

of a Situational Judgement Test (SJT)

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Introduction

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes et al., 2011) is a “third wave” cognitive behavioural approach, that aims to enhance psychological flexibility (Hayes et al., 2004). This is promoted via key principles within the ‘Triflex’ model (Harris, 2009). There are current challenges in assessing practitioner’s application and understanding of ACT, and any associated training needs. Situational judgement tests (SJTs) may offer a novel way to assess the application of therapeutic knowledge, by analysing responses to hypothetical scenarios (Wolcott et al., 2020).



Aims

- Used expert consensus via a Delphi study to develop the items and format of the first SJT which specifically assesses applied knowledge of ACT (named the **ACT SJT**).
- Conducted a field study with attendees at ACT training, to evaluate the utility of the newly constructed ACT SJT.

Methodology

Study 1: An initial draft ACT SJT was developed by the research team, with the panelist ratings and consensus across three rounds of the Delphi used to refine the ACT SJT. ACT experts with five years relevant experience were eligible to participate. Purposeful recruitment targeted research team contacts, with snowballing and social media advertisements then used for further recruitment.

Study 2: The same participants completed the ACT SJT before and after attending introductory level ACT training, facilitated by Contextual Consulting.

Study One Results

With the involvement of 13 ACT experts in round one, 12 in round two, and 10 in rounds three of the Delphi study, a ten-item questionnaire was developed. Five items were removed from the initial draft of the ACT SJT based on expert ratings, and all other items were edited based on feedback provided by panelists. Panelists were shown a prototype of the ACT SJT in round three, for any final comments.

Study Two Results

The developed ACT SJT was completed by 52 ACT training attendees, with 6 more participants completing the pre-training ACT SJT. There was a statistically significant difference in mean ACT SJT scores at pre-training and post-training, $t(51) = 4.82, p < .001$. The mean pre-training ACT SJT score was 5.38 ($SD = 2.81$), with an increase to 7.29 ($SD = 1.98$) post-training. There was a statistically significant relationship between pre-training scores and previous ACT training; $r(36) = .70, p < .001$.

Acceptability ratings of the ACT SJT on a Likert scale from 1 (not all easy) to 7 (extremely easy)

Acceptability questions	Mean	SD
1. How easy was this questionnaire to understand?	6.1	0.82
2. How easy was it to tell the difference between each response option?	5.3	0.94

Discussion

This study used a two-phase approach to develop and assess the utility of the ACT SJT; a novel questionnaire that assesses application of ACT knowledge. A ten-item SJT was created via expert consensus in a Delphi study, with utility tested via a field study with ACT training attendees. It is anticipated that the ACT SJT can be refined, amended and improved over time, based on further use in clinical, training and research settings. Future research could improve and build on this study’s limitations, including using the ACT SJT to explore dose-response, and aspects that might impact on applied ACT knowledge.

An example of a final item included in the ACT SJT



1. What would you do if someone you are working with says, “the things I think are true – I am ‘a failure’ and that won’t change no matter what I try”:
A. Respond by acknowledging that their mind is giving them a hard time telling them that they are a failure. Ask them how it might affect them if they were to cling too tightly to this thought.
B. Reflect that it sounds like they feel that the thought will always stay with them. Ask them to say more about any life experiences which taught them to believe they were a failure.
C. Gather evidence for and against their belief that they are a failure with questions such as, would someone else describe them as a failure? Why not? What would be a more balanced way of looking at this?

Conclusion: The ACT SJT represents a new way to assess the application of ACT knowledge and behavioural intentions, with promising initial findings gathered from the field study. There are important clinical and research implications from this study, including the use of the ACT SJT by practitioners to self-assess their application of ACT, to detect training needs, as part of research trials, or for evaluating the effectiveness of ACT training.

References:

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