1. The Decision-Oriented Interview (DOI) as a Toolkit

Karl Westhoff

Definition of DOI

A Decision-Oriented Interview is an interview that is planned, executed and evaluated according to scientific psychological criteria to enable decision-makers to reach satisfying decisions. (Westhoff & Kluck, 2008, p. 86)

Satisfactory decisions

We use the term "satisfying" to characterize decisions under uncertainty (i.e. decisions where we don't know the right alternative in advance) when, after implementation of the decision, the decision-maker has no regrets about the way the decision was reached. There are a number of different reasons why decision-makers may regret the way a decision was reached, for example because they failed to take all the possible alternatives into consideration, because they did not inform themselves adequately about the alternatives, because they weren't clear about their goals or values, or because they didn't have any contingency plans drawn up in case the alternative they actually selected turned out to be a bad choice.

Proficiency assessment as a sequence of inevitable decisions

Proficiency assessment is a sequence of inevitable decisions. If decision-makers do not reach each of these decisions with appropriate deliberation, they run the risk of later regretting how they reached their final decision because they made a mistake that could have been avoided.

The DOI as a component of DOA

Decision-Oriented Assessment (DOA) (Westhoff & Kluck, 2012, first published 1991) provides a collection of rules for the whole process of psychological assessment which can also be used in the human resources sector. Our aim in this present book is to offer a step-by-step introduction to the Decision-Oriented Interview (DOI) – one component of the DOA process – in a way that is also easy to follow for non-psychologists.

DOI as a set of rules

The DOI consists of a set of rules for the
1. planning,
2. execution, and
3. evaluation

of proficiency assessment interviews. This book explains with illustrative examples what these rules mean in practice and how they are applied.

Objectives of selection interviews

Selection interviews may have various objectives:
1. to establish a candidate's degree of proficiency for a particular job;
2. to find out how the candidate behaves under particular conditions;
3. to check what the candidate knows and can do.

Three types of selection interviews for quantifying a candidate's degree of proficiency

There are three basic types of selection interviews for determining a candidate's degree of suitability for a specific job:
1. the Situational Interview (SI),
2. the Behavior Description Interview (BDI), and
3. the Multimodal Interview (MMI).

These are all described in detail in Chapter 2.

In-depth interviews

So-called "in-depth interviews" are used to develop a qualitative description of a candidate's behavior, i.e. how the candidate behaves, or has behaved in the past, under specific conditions. The assumption is that candidates will behave in the future in a similar way as in the past. There are scattered references to this kind of interview in the literature. The DOI systematizes the in-depth interview in a collection of rules that are compiled into well-structured checklists.

Oral examinations

The aim in oral examinations is to find out what candidates know about a particular area of expertise and what relevant skills and abilities they have. There is a general assumption in practice that experts in a specialist field are inherently capable of conducting fair oral exams without any education and training in the construction of interviews. Here, too, the DOI provides a systematic set of rules compiled into handy checklists.

The DOI can emulate the SI, the BDI, and the MMI

We can use the DOI to emulate the specific type of interview (SI, BDI, MMI) selected to establish the candidate's degree of proficiency. The added bonus is that we can also use the rest of the DOI rules, for example on types of questions. This makes the designing of a corresponding interview guide easier because many mistakes that would only come to light through empirical testing of the interview guide can be avoided from the very start.

The DOI-Toolkit and how to use it

Our aim with this book is not only to present the DOI-Toolkit with its various tools, but also to explain when and to what purpose which tool is to be used and in what sequence.

This book is organized according to the procedural steps of the proficiency assessment process

To enable readers to work their way step by step into the DOI as a selection interview, our explanations are oriented to the logical sequence of the proficiency assessment process. This includes, before we even start looking at the DOI in detail, the clarification of the assignment and the creation of an accurate requirement profile that describes all the relevant behavior patterns. If possible, we also analyze the strategy implemented so far by the client for proficiency assessment (= analysis of the *a priori* strategy). If this is not possible, we negotiate with the client and arrange an evaluation of the prospective assessment strategy, in which the DOI will play a key role.

Who is this book written for?

Clients
Contractors
Interviewers
Observers
Candidates

From what you have read so far, it should be clear that this book is designed for everyone involved in a proficiency interview, clients, contractors, interviewers, observers and candidates alike. Candidates will find numerous tips on how to present themselves in the best possible way so that not only the interviewers but also they themselves can make an accurate assessment of the degree to which they meet particular requirements. Candidates will also learn about the questions they themselves should ask in a selection interview if the interviewer forgets to give them specific information.

2. Basics of Proficiency Assessment Interviews

2.1 Basic rules of proficiency assessment interviews

Anja Strobel and Karl Westhoff

Basic rules

Like every other proficiency assessment procedure, an interview must satisfy scientific quality criteria and comply with basic rules. These are stipulated for interviews in the Interview Standards of the Arbeitskreis Assessment Center e.V. (2008). The standards are organized according to the stages of the interview process.
Standard 1: Clarification of assignment
Standard 2: Job and work analysis
Standard 3: Interview design
Standard 4: Preparation and training of the interviewer
Standard 5: Execution
Standard 6: Recording and evaluation
Standard 7: Feedback
Standard 8: Documentation and evaluation

The interview standards of the Arbeitskreis Assessment Center e.V.

The key elements of each standard are as follows:

Clarification of assignment

Before implementing an interview, the objectives, conditions and consequences are to be clarified and communicated to all persons involved.

Job and work analysis

An interview process can only be designed rationally once the specific requirements have been analyzed.

Interview design

The interview design must implement the results of the assignment clarification and the job and work analysis in a structured and socially appropriate interview setting.

Preparation and training of the interviewer

Only qualified and well-prepared interviewers are capable of making well-informed decisions and of representing their company or organization in an appropriate manner.

Execution

Consistent implementation of the interview design and use of appropriate interviewing techniques ensure an intelligible and goal-oriented procedure.

Recording and evaluation

On the basis of carefully recorded minutes of the interview, the information gathered is evaluated systematically in terms of the requirements, and then condensed into a decision.

Feedback

Individual feedback regarding the requirements is imperative.

Documentation and evaluation

Results are to be documented in such a way that they can be understood by third parties and are accessible for subsequent evaluations.

Legal conditions

The objective of a selection interview is always to aid a decision

Selection interviews are always conducted with the aim of aiding a decision. The decision-maker and client being advised may be a) the candidate or b) a third party.

Selection interviews on behalf of third parties only for objective reasons

Principally, selection interviews may only be conducted on behalf of third parties for practical, objective reasons, i.e. when the aim is to establish the extent to which a candidate fulfills the job requirements of a position.

Invasion of the candidate's personal privacy must be objectively justified

A selection interview will always intrude to some extent on the candidate's privacy. It is only legitimate to explore those character traits of the candidate that are directly relevant to the specific job requirements and for which no information or only insufficient information is forthcoming from other sources.

Job and work analysis is essential

For this reason, the required characteristics of the holder of a particular position, and their attributes, must first be determined in a job and work analysis, i.e. before the planning of the assessment procedure and thus prior to the selection interview. Only when specific descriptions of the required behavior patterns are available can we begin to design a corresponding interview guide and establish rules for observation and evaluation.

Admissibility/inadmissibility of questions

A good reference for the admissibility/inadmissibility of questions is Tips on the Design of Personnel Questionnaires (Schuler, 2002). Inadmissible lines of enquiry include:

Family
- Questions about the candidate's family life are inadmissible if they are about marriage plans or intimate relationships. Questions about dates of birth of spouse and children are an exception. If the job in question will involve foreign assignments, questions about the occupation of the spouse are admissible.

State of health
- Questions about the candidate's state of health in terms of general information on previous and current illnesses are inadmissible. Candidates are however obliged to give information on contagious diseases, as well as on health-related restrictions which might substantially impair their performance at the workplace.

State of finances/income
- Questions about the candidate's state of finances or previous income are inadmissible, unless this is pertinent to the candidate's proficiency or to the position in question. Job applications as company executives or in positions of trust are an exception.

Police record
- Questions about previous convictions with no relevance to the position in question are inadmissible. However, it would be relevant, for example, to ask about previous convictions for embezzlement if the candidate were applying for a job as a cashier.

Religion/political party/ union membership
- Questions about religious or political affiliations or union membership are inadmissible with very few exceptions. Applications for so-called organizations pursuing ideological aims, for example religious institutions, are an exception.

Pregnancy
- Questions about a prospective pregnancy are principally inadmissible under European Law, and may only be asked in exceptional cases, for example, if there is a potential danger to mother and child through the nature of the job in question.

Consequences of inadmissible questions

If interviewers pose inadmissible questions, candidates are fully within their rights to answer such questions untruthfully, without this response later furnishing the employer with legitimate grounds for termination of the labor contract.

Conflict for candidates

Although this is a legitimate option for candidates confronted with an inadmissible question, it nevertheless creates a dilemma: they can either tell a deliberate lie and thus compromise the relationship of trust with their new employer from the very start; or they can answer truthfully and quite possibly reduce their chances of getting the job.

Data protection

Recordings of selection interviews are subject to data protection laws.

Legal principles

The legal principles that need to be taken into consideration in the planning, execution and evaluation of selection interviews in Germany can be found in the German Constitution, Article 1 ("Protection of human dignity") and 2 ("Rights of liberty") and in the German Criminal Code, Section 201 ("Violation of the confidentiality of the spoken word"), Section 202a ("Data espionage"), and Section 203 ("Violation of private secrets"). The Federal Data Protection Law must also be complied with. This law is so extensive that it would be beyond the scope of this book to go into further details. However, interviewers are strongly advised to inform themselves adequately about all relevant laws in their literal and complete form.

Collection, storage and use of data

Collection, storage and use of data are only permissible after prior notification of the candidate and with their explicit consent. Furthermore, data may only be used for the intended purpose. In other words, all information collected may only be used for the purpose which was communicated to the candidate and consented to by the candidate. If the data are to be used for other purposes, this is only permissible after giving detailed explanation of the other purposes to the candidate and with their explicit consent.

2.2 Clarification of the assignment for a proficiency assessment

Karl Westhoff and Hagen Flehmig

Before a contractor accepts an assignment from a client, it is in their own interest to clarify the specific details of the assignment. To do this the contractor needs answers to the following questions:

Checklist for clarification of an assignment for a proficiency assessment

1. What is the assignment?
2. What led up to the planned assignment?
3. What sort of approach was used previously to answer the client's question (*a priori* strategy)?
4. What were the results of the *a priori* strategy?
5. Who implemented the results of the previous proficiency assessment procedure, and how?
6. Is the assignment legally permissible?
7. Is the assignment ethically permissible?
8. What aims is the assignment intended to achieve?
9. What values must not be changed through implementation of the assignment?

10. Does the assignment have an open outcome?
11. Is the assignment open for all suitable sources of information?
12. What are the conditions (timeframe, personnel, financial and organizational parameters)?
13. Who is involved on the side of the company or organization?
14. Who has what tasks and deadlines?
15. Who has a legal right to be consulted?
16. What are the prospective results of the proficiency assessment?
17. Who will implement the prospective results, and how?
18. What do the groups of people involved think of the prospective results?
19. How will the results be reported?
20. How will the process be documented?
21. Who will document the process?
22. Who will be allowed to view the documentation?
23. How will the proficiency assessment procedure and the implementation of the results be evaluated?

1. What is the assignment?

First we need a detailed description of the prospective assignment so that we know what we are talking to each other about. Vague formulations are a guaranteed source of misunderstandings and trouble further down the line.

2. What led up to the planned assignment?

If we want to really understand what motivated the client to plan this assignment, it can be very helpful to know the background story that led up to it.

3. What sort of approach was used previously to answer the client's question (*a priori* strategy)?

A new assignment is often formulated because the company or organization is not happy with the previous procedure and its results or side-effects. This *a priori* strategy can tell us a lot about how professionally the job was done previously. How to analyze the *a priori* strategy is dealt with below in Chap. 2.3.

4. What were the results of the *a priori* strategy?

The results of the *a priori* strategy provide us with an initial benchmark against which the client will naturally measure the new strategy. So we have to take into account and explain to the prospective client what significance base rate, selection rate and validity – dealt with below in Chap. 2.3 – will have in the prospective assignment. There are of course prospective assignments where no *a priori* strategy exists, or where the prospective client does not (yet) wish to reveal the details of the *a priori* strategy.

5. Who implemented the results of the previous proficiency assessment procedure, and how?

It is also useful to know who implemented the results of the previous proficiency assessment procedure, and how. If, for example, it was completely up to each decision-maker whether and how they took the results into account, these individuals will have to reckon with a loss of power when the procedure is rendered more intelligible. On the other hand, greater intelligibility in the implementation of assessment results can lead to stronger identification with the company or organization when the assessment procedure is perceived to be fair.

6. Is the assignment legally permissible?

If the results are to be accepted by all persons involved, the assignment must comply with all relevant laws and statutes. Even if objections to the results do not lead to legal proceedings, public knowledge of the use of procedures which are not legally permissible can do very serious damage to a corporate image.

7. Is the assignment ethically permissible?

Ethical permissibility is a notoriously elastic concept. But most people have a very fine grasp of fairness when they are directly affected by a procedure. Prospective contractors can always start by asking themselves: “What would I think of the planned procedure if I were affected by it as a candidate or employee?” We should not delude ourselves: unfair behavior never pays off, even in the medium term.

8. What aims is the assignment intended to achieve?

Contractor should know as much as possible about the aims the client is pursuing with the assignment so that they can judge accurately whether they are willing or able to accept the contract.

9. What values must not be changed through implementation of the assignment?

Any new measure implemented may, as a side-effect, alter desired conditions (values). It is therefore essential before accepting an assignment to clarify what will change for the client and how all groups of people involved evaluate these prospective changes.

10. Does the assignment have an open outcome?

Some assignment formulations already indicate what result the client wants. To accept an assignment like this would be against the legitimate interests of the candidate who is to be assessed, and ultimately also against the interests of the client themselves. We have to make this clear to the prospective client, and propose a suitable alternative formulation for the assignment.

11. Is the assignment open to all suitable sources of information?

It is often the case that assignment formulations prefer certain sources of information and exclude other suitable sources of information from the very start. This is also against the legitimate interests of the candidate, and of the client. We can usually manage to convince any client by proposing a suitable alternative formulation combined with an explanation of the advantages of this formulation and of the procedure based on it.

12. What are the conditions (timeframe, personnel, financial and organizational parameters)?

The timeframe for the assignment must be fixed in the contract, not only regarding starting and completion dates but also in terms of deadlines for the achievement of specific milestones stipulated in the contract. Personnel requirements and their competencies and tasks also need to be specified, as do the costs of each planned measure and the specific organizational conditions under which the assignment will be executed at specific locations.

13. Who is involved on the side of the company or organization?

If we want to complete an assignment to the satisfaction of all involved, we need to clarify not only the tasks of the contractor but also the kind of cooperation expected from representatives of the client.

14. Who has what tasks and deadlines?

For a cooperation to work well, we need to clarify who is to do what tasks by when, and how the results are to be communicated to each other.

15. Who has a legal right to be consulted?

Depending on the size of the company or organization, we may have to take statutory codetermination rights into account. This already applies in the planning stage of the proficiency assessment. Acceptance of a proficiency assessment in a company or organization depends very much on whether labor representatives were involved early enough in the decisions.

16. What are the prospective results of the proficiency assessment?

It makes sense, if we don't want to encounter nasty surprises down the line, to anticipate the prospective results of the proficiency assessment while still negotiating the contract. It is also helpful to have a clear picture of how undesirable outcomes will be dealt with.

17. Who will implement the prospective results, and how?

To ensure that the client does not waste their money and the contractor's work does not end up in the trash, we need to clarify, before we accept an assignment, who in the company or organization is going to implement the results and in what way or according to what explicit rules they are going to do this. We need to clarify how we can ensure that the decision-makers in the company or organization will implement the results in the agreed manner.

18. What do the groups of people involved think of the prospective results

Decision-makers, (prospective) candidates and labor representatives may all have different interests, and this may lead to highly divergent evaluations and acceptance of the prospective results of the proficiency assessment. If the assignment is to have a successful outcome, all parties involved should strive to find a solution to this problem as early as possible in the project.

19. How will the results be reported?

It is not only the validity of the results and the fairness of the procedure that are crucial for the acceptance of proficiency assessments, but also the way the results are reported. Feedback to candidates should be handled respectfully, be fully comprehensible and leave no room for misinterpretation, and should be given soon after the interview. The feedback should describe specific behavior patterns so that candidates get useful tips for their own further development.

20. How will the process be documented?

Intelligibility, fairness and verifiability all depend on every step and every result being accurately and meticulously documented.

21. Who will document the process?

It is a good idea if the contract contains specifications of who is to document what, and when, and how they are to do this.

22. Who will be allowed to view the documentation?

To ensure that all those involved know exactly what they are entering into, it is essential to clarify, before accepting the assignment, who will be allowed to view which parts of the documented procedure and the results.

To ensure that the company or organization can learn from the proficiency assessment, we need to clarify, before accepting the assignment, in what intervals the proficiency assessment procedure and the implementation of the results will be evaluated.

23. How will the proficiency assessment procedure and the implementation of the results be evaluated?

2.3 Analysis of the *a priori* strategy

Karl Westhoff

Definition

The *a priori* strategy is the assessment procedure that was used prior to the new assignment to answer the client's question stipulated in the contract. *A priori* strategies may represent the assessment attempts of alleged or of genuine experts.

Individual-case vs. institutional assessment

The *a priori* strategy can be analyzed for individual-case assessment and for institutional assessment (i.e. assessment that relates to several or many similar cases).

Qualitative and quantitative analysis

For institutional assessment, the *a priori* strategy can be analyzed not only qualitatively but also quantitatively.

Qualitative analysis of the *a priori* strategy

Analyzing written documentation

The contractor works through whatever written documentation of the previous assessment process has been made available by the client, and registers: (a) the chronology of the (b) previously collected results, as well as any (c) measures which might have been taken and (d) their outcomes, if these are documented.

General hypotheses guide the analysis

The assignment addresses topics that are important for proficiency assessments from a general point of view, e.g. requirements, information sources used, or criteria for success. The contractor analyzes the files and other written documentation in terms of these general features. This hypothesis-based analysis can, and usually does lead to further case-specific hypotheses that also need to be verified in the new proficiency assessment being planned.

Using DOI to ascertain previous procedure

It is very often the case that the *a priori* strategy is not at all or only incompletely documented in written form. But most of the deliberations made and the criteria applied in the planning, execution and evaluation of previous proficiency assessments can still be ascertained in retrospect through a carefully planned DOI. Even the conclusion that there was no consistency in the previous strategy is useful in making clear to the client where improvements in planning are possible.

Analysis of requirements

Requirements must be collected as objectively and reliably as possible, with a maximum of validity, if they are to be useful as standards. They have to remain stable well beyond the forecast horizon and it has to be clear for each individual requirement whether, and to what extent it can compensate for another requirement, if necessary.

Analysis of sources of information

Sources of information must provide maximally valid information (accuracy, correctness), if they are to increase the net benefit (benefit minus all costs) of a strategy.

Analysis of criteria for the success of the assessment strategy

The criteria for the success of an assessment strategy must in themselves be as objective and reliable as possible, with a maximum of validity, if they are to be useful in appropriately evaluating the quality of a selection.

Quantitative analysis of the *a priori* strategy

Analysis of the distributions of criteria values

If the distributions of criteria values, e.g. performance indicators, diverge from the distribution that is theoretically to be expected, the reason for this will have to be found. Performance indicators often follow a more or less normal distribution. However, if the performance indicators are mistakes, a Poisson distribution can be expected.

Analysis of the distribution of requirements

The same applies for the distributions of requirements like, for example, specialist knowledge.

Bivariate distributions of criteria and requirements

The bivariate distribution of a performance indicator (e.g. judgment of superiors) and a specific requirement (e.g. specialist knowledge) supplies further decisive clues to the quality of the selection strategy. With this information and further information from the literature, the net benefit of an *a priori* strategy can be estimated. This provides a clear picture of how difficult it will be to improve on the *a priori* strategy.

Trends over longer periods of time

The analysis of the results of the *a priori* strategy over longer periods of application may reveal a trend in the data that will provide valuable information on potential improvements.

Conditions for the success of an institutional strategy for proficiency assessment:

The *a priori* strategy can serve as a benchmark for the new strategy that is to be developed. The success of both the *a priori* strategy and the new strategy for proficiency assessment depends on the following conditions: base rate, selection ratio and validity of the selection strategy.

Base rate

The base rate is the “proportion of potential qualified candidates (regarding the characteristic of interest) within the applicant population prior to selection” (DIN 33430, p. 19). If the base rate is high, e.g. 90%, the probability of giving the job to an unsuitable candidate by purely random selection is 10%.

Selection rate

The selection rate or selection quota refers to the proportion of accepted applicants in relation to the total applicant pool. It is easier to look for the few very well-suited candidates among a large number of more or less well-suited candidates than it is to find all the suitable candidates.

Validity of the assessment strategy

The validity of the assessment strategy refers to the proportion of correctly classified candidates. The more valid an assessment strategy is, the more candidates it can classify correctly, e.g. as "suitable", "partially suitable" or "unsuitable".

2.4 Job and work analysis

Anna Koch and Karl Westhoff

Definitions of terms

A job and work analysis is the indispensible basis for selection interviews

After clarifying the assignment, the job and work analysis is the next essential step in the planning of selection interviews. The results of the job and work analysis are the indispensible basis for designing an interview guide and developing explicit rules about how the selection interview is to be summarized (Arbeitskreis Assessment Center e.V., 2008).

Job analysis and requirement analysis

The terms job analysis and requirement analysis are often used synonymously, but they actually stand for different aims and classes of methods. Table 1 provides an overview of the differences between the two terms, and these are explored below. The DIN 33430 standard (2002, p.12) defines the terms as follows:

Job and work analysis according to the DIN 33430 standard

"A (...) job and requirement analysis (...) should be the basis of a proficiency assessment. The requirement analysis should investigate the job, education, occupation or occupational task characteristics relevant for occupational success and satisfaction. All aptitude characteristics, including their degree of development, necessary for the satisfaction of the requirements should be derived from the requirement analysis."

Requirement profile

The result of a job and work analysis is the requirement profile. It contains the sum of all requirements of the target position, detailed descriptions of these requirements as well as information on how important the requirements are and the extent to which they can be trained and compensated for. DIN 33430 (2002, p.4) differentiates the term job analysis from the term requirement analysis with the following definition: