

Standard Telephones & Cables: A Company that pioneered the application of Occupational Psychology in the UK

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Standard Telephones & Cables (STC) was one of the pioneering private sector organisations in the UK to use psychometric tests in the 1960s and 1970s and to our knowledge the only one to have its own tests. It became a model for other companies. This article records the work and contribution of the company and its Occupational Psychologists for more than a quarter of a century.

In the early 1960s Pat Elliot, STC's Personnel Director, who later became a professor at Trinity College, Dublin, introduced psychometric tests for personnel selection. He designed and developed some tests himself. Around the same time, STC's parent company ITT introduced a psychological assessment programme for selecting top executives worldwide, conducted by external Occupational Psychology consultants. Psychometric tests used included ability, personality and projective tests such as TAT and sentence completion. This produced in STC a culture receptive to testing since most senior managers had themselves been selected by tests.

In the mid-1960s John Handyside, an eminent Occupational Psychologist (and formerly Chair of the OP Section 1960-61) was recruited from the National Institute of Industrial Psychology (NIIP) and began his work by designing the company's own batteries of tests for assessing graduates, apprentices, technical and clerical staff. A novel projective test (designed by Pat Elliot) was also used to assess indications of neuroticism and psychoticism for interviewees, using Rorschach (inkblots) plates with a multiple-choice form containing possible reactions to each plate. Although the details of such validation work as was done on this do not survive, similar approaches used elsewhere have subsequently shown to achieve useful levels of validity. The 16PF personality questionnaire was also widely used for most staff. Psychometric test training courses were run for the 200 personnel managers and officers responsible for applying the tests. John conducted validation and other research on testing. He also designed a sophisticated management appraisal process and advised top management on organisation and management development generally. One major achievement was to set up a programme for identifying and developing high fliers with potential for general management, MIDSTEP. Candidates were carefully selected initially by psychometric tests and interviews. The

programme was strongly supported by top management and a senior manager in each HQ function was responsible for facilitating the growth of high potential managers in their function.

I succeeded John Handyside in 1977 as company occupational psychologist and began by reviewing and updating the company's test batteries and training courses. My first major assignment was to design an assessment and development centre for identifying general management potential, for selection onto MIDSTEP. It was named IMPACT and included four situational exercises - group discussion, in tray, business decisions company simulation and business plan presentation. Management psychometric tests were also administered including two new tailored tests for assessing numerical interpretation and effective listening. I was encouraged to conduct research into the process, specifically into internal validity and the effects of personal data including experience on performance. This generated some of the earliest UK academic studies of ACs and was published in both academic and practitioner journals. Some references are provided at the end. This constitutes evidence that the company promoted evaluation research, something that even today distinguishes it from so many other organisations.

IMPACT was subsequently referred to by some professional colleagues as the Rolls-Royce of management assessment centres. It had the full support of top management, with relatively senior managers such as general managers acting as assessors, and was run for eight years. In total around 200 managers were assessed and developed. Its success led to other assessment and development centres being designed and run for middle-managers in various operating companies and for graduate recruitment.

Other Occupational Psychology work included, for example, the design of a new management appraisal and development process; a Rep Grid study of sales effectiveness and research producing a personality profile for managers who were receptive to change.

When I left the company in 1986, responsibility for psychometrics and other assessment and OP work was outsourced to external consultancies, a pattern being followed by many companies at that time. But prior to that, for nearly three decades STC was an exemplar of developing and applying psychological assessment techniques in-house, and by its example stimulated the application of OP methods across many other organisations. Eventually, in 1992,

it was taken over by Northern Telecoms, an organisation, which also made much use of psychological assessment methods at senior levels.

Further information is available in:

Dulewicz, V. (1982). The application of assessment centres. *Personnel Management*, 14(9), 32-35.

Dulewicz, V., & Fletcher, C. (1982). The relationship between previous experience, intelligence and background characteristics of participants and their performance in an assessment centre. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 55(3), 197-207.

Fletcher, C., & Dulewicz, V. (1984). An empirical study of a UK-based assessment centre. *Journal of Management Studies*, 21(1), 83-97.

Dulewicz, V., Fletcher, C., & Wood, P. (1983). A study of the internal validity of an Assessment Centre and of participants background characteristics and attitudes: A comparison between British and American findings. *Journal of Assessment Centre Technology*, 6, 15-24.