



Cross-Cultural Applications of the Assessment Center Method: Survey Findings and Professional Guidelines

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Overview of Presentation

- ◆ Importance of cross cultural considerations
- ◆ Results of international survey
- ◆ Professional guidelines for cross cultural applications of assessment centers





Internationalization of Assessment Centers

- ◆ Globalization of business
 - ◆ Multi-national organizations and consultancies
 - ◆ Attendance in the International Congress on Assessment Center Methods
 - 1973: 5 of 76 outside North America
 - 1974 - 1983: 5%
 - 1984 – 1993: 15%
 - 1994 – 2005: 25%
 - 2006 in London: 50% = 53 attendees from UK, 16 from US & Canada, 73 from 18 other countries
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Backdrop

On the one hand...



- It is crucial for companies that are operating in an international context to increase their knowledge about the AC use in different countries

On the other hand...



- There are only few empirical studies about current AC practices around the world and cross-cultural differences in the AC use.
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Why Is Knowledge About The Cross-Cultural Use of ACs Important?

- ◆ To be successful in a competitive and global environment, an organization must **balance** the competing requirements of **stability** and **change**.
- ◆ Efforts to balance stability and change are reflected in the conflict of:
 - Need for a **culture specific** AC design
 - Need for **standardization** of the AC design





Previous Surveys on the AC Use



- ◆ Spychalski et al. (1997)
 - Data only for U.S.
 - Data collection in 1990
 - ◆ Kudisch et al. (1999)
 - Collapsed results across countries
 - ◆ Krause & Gebert (2003)
 - Data only for Germany, Switzerland, and Austria
-



Purposes of Our Study

*Description
of AC use*

*Compare practice
with 'Guidelines'*

*Identify cross-
national differences*

*Explain differences in AC design
by cultural differences*

Objectives of the Study



Methodology

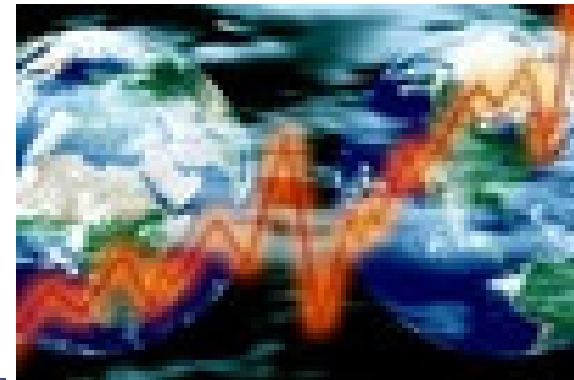


- ◆ Online Survey ($N = 176$ Items) was completed by HR experts of Fortune 500 and other companies
 - ◆ Recruitment Strategies:
 - Letters or email messages were sent
 - ◆ to attendees at previous meetings of the International Congress on Assessment Center Methods
 - ◆ individuals in academia, organizations, and consultancies
 - Copies of the surveys were distributed at conferences (Society for I/O Psych, Academy of Mgmt)
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Methodology

- ◆ Responses were received from 156 organizations
 - $N = 45$ West Europe (WE)
(United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, France, Netherlands)
 - $N = 52$ North America (NA)
(U.S., Canada)
(Smaller N from other countries: Brazil, Korea, Japan, South Africa, Indonesia, etc.)
- ◆ Data came from a variety of organizational sizes and sectors of the economy





Results: AC Design

◆ Guidelines considered?

West Europe ($N = 45$): 89%
North America ($N = 52$): 93%

◆ Job analysis conducted?

West Europe ($N = 45$): 89%
North America ($N = 52$): 95%

◆ Duration of AC

West Europe ($N = 45$):
1-2 days: 87%
North America ($N = 52$):
0.5-1 day: 63%

◆ Systematic revisions?

West Europe ($N = 45$):
Every 2-3 years: 57%
North America ($N = 52$):
Every 2-3 years: 30%

◆ Fit with the procedures of the given company?

- Use of standard AC developed elsewhere: 5% WE/18%NA
 - Adaptation of a standard AC to this division: 23%WE/ 26% NA
 - Development entirely according to this division's own needs: 72% WE/ 56% NA
-



Results: Job Analysis Techniques

	Practice in West Europe	Practice in North America
Job description**	41%	76%
Interview with job incumbents	39%	56%
Interview with supervisor	59%	54%
Questionnaire to job incumbents**	14%	41%
Observation of job incumbents**	7%	31%
Critical incident technique	36%	27%
Questionnaire to supervisor	16%	29%
New competency model*	43%	20%
Existing competency model*	39%	20%
Workshop or teamwork*	36%	15%

* $p < .05$, ** $p < 01$.



Results: Dimensions

	Practice in West Europe	Practice in North America
Communication	98%	90%
Problem solving	84%	90%
Organizing and planning	73%	83%
Influencing others	75%	61%
Consideration/Awareness of others**	80%	49%
Drive**	70%	37%

** $p < 01$.



Results: Exercises

	Practice in West Europe	Practice in North America
Role-playing	88%	78%
Presentation***	92%	58%
In-basket	35%	55%
Planning exercises	40%	48%
Situational interview	48%	48%
Group discussion***	90%	45%
Case study***	78%	38%
Background interview	48%	40%
Fact-finding	20%	33%

*** $p < 001$.





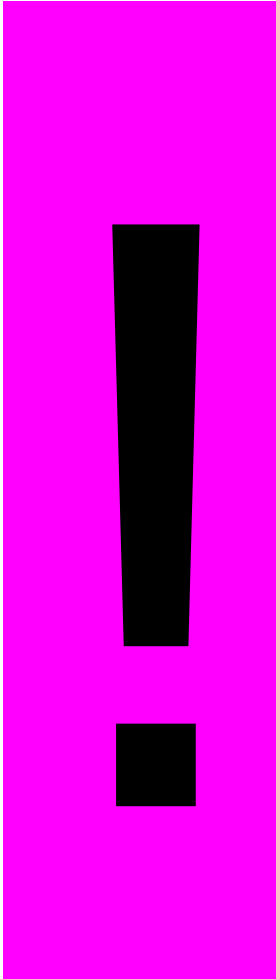
Results: Exercises

- ◆ Organizations in NA use fewer exercises (76 % use 3-5 exercises) than organizations in WE
 - ◆ Group discussions...
 - Conducted with a designated leader? 5% WE, 12% NA
 - Content of discussion: real life problem? 61% WE, 59% NA
 - Conducted with assigned roles? 36% WE, 14% NA
 - ◆ Exercises are...
 - All separate and distinct: 46% WE, 21% NA
 - Related: 38% WE, 62% NA
 - All integrated: 16% WE, 17% NA
-



Results: Other Diagnostic Methods

	Practice in West Europe	Practice in North America
Knowledge tests	15%	30%
Skill/ability tests	20%	30%
Personality tests	25%	20%
Biographical questionnaire	23%	10%
Work sample tests	10%	15%
Intelligence test (GMA)	20%	10%
Graphology	3%	0%





Results: New Technology

- ◆ Can some exercises be completed on the web? 7% WE, 8%, NA

 - ◆ Computers used? 58% WE, 56% NA

 - ◆ If computers are used, how are they used?
 - Writing reports: 46% WE, 31% NA
 - Presentation of exercises: 22% WE, 31% NA
 - Scoring of dimension: 38% WE, 18% NA
 - Classification of behavior: 11% WE, 10% NA
 - Behavioral checklists: 14% WE, 8% NA
-



Results: Assessor Characteristics

	Practice in West Europe	Practice in North America
Line managers***	93%	44%
Internal Human Resource experts***	75%	37%
External Human Resource experts	20%	34%
External psychologists	32%	15%
Internal psychologists**	43%	12%
A participant's direct supervisor	7%	10%
Works council	5%	2%

** $p < 01$, *** $p < 001$.





Results: Criteria Considered in Selecting the Observer Pool

	Practice in West Europe	Practice in North America
Organizational level***	89%	54%
Functional work area*	80%	54%
Sex	20%	29%
Race***	--	27%
Ethnicity**	--	17%
Educational level	18%	24%
Age	11%	7%

* $p < 05$, ** $p < 01$, *** $p < 001$.



Results: Methods of Observer Training

	Practice in West Europe	Practice in North America
Lectures	88%	60%
Discussion	83%	85%
Video demonstration/Camera	31%	28%
Observe other assessor	38%	25%
Observation of practice candidates	28%	58%

- ◆ Duration of training sessions: 0,5 to 1 day in WE (77%) and NA (64%)
 - ◆ Evaluation of the qualities of observational and rating skills of each observer after the training? 33% WE, 57% NA
 - ◆ Certification after completing observer training? 15% WE, 14% NA
-



Results: Types of Information Provided to Participants

	Practice in West Europe	Practice in North America
About objective of the AC	88%	73%
How the results will be used*	78%	53%
About the kind of exercises	50%	65%
The storage and use of data***	55%	18%
About the staff/observers	63%	48%
How individuals are selected**	55%	25%
What recommendations will be made*	43%	23%
How feedback will be given*	80%	55%
The possibility of reassessment*	25%	10%

** $p < 05$, ** $p < 01$, *** $p < 001$.



Results: Data Integration Process



Assessor discussion to consensus
Combination of discussion and
statistical aggregation
Statistical aggregation
Voting

Practice in
West Europe

Practice in
North America

38%

42%

56%

47%

5%

8%

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3%





Results: Feedback

- ◆ Most common: oral and written feedback (64% WE, 46% NA)
- ◆ When do participants receive feedback?
 - Directly upon completion in WE 54%
 - More than one week after the AC in NA 58%
- ◆ Who gives feedback?
 - Observer 70% in WE
 - Employee of the personnel department (33%) or external expert (30%) in NA
- ◆ What information includes feedback?
 - Behaviors observed on each dimension in each exercise: 63% WE, 60% NA
 - Overall dimension ratings across the exercises: 65% WE, 53% NA
 - A final overall assessment rating across all dimensions*: 73% WE, 50% NA
 - Ratings on each dimension in each exercise: 43% WE, 40% NA





Results: Evaluation of Participants Reaction

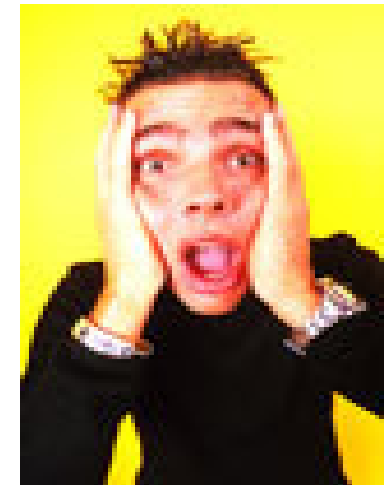
	Practice in West Europe	Practice in North America
Fairness*	51%	28%
Usefulness of the AC**	49%	21%
Acceptance of the AC***	64%	18%
Feelings during the AC procedure**	54%	18%
Communication of the results**	41%	13%
Accuracy of the feedback*	33%	13%
Transparency of the AC procedure***	56%	10%
Stress perception during the AC***	51%	5%
Transparency of the appraisal process***	38%	5%
Acceptance of the feedback**	41%	8%
Acceptance of the company*	13%	0%

* $p < 05$, ** $p < 01$, *** $p < 001$.



Results: Evaluation of the AC

	Practice in West Europe	Practice in North America
Evaluation of...		
Objectivity	32%	52%
Reliability	36%	71%
Criterion validity		
Predictive	43%	32%
Concurrent	32%	21%
Content validity	63%	79%
Construct validity	40%	40%





Comparison of Western Europe and North America

- ◆ Western Europe: Austria, Germany, France, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom
 - ◆ North America: US, Canada

 - ◆ Comparison on two cultural dimensions:
 - Uncertainty avoidance
 - Power distance
-



Area	Uncertainty Avoidance	Power Distance
Western Europe	57.87	47.20
North America	46.19	39.90



Distinguishing features of ACs in Western Europe

- ◆ Longer with more exercises
 - ◆ Based on competency models
 - ◆ Personality-like dimensions
 - ◆ More use of case study and presentation
 - ◆ Line managers and internal HR as assessors
 - ◆ More information provided about AC
 - ◆ Feedback provided more quickly
 - ◆ More evaluation of participants' reaction
-



Distinguishing features of ACs in North America

- ◆ Design based on traditional job analysis
 - ◆ Less use of group discussion
 - ◆ Exercises are related
 - ◆ Race and ethnicity used to select assessors
 - ◆ More psychometric evaluation
-



Possible explanations

Distinguishing features in W Europe reflect:	Distinguishing features in N America reflect:
Greater power difference	Higher measurement proficiency
Attempts to minimize uncertainty	Equal employment laws
Strict law laws	Attempts to avoid litigation



Study Limitations

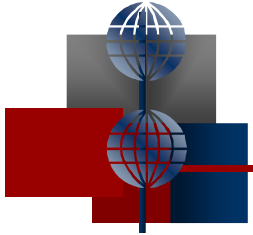
- Limited sample size
- Many countries not represented
- No purely random samples
- Only one respondent for most of the organizations





Assessment Center Guidelines

- ◆ 1975 First edition
 - ◆ 1979 Second edition
 - ◆ 1989 Third edition
 - ◆ 2000 Fourth, current edition
 - ◆ Draft of addition to address cross-cultural issues
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Extension of the *Guidelines*

- ◆ Professional Guidelines for Global Assessment Centers
 - ◆ Task Force from U.S., Canada, Switzerland, Malaysia, UK, Germany
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Purpose

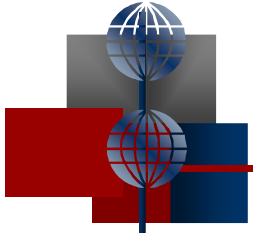
- ◆ Provide guidance to increasing numbers of applications of the AC method by organizations operating in several different countries





Examples of Assessment Center Applications across Countries

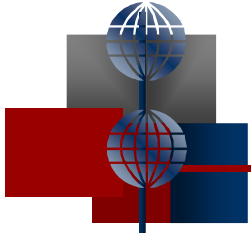
- ◆ The Multi-National Organization Model
 - An organization adapts an AC from branch in one country to a branch in another country
 - ◆ The International Consultant Model
 - A consultant transports an AC from one country to another country
 - ◆ The Local Importation Model
 - An organization imports an AC from another country
-



To ensure validity:

- ◆ Macro-level considerations:
 - Contextual factors
- ◆ Micro-level considerations
 - Design, implementation, validation





Macro-Level Considerations

- ◆ Extent of cultural commonality
 - ◆ Differences in professional guidelines
 - ◆ Commonality of business models
 - ◆ Extent of transfer of personnel
-



Micro-level Considerations: Job Analysis

- ◆ Cultural differences may result in differences in:
 - KSAOs for job success
 - Relative importance of KSAOs
 - Behaviors relevant to a given KSAO
-



Assessment Techniques

- ◆ Cultural differences may result in differences in:
 - Acceptability of assessment techniques
 - Language used
 - Need to orient and instruct participants about a given technique
 - Appropriate content in an exercise
-



Assessors

- ◆ Cultural differences may result in differences in:
 - Acceptability of men vs women assessors
 - Acceptability of older vs younger assessors
 - Need for cultural sensitivity and ability to communicate across cultures
 - Need to train assessors
 - ◆ e.g., give appropriate feedback in different culture
-



Administrative concerns

- ◆ Cultural differences may result in differences in:
 - Need to provide evidence of validation
 - Requirements to document process
 - Levels of security of personal information
-



Sidelight: Guidelines in specific countries

- ◆ Germany
 - ◆ Indonesia

 - ◆ South Africa??
-



 ***Thanks!***





Future Correspondence

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◆ Access to survey

- ◆ <http://psy.psych.colostate.edu/AC/Green.asp>
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