

Assessment Centers in South Africa

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Backdrop

- AC programs continue to spread to more countries around the world
- One challenge: understand cross-cultural variability in AC practices
- Certain AC features that are acceptable and feasible in some countries (e.g., U.S., U.K.) may not be acceptable and feasible in others (e.g., South Africa)
- So far, no AC study in South Africa exists

Goals of the Study

- For the first time, we...
- (a) ... portray a broad spectrum of AC practices in South Africa.
- (b) ... compare South African ACs with the practices in other countries and identify pros and cons in South African AC practices.

Method

Procedure and Measure

Online survey (62 AC features) of human resource (HR) experts from 43 South African organizations

Respondents were asked to describe the development, execution, and evaluation of ACs in their organization.

Data collection took place from August to September 2009, collaboration with SHL South Africa

Our Sample

Respondents (N = 43) came from different organizations, they represented a variety of organizational sizes, economic sectors, organizational functions, and functions within the AC.

Response rate: 38,6%.

Results

Results were found in the following categories: (a) AC design, (b) job analysis methods and job requirements, (c) target groups, (d) number and kind of exercises, (e) additional diagnostic methods, (f) assessors and characteristics considered in constitution of the assessor pool, (g) observational systems and rotation plan, (h) assessor training, (i) types of information provided to participants, (j) data integration process, use of self- and peer-ratings (k) feedback, (l) features after the AC. Due to space limitations, we present only a few findings per topic.

Results (cont'd)

Job Analysis

- 84% of organizations use job analysis (JA) to construct their ACs.
- Encouragingly, a variety of job analysis methods were used (especially job description 47%, competency modeling 44%, interview with supervisor 26%, interview with job incumbents 23%, questionnaire to job incumbents 16%).
- Each technique is being used by fewer organizations compared to North American and western European organizations (see Krause & Thornton, 2009).

AC Dimensions

- Most ACs assess between 6 and 10 dimensions (6-7: 30%, 8-10: 25%).
- The most popular dimensions (see Bowler & Woehr, 2006) have the most predictive validity evidence: communication (63%), problem solving, (67%), organizing/planning (67%), influencing others (58%).
- Least frequently assessed: consideration of others (33%) and drive (33%).

Exercises

- Most organizations (46%) use between 4 and 5 exercises.
- Most common: in-basket (54%), presentation (51%), role playing (49%), group discussion (37%).
- Least common: case study (26%), situational interview (23%), planning exercises (16%), fact-finding (16%), background interviews (16%).

Other Diagnostic Methods

- Other diagnostic methods are used rarely: personality tests (54%), skill and ability tests (49%), biographical questionnaire (14%), work sample tests (7%), intelligence tests GMA (7%), knowledge tests (5%).

Assessor Characteristics & Assessor Training

- Though the Guidelines advise considering diversity in assessor selection, few organizations do: educational level (28%), functional work area (28%), organizational level (9%), gender (9%), race (9%), ethnicity (7%), age (2%).
- Internal and external psychologists (70%) dominate the assessor pool.
- Discouragingly, 11% of organizations train their assessors less than one day.
- Training methods: discussion (47%), observe other assessor (33%), lectures (28%), observation of practice candidates (28%), video demonstration/camera (16%).

Results (cont'd)

Feedback & Information to Participants

- Oral and written feedback (79%), 45-90 minutes.
- Only 7% of the organizations provide feedback directly upon completion.
- Feedback is on: specific dimensions (46%), specific exercises (14%), overall assessment rating (29%).
- Only 50% communicate the job requirements in advance 8principle of transparency).

AC Evaluation

- Systematic evaluation of the AC: 71%.
- What is Evaluated?

Predictive validity: 75%
Concurrent validity: 45%
Construct validity: 75%
Content validity: 65%
Reliability: 70%

Suggestions for Improvement

- Assess less job requirements (you will increase the predictive validity).
- Increase the duration of the AC.
- Develop the AC entirely to the divisions own needs, don't use standard ACs.
- Add other diagnostic methods more frequently (e.g., test of cognitive ability or work sample test).
- Consider specific criteria in the constitution of the observer pool such as organizational level, age, gender, race, ethnicity more frequently.
- Change the methods and contents of observer training.
- Improve the information policy towards participants
- Provide feedback in a timely fashion.

Limitations of Our Study

- Small sample size.
- Single source problem.

References

Bowler, M. C., & Woehr, D. J. (2006). A meta-analytic evaluation of the impact of dimension and exercise factors on assessment center ratings. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91, 1114–1124. ratings.

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Krause, D. E., Rossberger, R. J., Dowdeswell, K., Venter, N., & Joubert, T. (in press). State of the art of assessment center practices in South Africa. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*.

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