complexity.
 - It aids in understanding current talent trends within the organisation and aids in predicting potential danger-zones, and highlights blind-spots.

Whereas talent analytics have increasingly become prevalent in the succession planning efforts of large organizations, few assessment centre providers have or are willing to evaluate their assessment methodologies to ensure that it is structurally valid, and reliable as well as predictively fair within the given context. As both an assessment methodology and a development framework, a TDC needs to comply

with the same scientifically sound standards as any psychometric assessment tool.¹ First, the *factorial validity* of the assessment components of the TDC needs to be established. This could be done through employing a confirmatory factor analytic approach, coupled with a competing measurement modelling strategy (c.f. Gefen, Straub, & Boudreau, 2000). *Second*, the internal consistency and temporal stability of the instrument needs to be established at both the lower- and upper bound limit (Cronbach alphas, as well as rho, phi or composite reliabilities) (c.f. Straub, Boudreau, & Gefen, 2004). Third, *measurement invariance* should be investigated to ensure that the instrument measures the leadership capability components fairly across groups (c.f. Van de Schoot, Lugtig, & Hox, 2012). If invariance is established, latent mean differences need to be systematically compared. Fourth, *concurrent validity* of the TDC need to be methodically evaluated (c.f. Raykov & Marcoulides, 2011). The predictive capability of the various competencies, experience domains, ability factors and value orientations being measured needs to be associated with objective performance related organisational data. The TDC's assessment framework and effectiveness needs to be actively monitored throughout the process.

Consistent with the data driven approach of a TDC, effort is required in leading accurate and aligned competency-based assessment amongst raters/facilitators in a TDC. Behavioural observation and -ratings are core functions of the TDC process. Multiple skilled observers are required to ensure that competency-based assessments are credible, transferable and reliable. Suffice to say, the success of a TDC rests strongly on the competence and professional experience of its facilitators. Although there is a high correlation between the professional experience/training and the accuracy of ratings, research shows that discrepancies in behavioural observation assessments may occur even between the most seasoned professionals (Ahmed, Miskovic, Darzi, Athanasiou, & Hanna, 2011); through such factors as differences in interpretation, misalignment in contextual understanding of competencies, and different interpretations to the extent of which certain exercises reflect observable behaviour required in the defined capability matrix. As such, concerted efforts and structured attempts need to be made in order to improve the accuracy of individual ratings (inter-rater reliability²) and between rater consistency (inter-rater agreement³) through the standardization of assessment measures, procedures, rater training, and comprehensive on-boarding.

Several evidence-based practices adapted from Gwet (2014) can be implemented to enhance IRR and IRA:

1. Clarify expectations with facilitators beforehand. Provide a through overview of the process, what it entails, the theoretical models on which the TDC is built and what is expected of facilitators.

¹ A full comprehensive discussion of each metric is beyond the scope of this article. Practice friendly guidelines will be referenced and should be consulted.

² IRR is defined as the extent towards which a single rater can consistently distinguish different items on an assessment scale.

³ IRA measures the extent to which the same value for each observed assessment item is being reported by different raters.

2. Provide thorough training on all assessment metrics, simulation activities, and competency frameworks.
3. Validate and standardise assessment tools in order to ensure that the theoretical behaviours, competencies, values or attitudes that are associated with such, are indeed solicited.
4. Ensure that all raters share the same definition of each competency being assessed and that behavioural indicators are clearly defined.
5. Facilitators need to understand the connection of each metric to the overall leadership capability matrix.
6. Implement “dry-runs” and evaluate rater capability.
7. Set standard operation procedures for each activity.
8. Build in rater evaluation and tracking metrics to review at different intervals of the TDC process.
9. Provide meaningful feedback to raters and facilitate open discussions about the process.
10. Perform agreement testing with the Kappa Index and Inter Class Correlations (c.f. Shweta, Bajpai, & Chaturvedi, 2015)
11. Provide resources to support the implementation of the TDC and ensure that enough time is scheduled for (in between) assessment activities
12. Simplify assessment forms or rating tools and ensure that such is used consistently, in the same manner, by all raters.
13. Host debriefing sessions after each TDC to discuss the learnings from the process and to address any questions which may occur.
14. Consider rater fatigue when scheduling TDCs

Principle 6: Follow a developmental, strength-based approach

An indispensable component of a well-constructed TDC is its developmental, strength-based orientation. It is this approach that positions the TDC as a positive organisational intervention and which leverages its attributes as a meaningful, endearing and exponential learning experience on the part of the leader. Too often, historic assessment practices have been punitive in its nature; with several non-best-practices leading to participants being left with a high sense of dissatisfaction, discomfort and even animosity for the process. This includes, but is not limited to such practices as participants receiving little or no orientation as to the reason for the assessment being conducted, feedback not taking place, the results of the process not being shared with participants, results not being properly managed, safeguarded and dispersed to the appropriate audience, non-contextual decisions being made that hold far-reaching consequences for participants’ career development (often with results that are utilised for purposes it was not intended for), and assessors not being ably qualified to work with the complex instruments of assessment they have at their disposal.

For an assessment exercise to be successful, the participant must be viewed and valued as the primary stakeholder whose interests must be protected and promoted through the process (Kaufman, 2018; Lefkowitz, 2017; Smith et al., 2016). A TDC

is positioned for what it is intended for; a robust and deeply individualized learning experience for the leader.

To enhance the developmental orientation of the process, a few practical guidelines exist:

- *Orientate the process clearly*: Participants must know exactly what the purpose is of the TDC, the intended outcomes thereof and how the information outcomes will be managed within the organisation.
- *Acknowledge the leader's progress*: A TDC, by design, is a succession planning tool. When a participant is therefore invited to partake in the process, it serves as a clear indication that the organisation acknowledges the intent of understanding more fundamentally the strengths and development areas of that individual. It indicates that the organisation is invested in the individual and considers the possibility of upward mobility, even if it does not commit to such immediately. By recognising that a leader is nominated to a TDC, one allows for such acknowledgement and much of the negative early trepidations of the leader can be mitigated.
- *Build a comprehensive developmental plan*: This does not only refer to one of the actual end results of a TDC, which often is an Integrated Report as well as Individualised Plan, but to a systematic inclusion of key developmental action at various stages of the TDC process.
- *Clear links between developmental tasks and assessed competencies* needs to be established. The leader should be able to see a clear link between developmental tasks and the enhancement of an associated capability.
- *Build a positive relationship with the leader*: Personal development is a process and is dependent a positive relationship between all stakeholders. Its important to establish rapport with the leader and to ensure that a positive relationship develops where he/she is encouraged, empowered and supported throughout the process.

Mackie (2014) comments that leadership development is a “full range” process. This has very focused application in the broad life cycle of a TDC. Firstly, during the pre-TDC process, the participant must be briefed thoroughly on the intent of the intervention. A coherent and positive message must be positioned—both from the side of the organisation and on the part of the partner organisation coordinating the TDC. Ensure that the psychometric suite selected allows for sufficient developmental instruments to be deployed and ensure accessibility of the information gathered during this process. Through leveraging technology, the candidate can also be supported in the on-boarding effort of the TDC; for example through engaging in developmental activities on a mobile enabled platform, relaying key information on career experiences, preferences and planning and being able to raise questions and enquiries on the TDC process.

Secondly, during the TDC process itself, ensure that simulations, case studies and exercises allow for developmental reflection, constructive debate and peer-learning. In contemporary leadership development, real-time feedback is critical and peers can relate their experiences to facilitate powerful conversations (Houghton & DeLiello, 2010). A TDC must therefore deliberately allow for feedback, key learning must be consolidated and the conclusion of exercises must be met with a summary of critical

learning and leadership lessons. Further, the applicability of these lessons for roles of higher complexity must be explored to further support the accelerated readiness development approach of a TDC. Through applying simulations in individual, small group and larger group contexts, learning and feedback can be clustered and a holistic learning experience ensured.

Thirdly, the post-TDC process must be delivered with continuity in development. Several practical considerations arise. Coaching (in individual and/or group context) after the TDC process provides a powerful opportunity to unpack the reporting that is generated from the TDC, and allows the leader opportunity to give input and finalise a clear developmental action plan. Structured developmental interventions, informed directly by the analytics of the TDC, ensure focused learning investment which will produce greater returns. For example, through group trend analytics, the TDC may identify Change Leadership as a priority developmental area for a specific cohort of candidates. Interventions based on formal learning (courses), practical assignments (exposure) and critical experiences can now be selected from the appropriate sources, tailored and applied from a well-informed, needs-driven and data supported perspective. Technology can also greatly support post TDC developmental activities, availing self-insight surveys, gamified learning activities, learning knowledge resources and a wide variety of content that can be pushed to the participant in real-time on a needs basis.

A second and compelling part of the developmental nature of a TDC is its strength-based approach. Welch, Groissant, Reid and Walker (2014) narrate that a strength-based leadership developmental model exponentially develops leader capacities as it leverages existing capitals within the leader. This view is shared by Stander, Mostert, & de Beer (2014); who established strength based developmental approaches in organisations to support engagement and productivity. In a TDC, a strength-based approach is utilised to assist the leader in accelerating his/her potential and capability to effectively negotiate challenges; by enhancing and supporting individualised strength areas. Much support exists in the literature of the advantages of a strength-based approach in leadership development. Whilst the strength-based approach does not dispute the need to focus on key developmental areas in a balanced framework, research has proven that the leveraging of strengths can greatly support closing of gaps in a shorter turnaround time through accentuating a leader's potentialities (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; van Zyl, Van Der Vaart, & Stemmet, 2017). In a TDC, a great deal of effort is undertaken to understand the strength areas of the individual leader, from a practical perspective as learned from observable behaviours, through the insights from psychometrics pertaining to such elements as leadership drivers, preferences and orientations, to signature strengths that differentiates a leader from peers. By emphasising the strength areas of the leader, a unique leadership brand and value proposition can also be clarified—allowing the leader self-expression and meaningful development that is to the benefit of the organisation and rewarding to the individual (van Zyl & Stander, 2013).

Principle 7: Leverage the reach of technology

Technology in a TDC has two broad applications: In the enhancement, integration and consolidation of the experience; and in data reporting, storing and analytics. Within an expansive and rapidly evolving global work context, technology has put to the fore opportunity for express learning accessibility, real-time feedback, entrée to globalised knowledge, virtual community and hyper interconnectivity (Lanvin & Evins, 2016; Mayfield, Mayfield, & Wheeler, 2016). A TDC seeks to utilise technology as a central supporting mechanism for the process. In terms of experience integration, a platform is deployed in a full TDC process, operating in a smartphone enabled mobile application (“app”). This platform serves as a communication, scheduling and logistics tool, reporting library, information dashboard, activity hub, resource storage instrument and virtual communication platform. By deploying several technologies, such activities as virtual coaching, feedback sessions and capability building modules (for example through webinar format) can be made available through the platform. By introducing this, the TDC continuity is greatly enhanced and the TDC is further entrenched as a process driven intervention designed for the principles of blended learning; which in modern Leadership Development makes use of integrated and focused technologies (Hilliard, 2015).

Relating the second use of technology within TDC is the integration of data and talent analytics flowing from the process. Consistent with the narrative of Schepker et al. (2018), methodical and data driven approaches are increasingly becoming apparent in Succession Planning and Talent Management, to position for Strategic Human Resource and Leadership Development. This is perhaps best summarised by Rasmussen and Ulrich (2015; p. 236): “A shift towards an “outside-in” approach with a focus on actionable, high-impact analytics is needed. This development is accelerated by technology, which is rapidly consolidating the analytics landscape. This shift enables HR analytics to be taken out of HR and become part of existing end-to-end business analytics, where human resources is just one element in the value chains analysed.”

For a TDC to present optimum data analytics for key strategic decision making, customised Talent Analytics software and technologies must be used, the design of which reflect the organisation’s unique leadership model, key imperatives, roles and positions, and most importantly, serves as platform to lead robust conversations in supporting business continuity and meeting performance objectives. It is realised that customisation can also not occur in isolation, and that data platform software must be assimilated to the organisation’s existing HRIS frameworks, performance management systems and general HR technologies. This enables the transition from technology being used as a transactional reporting interface towards being a data-driven decision-making mechanism (Marler & Boudreau, 2017).

5 Conclusion

The TDC is, by the nature of its design, a process of many moving parts. A high level of expertise, analysis, design, technology integration and project management is required to successfully deliver a TDC. This should however not detract practitioners to make use of the instrument within organisations. When executed along the principles outlined above, the TDC provides a compelling positive organisational and leadership development intervention, in the process delivering vast, integrative data for the purpose of succession planning and herewith enabling strategic decision making for the purpose of business continuity.

From a research perspective, much can still be done to understand how a TDC must be implemented within a broader Business Planning function, how the approach can integrate different components and how the selection and application of such components must be conducted. Closer collaboration between scholars and practitioners will be required here—a TDC, although supported and entrenched in a clear scientific, data-driven approach, remains a practical Leadership Development and Analytics intervention. The results it produces must thus be workable, integrated and practically presented in a manner that supports the mandate of the organisational leadership; which is to drive their business forward and reach performance goals. The organisation remains the key stakeholder, and the scientific approach of a TDC cannot be divorced from the organisation's strategic objectives. Rather, synergies must be created.

Into the future, TDC's can play a truly significant part as a total growth engine for organisational talent and leadership, accelerating growth whilst supporting data-driven decision making, analysis and succession planning. With the advancement of technology, the rapid expansion of learning tools, the interconnectivity in the global economy and the rapid acceleration of best practice in both tools and expertise, a TDC is well positioned as a Positive Organisational Intervention for sustainable successful application. With research and practice further developing the approach, it can continue and enhance its responsiveness to the major drivers in the new world of work.

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