

Standards for AC Efficacy: More than Psychometrics

34th International Congress on Assessment Center Methods
Washington, D.C.



Robert Jones, Missouri State University
Richard Klimoski, George Mason University

September 23, 2008

Our Focus:

- Identifying and managing the “value proposition” of the AC as an HR practice.

What really matters?

- Psychometrics are necessary but not sufficient for maintaining the value proposition of the AC method
- The challenge:
 - Consider the needs of the stakeholders
 - Why is an AC adopted in the first place?
 - What serves to maintain it as a vital HR practice?

We entertain two perspectives

- For the organizational client: Why is there an assessment center in this organization? What purposes is it thought to serve?
- For the designers and evaluators: How well are these purposes served? How well do we design and evaluate the center for these purposes?

When assessing the Assessment Center,
context matters.

What is the apparent value of a particular AC?

Is it:

- Feasibility
- Cost effectiveness
- Consistency with culture
- Alignment with other HR practices
- Consistency with the organization's human capital management
- Robustness
- Apparent consequences "downstream"

Feasibility

- Meeting decision makers' needs
- Selection systems as OD tools
- Muchinsky: *Development* of HR systems as OD
- Manager acceptance and use
 - Captains are who actually run the Navy
- Hidden and obvious costs of failed selection and developmental systems
- Existing capital: Do we have the people to do this?

Cost Effectiveness

Per assessee “utility”

- Predictive accuracy one component of common equations for this
- Construct validity rarely included as part of it

Avoidance of compliance costs
(Hoffman & Thornton)

Wastage (non-implementation and bad will)

Ultimate Human Capital retention and development

Consistency with culture

- Organizational values: Why is there an AC in the organization in the first place?
- How is this particular center a reflection of organizational culture?
- Does it promote existing culture or is it aimed at intentional cultural change?

Alignment with existing HR practices

- Integration with strategy (culture again)
- Integration with other practices (e.g. succession planning, training options, other development systems)
- Consistency with broader (legal, social, educational) contexts around the organization

Consistency with human capital management at the firm

- How does the AC method relate to other HR practices?
- Assesseees differentially hired, promoted, developed, retained
- Assessors and role players develop through praxis, and incremental understandings about their own jobs, roles, biases and prejudices through AC experiences?
- Ultimate “customers” of assessment centers (direct reports, vendors, peers, and others) receive value from AC?

Comparative robustness

- Lower maintenance?
- Faster?
- Easier?
- More efficient?
- Not easily compromised?
- More fun?

Downstream consequences: Not-so-favorable

- Uses and abuses of ratings
- Minimizing biases, prejudices in the rating component of the system
- Confidentiality of information
- Informed consent of assessees
- Protecting against potential negative consequences of feedback

OR

Downstream consequences: Favorable

- Developing under-performing employees
- Identifying hidden talent
- Retaining high potential/high performance individuals
- Increase successes at recruiting
- Improved organization performance
- Long-term viability of the firm

Will the AC method “prosper” as an HR practice?

We offer a nuanced reply:

- Evidence of psychometric quality is expected; but type of evidence required should depend on application
- Context matters: ACs need to add value in the eyes of stakeholders, not just scientists
- Our job as professionals is to provide rich information about both sets of criteria (psychometric and value added) to aid management decisions
- As such we must be prepared to balance trade-offs in our recommendations to adopt or sustain the practice

Future research agenda

- Discerning the actual value propositions:
 - Why is the AC method being embraced in a given context?
 - Why has it been rejected in another context?
 - What are the critical differences?
- The value propositions may include:
 - Validity, feasibility, efficiency, robustness, consistency with culture, alignment with practices
- Allows matching the method with the context to insure the value proposition of *our* work is real and can be appreciated

Thanks!