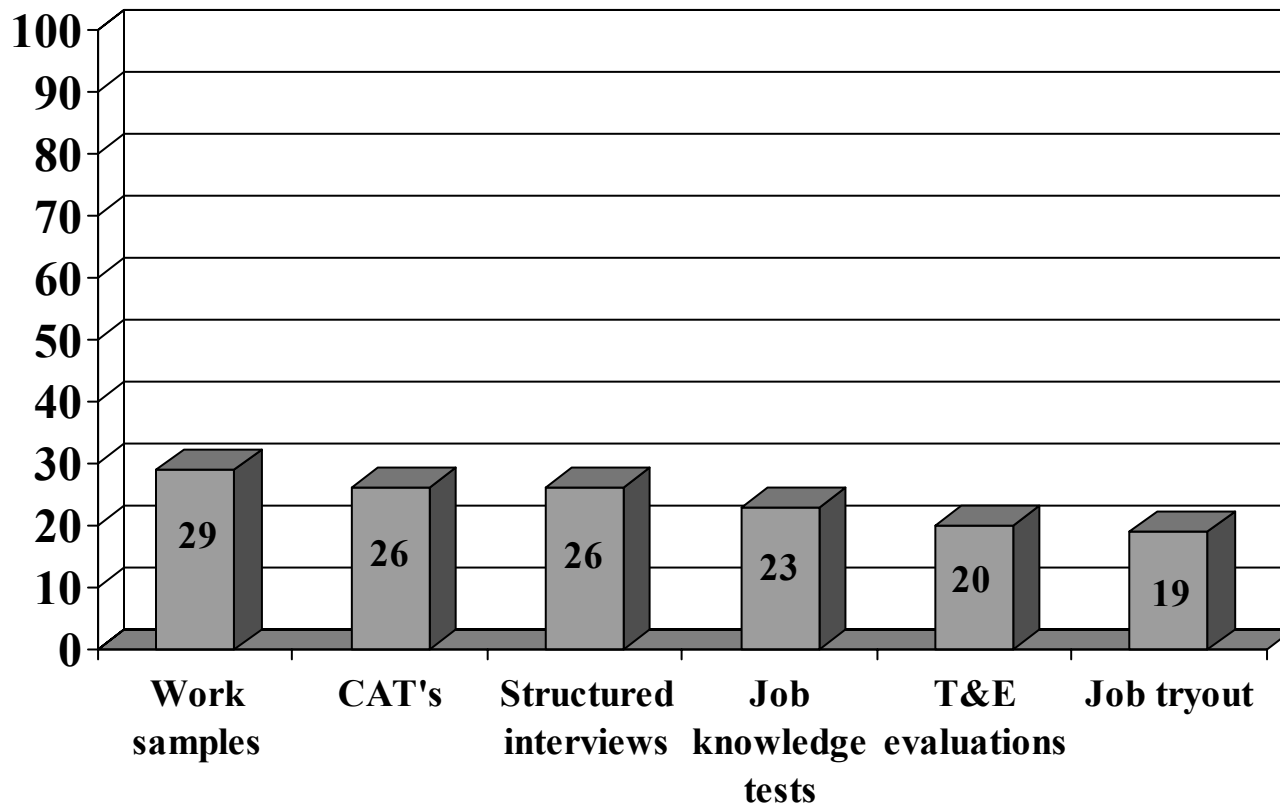


# Assessment Centre Wash-ups

Chris Dewberry

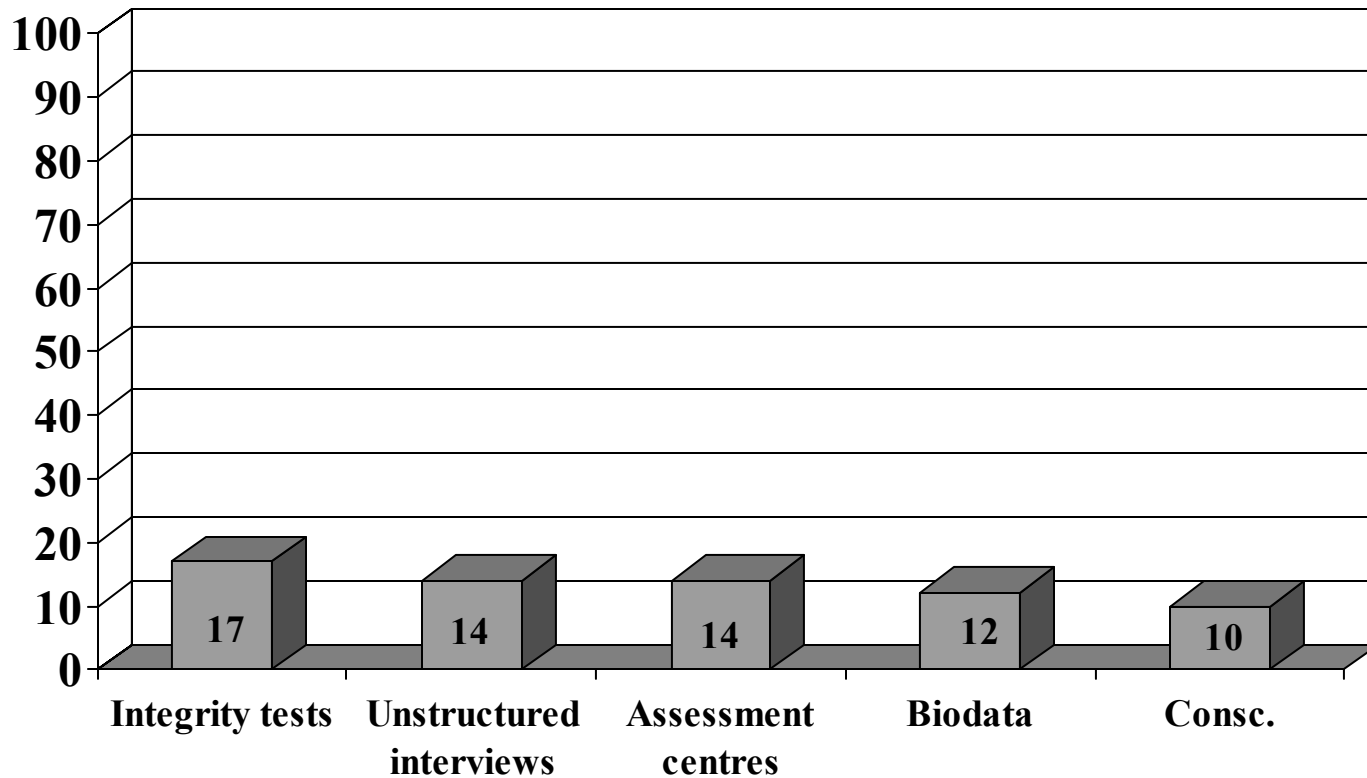
Birkbeck, University of London

# Percentage of Variance in Job Performance Accounted For Schmidt and Hunter (1998)

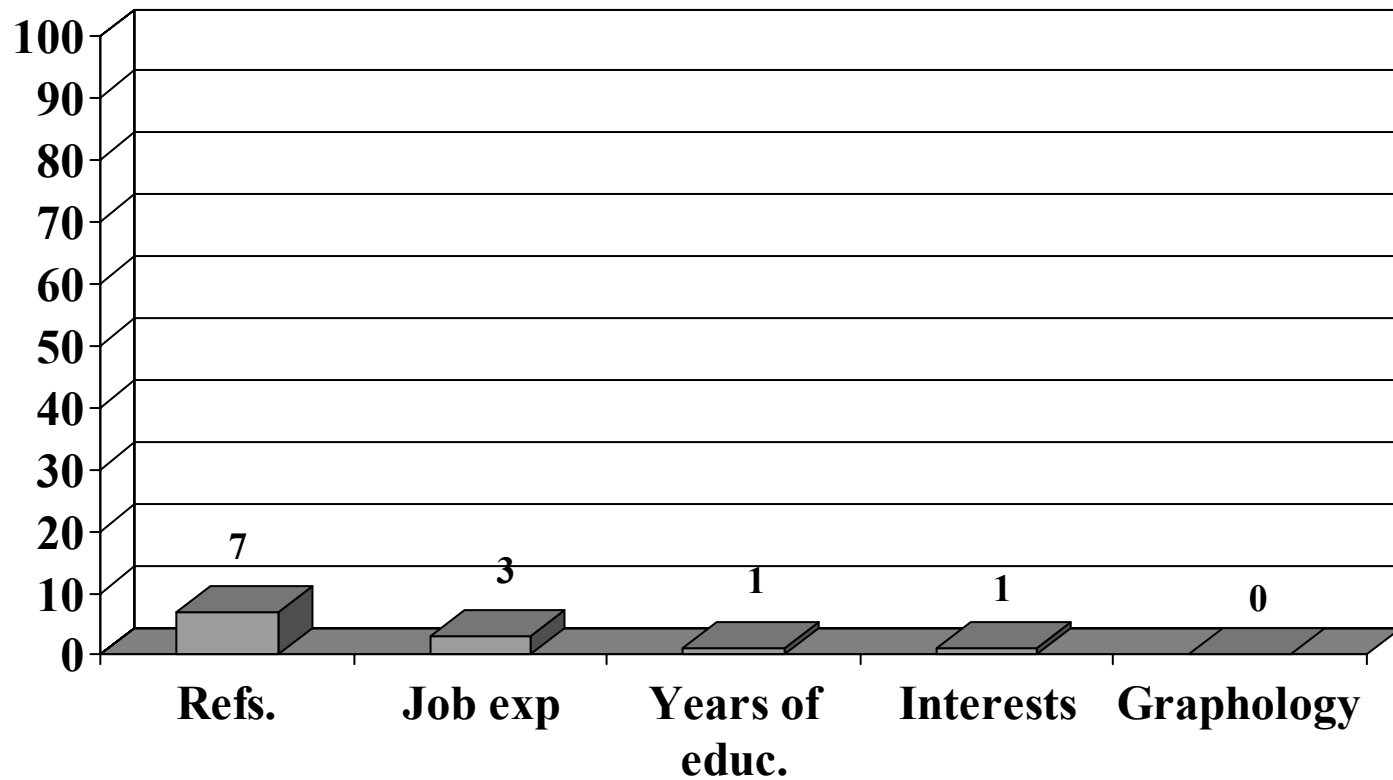


# Percentage of Variance in Job Performance Accounted For

## Schmidt and Hunter (1998)



# Percentage of Variance in Job Performance Accounted For Schmidt and Hunter (1998)



# The Paradox

- Assessment centres are composed of exercises which individually have higher criterion-related validity than the entire centres themselves.
- The validity of the assessment centre is therefore less than the sum of its parts.

# Possible Explanations

- Poor design and execution of ACs. This is not consistent with Spsychalski et al.'s (1997) findings.
- In arriving at an overall score for candidates, too much weight is placed on exercises which may have relatively poor validity (e.g. situational excises).
- Data from the AC exercises is lost or degraded in the wash-up session.

# Data Suggesting that Wash-ups Don't Add Value

Research indicates that “actuarial decisions”, based on the weighted arithmetic sum of the ratings of assessors across dimensions, are equally or more valid than “clinical” ones involving a discussion of the assessee (Feltham, 1988; Herriot, 2003; Jones *et al.*, 1991; Pynes & Bernardin, 1989).

# **Guidelines and ethical considerations for Assessment Center Operations: International Task Force on Assessment Center Guidelines (2000)**

The integration of behaviors must be based on a pooling of information from assessors or through a statistical integration process validated in accordance with professionally accepted standards. During the integration discussion of each dimension, assessors should report information derived from the assessment techniques but should not report information irrelevant to the purpose of the assessment process. The integration of information may be accomplished by consensus or by some other method of arriving at a joint decision. Methods of combining assessors' evaluations of information discussed in the assessors' integration sessions must be supported by the reliability of the assessors' discussions.

# Research Approach

- Survey of assessment centre practices
- Non-participative observation, recording, transcription, and analysis of wash-ups in one organization.
- Statistical analysis of relevant quantitative data in one organization.

# Survey Sample

- 74 respondents from different UK organizations. Each respondent direct experience of working as an assessor in assessment centres
- Male 19%
- Female 81%

# Size of Sampled Organizations

- Under 50 4%
- 51-200 7%
- 201-500 8%
- 501-1000 11%
- 1001-2000 5%
- 2001-5000 18%
- 5001-10000 12%
- 10001-20000 13%
- Over 20000 33%

# Job Applicants

- Graduates 29%
- Applicants for the post of junior manager 3%
- Applicants for the post of middle manager 13%
- Applicants for the post of senior manager 10%
- Specialists 6%
- A mixture of the above 33%
- Other 7%

# Proportion of Organizations Using Various Exercises

<b>Exercise</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Interview	90%
Role play	64%
Group discussion	58%
In-tray exercise	54%
Non-discussion group exercise	50%
Analysis problem	46%
Cognitive ability test	46%
Presentation	36%
Personality questionnaire	35%
Fact finding exercise	25%

## Median Number of Assessors Observing Each Candidate, and Median Number of Candidates Observed Per Assessor

<b>Exercise</b>	Assessors observing each candidate	Candidates observed per assessor
Interview	2	2
Role play	1	1
Group discussion	1	2
In-tray exercise	1	N/A
Non-discussion group exercise	2	2
Analysis problem	1	N/A
Presentation	2	2
Fact finding exercise	2	N/A

# Number of Competencies Evaluated by Each Assessor

<b>Exercise</b>	<b>Median</b>
Interview	5
Role play	5
Group discussion	4
In-tray exercise	4
Non-discussion group exercise	4
Analysis problem	4
Presentation	4
Fact finding exercise	4

# Assessor Feedback at Wash-ups

<b>Exercise</b>	
Assessors feed back the grades or marks they have awarded to candidates for the exercise (or exercises) they have observed	81%
The grades or marks awarded to each candidate are displayed so that all assessors present can see them	87%
Assessors are required to provide evidence to justify the marks or grades they have given to a candidate.	95%

# Chair at Wash-up

At the wash-up there is an assigned facilitator or chairperson.	92%
The person facilitating or chairing a wash-up is also responsible for assessing or evaluating candidates at that wash-up	48%

# Relative Seniority of Assessors at Wash-up

All assessors have the same level of seniority in the organization	25%
Generally the person facilitating or chairing wash-ups has a more senior role in the organization than any of the other assessors	20%

# Discussion of Candidates at Wash-ups

Assessors do not, under any circumstances, discuss the marks or grades they have awarded to a candidate	2%
At the wash-up, assessors sometimes discuss marks or grades given to a candidate even when there is no difference in the marks or grades assigned across two or more exercises	84%

# Inappropriate Practices at Wash-ups

	Never	Very rarely	Occasionally	Quite often	Very often
Candidates are discussed when one or more of the assessors who observed them is not present	31	44	10	13	2
Assessors discuss candidates in ways that are not directly and explicitly related to the competencies under consideration	7	34	43	15	2
Assessors openly decide whether a particular candidate should be appointed or not, and then adjust that candidate's overall exercise grades or ratings accordingly	58	23	10	7	2

# Inappropriate Practices at Wash-ups

	Never	Very rarely	Occasionally	Quite often	Very often
Assessors talk about candidates before the wash-up session begins	16	26	23	18	16
Assessors refer to things they believe they have learnt about candidates outside of the formal assessment process (e.g. by observing candidates at a pre-assessment centre meeting, or by overhearing discussions between candidates during the assessment centre).	21	29	29	18	3

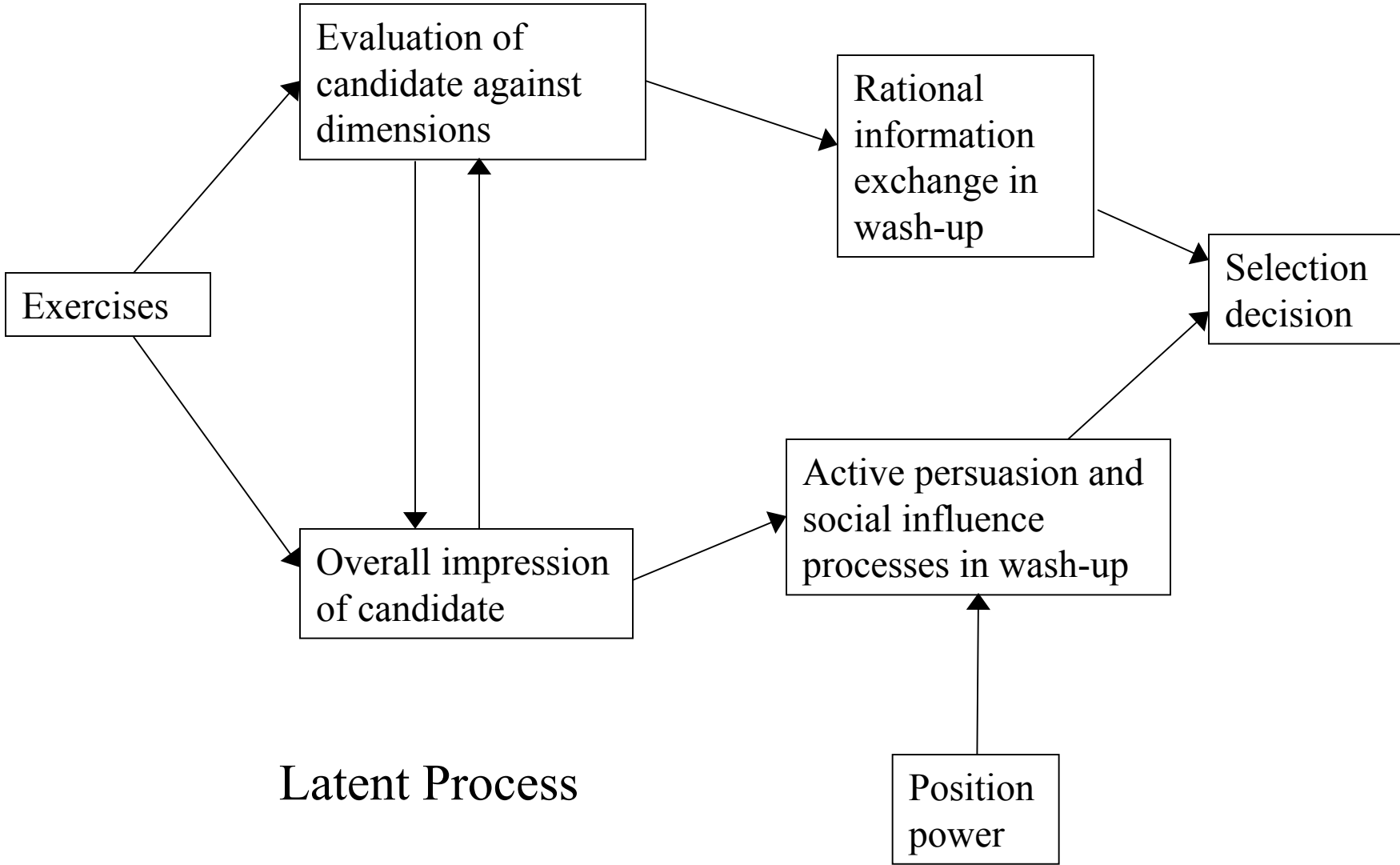
# Inappropriate Practices at Wash-ups

	Never	Very rarely	Occasionally	Quite often	Very often
Candidates are evaluated when all assessors are clearly very tired and want to leave	15	19	44	21	2
Assessors spend more time discussing the first one or two candidates to be considered than the last one or two	31	32	24	10	3

# Qualitative Research Design

- Non-participative observation of four wash-ups in three organizations: a multi-national financial organization, a medium-sized software company, and a division of the British army. Auditory recordings were made in three of these meetings: two in the financial organization, and one in the software company.
- Examination of relevant quantitative data.

# Explicit Process



# Case Study of an Assessment Centre for Graduates in a Large Financial Organization

12,000 applicants annually for 400 posts.

# Selection Process Stage 1

- Filtering by application forms.

# Selection Process Stage 2

- First interview carried out by a relatively junior member of staff.
- Cognitive ability test (verbal, spatial, numerical).

# Selection Process Stage 3

Assessment centre involving:

- Analytical problem (90 minutes).
- Leaderless group discussion (40 minutes).
- Second interview with a partner in the firm (60 minutes).

# Case Study of an Assessment Centre for Graduates in a Large Financial Organization

Candidates given a score for each exercise of:

1. Poor
2. Marginal
3. Good
4. Strong

# **Extract 1: Overall Impression, and Use of the Wash-up to Persuade**

Second Interviewer: I had 4, 4 for responsiveness to change, er 3 for communication skills and 4 for leadership. **And I thought she was excellent ...one of the best candidates I've interviewed in a long time.** I see what you mean about talkative and struggling to get to the point though which is why I marked her down slightly on communication skills.

She is Japanese, she came to the UK when she was 15 or 16, and she has the most fluent English of any Japanese person I have ever interviewed. Her English is just impeccable, couldn't fault it. She's at Oxford, she I mean her biggest change was coming to the UK and assimilating, she does have Japanese parents, and I thought one of her parents might be English which would account for the English but both are Japanese. She is, ah, tremendously driven she is a sort of a lead cox with the Oxford boat, women's boat team, and spoke quite a bit around that, also around motivation and inspiring people and she certainly won *me* over anyway in her style of communication.

She, she, very hard working, very driven, spoke a lot about her sort of study, study style, which passed, I think it was very driven, very balanced as well because she fits in lots of extra curricular activities as well, as well as studying. She had a very good interest in, you know, business and awareness of the accountancy profession, and sort of issues that were impacting us, talked about IFRS and the impact that that might be having impacting on us and our resource requirement which was quite interesting. **I mean I thought she was great** I thought she, I would say her communication style was very good she was *very* fluent.

She did lack a little bit of awareness of when to stop when to wrap up once, she didn't sort of catch on to the – okay time to move on to the, to the next point but I mean I don't see that as a major drawback and I find....but I actually thought she did articulate her points very well, she expanded on them quite a lot but didn't take long to get to the point, she gave a lot of examples I thought she could have stopped, she didn't take long to get to the point but she probably went on and elaborated a bit too much.

And she, I mean ...very team, I mean very team focused, women's rugby team, hockey team, boating team and she is also a musician and has started a string quartet at Oxford they play at weddings and bar mitzvahs and funerals and the like, and establishing a network there so, **I thought she was great.**

# Extract 2: Persuasion

- Facilitator: Ok, we'll come back to that one.
- Interviewer: Definitely an offer, definitely an offer.
- Facilitator: Ok we've got to come back to that one
- Interviewer: Well based on what I saw....
- Facilitator: Ok
- Interviewer: .....I think we'd be very silly not to make her an offer
- Facilitator: Well, we will wait to see what the case study says, but based on what you two have said it looks like it will be an offer, yeah.

# Extract 3: Persuasion

- Facilitator: Okay, well can we just, quickly say, and we'll jump back to you then, ok? Going across then, we've got two 3's and a 4 just in the end column with everybody, would people be happy with a "good" for that? Yeah? Okay, what about the next column it is two 3's and a 4 again, so it's not great is it?
- Second Interviewer: What is the column?
- Facilitator: It's practical intellect.
- Interviewer: Happy with a 3.

- Case study assessor: I'm happy, I mean, my general feeling is it we should take him, so whatever.....
- Second Interviewer: Yes, whatever it needs to take him, this guy, this guy - we're taking, so....
- Facilitator: Yep
- Second Interviewer: ....if you make it fixed so we take him...

General laughter

- Facilitator: You want me to fix the end column? Okay, so nobody has got any objections. It looks basically that it's going to be a 4 there
- Second Interviewer: Yeah
- Case study assessor: Yeah
- Facilitator: Okay a 4 there, and 3's for the rest, okay we happy with that?
- Second Interviewer: Yeah
- Facilitator: Ok, that's an offer. Brilliant.

# Extract 4: The Influence of Power on Ratings?

- LGD assessor: Practical intellect 3, team work 3, interest in business 4 ... 3 to 4, and communication skills 2.
- Facilitator: Alright, okay, take me through the interview first.
- Second Interviewer: *232 words*
- LGD Assessor: Hmm

- Interviewer: Cause certainly in interview she was, but that was one-on-one.
- LGD Assessor: Yeah
- Interviewer: So, so it would be useful to get some communication skills in the group feedback.
- LGD Assessor: Yeah
- Interviewer: Because that might demonstrate that actually she is comfortable one-on-one but was less comfortable when she was in a group environment
- LGD Assessor: Well I did have, I had 3's scrubbed out and put 2.

- Facilitator: Communication is this?
- LGD Assessor: Yeah, I thought, I mean she did, really, withdraw from the meeting, em, it was quite a large period where she didn't actually say *anything* at all, certainly towards the end of the last erm yeah it was a quiet group, anyway there wasn't any sort of some spark, there was no catalyst there to maybe get people discussing things properly, um, I mean what she said she said it clearly confidently, and so I think I maybe have been a bit harsh on her, erm ....

- Facilitator (to interviewer): Would you be happy to go down to a 3?
- Interviewer: On communication skills? Not in terms of what I was seeing and the examples we had. One-on-one she was very confident, very comfortable, and the example she gave of where she had had to use her communication skills was, you know, as a representative of the first year economics class she had to attend board meetings of the faculty, and present, and she was quite *comfortable* doing that and that was why she put herself in that situation. So, I mean if that she giving that as a example so...
- LGD assessor: I'll happy, I'll happily change mine to a 3 or more.

# Propositions Examined with Quantitative Data

If there is a latent persuasion process:

- Assessors attending the wash-up who have position power will have a particularly large influence on the selection decision.
- Exercises not represented by an assessor in the wash-up will be given a lower weight than others.

					Odds ratio 95% confidence interval	
Exercise	B	Wald	Sig.	Odds ratio	Lower	Upper
First interview	-1.02	5.01	0.02	0.36	0.15	0.88
Second interview	3.6	45.45	<.000	36.49	13.25	100.46
Leaderless group discussion	1.93	27.67	<.000	6.88	3.35	14.12
Case study	1.45	12.87	<.000	4.26	1.93	9.4
Verbal ability	0.01	0.54	NS	1.01	0.99	1.02
Numerical ability	-0.01	1.19	NS	0.99	0.97	1.01
Abstract reasoning ability	-0.01	0.64	NS	0.99	0.98	1.01
Constant	-14.97	35.33				

# Study Conclusions

- Wash-ups can involve both formal/explicit and informal/latent processes.
- The survey of UK assessment centre assessors, and the case study data presented here provides evidence that a variety of informal/latent processes are common.
- These include discussing candidates outside the wash-up, discussing candidates in ways that are irrelevant to the competencies in question, basing judgements of candidates on general impressions, actively trying to persuade other assessors of the suitability of candidates based on these general impressions, and using power resources (including position power in the organization) to do so.
- Such latent processes are likely to degrade the validity of assessment centres.

# The Response: Increase training?

- In assessment centres we are asking assessors to sample candidate behaviour across a small number of discrete dimensions, and form independent judgments about candidate performance across these dimensions alone.
- A wealth of social psychological theory and research indicates that this is quite different from the processes we normally use to evaluate people (e.g. forming general impressions by drawing on stereotypes).
- Can we realistically expect assessors to suspend their highly developed social judgment processes as a result of two or three days training?

# The Response: Increase training?

- There is no correlation between the amount of training that assessors receive and the validity of assessment centres (Gaugler 1987).

# The Response: Alert the facilitators?

- Facilitators cannot observe whether or not assessors are forming and using general impression of candidates.
- The methods of persuasion used by assessors can be subtle and hard to detect.

# The Response: Use Psychologists as Assessors?

- There is evidence that when assessors are trained psychologists, the validity of assessment centres is increased (Gaugler 1987).
- However, the validity of assessment centres in which the assessors are psychologists is still lower than structured interviews and cognitive ability tests.
- It is impractical to suggest that all assessment centres use psychologists as assessors

# The Response: Abandon Wash-ups?

- This response, though apparently extreme, may be warranted given:
  - The lack of evidence that wash-ups add to the validity of the assessment centre process.
  - The evidence presented here that latent processes operating in wash-ups may actively reduce the validity of assessment centres.
  - The additional time and resource necessitated by wash-ups.
  - The availability of arithmetical techniques to integrate the judgments made by assessors.