

Are We Missing a Trick?  
Feedback Delivery Mechanisms and Promotion  
Decisions in Assessment Centers: A Multi-Source  
and Two-Wave Investigation

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# Introduction

- Organizations increasingly rely on assessment centers to:
  - Objectively evaluate the skills of their employees on various performance criteria
  - Provide a context for development and training opportunities
  - Set goals for the employees and manage critical managerial decisions such as promotions (e.g., Ripamonti and Scaratti, 2012; Lievens and Thornton, 2005)

# Introduction

- Research also emphasizes the significance of effective feedback delivery mechanisms in order to predict:
  - Employee performance (Hattie and Timperley, 2007)
  - Satisfaction (Krasman, 2010)
  - Innovation (Lee, 1997)
- Results in these studies commonly emphasize that findings from ACs need to be used to boost performance
- Yet, there is little research to date, that examines how companies might better utilize the results of ACs in their critical decision making processes

# Research Goals

- This research was carried out with the intention of answering two central question:
  - Do AC findings predict employee promotion decisions made by the client company?
  - Does AC performance of employees change if they participate in ACs more than once?

Method

# Participants

- We conducted our research on store employees (N=98) in a retail company who participated in ACs run for promotion purposes.
  - 67% male
  - 54% bachelor graduate
  - Mean age 30.7

- The company conducts ACs to assess store employees for the deputy manager position.
  - The AC consists of 3 different exercises and it was conducted by two highly-qualified, external assessors.
  - Any employee who fails to get promoted, is given another chance to participate in another AC at least 6 months later.
    - In our sample, 52% of the participants have participated in an AC for the second time.
    - After the first AC, all of them got feedback about their performance immediately following the AC.

- The ultimate promotion decision was made by the Store Managers who were not obliged to use the AC results.
  - In our sample, 64% of the participants were promoted.



Results

- We ran logistics regression in order to examine the effect of the AC results on the promotion decisions.
  - Our results showed that the competency scores obtained from the AC did not have any significant effect on promotion decisions.

- We used a T-test in order to analyze the difference between the participants who participated in ACs for the first and second time.
  - There were no significant differences between the two participant groups.
  - Thus, the feedback delivery mechanism did not affect the subsequent AC scores.

Conclusion

# Conclusion

- There might be some other mediating variables that affected the link between the results of the AC and the final promotion decisions.
  - Decision makers (e.g., managers) might place lower emphasis on the data obtained from ACs and favored other data.
  - Moreover, decision makers might have selected and sent the low-performing employees to ACs.
  - The client company might have not provided the developmental and training opportunities for low-performing employees and might have avoided the burden of directly confronting them about their performance (high in-group collectivism; Gupta et al., 2002).

# Conclusion

- Another important observation was that the performance of participants who attended ACs a second time did not change.
  - We may explain this with social-cognitive theory of Bandura (1989) which emphasizes the feeling of self-competency and self-mastery.
  - Accordingly, AC participants, who showed insufficient performance in their initial AC, might have lacked self-competence during their subsequent AC.

# Conclusion

- Our findings also highlight that promotion decisions aren't always aligned with performance at an AC and this could be due to several factors.
  - It is important to recognize that external factors such as cultural values and organizational attitudes might influence the way those decisions are made.
    - So, this research is a call for further studies where AC results are integral features of the decision making process.
    - It is also critical for practitioners to determine who their clients will be and how the AC data will be utilized in critical decision making processes. Otherwise, all the efforts from ACs will be in vain.

# Suggestions

- Organizations should implement mechanisms in order to drive employee motivation and enable them to further utilize their potential
  - The fact that employees who participated in ACs did not reveal any significant changes in their second AC, is also critical for researchers. Researchers should try to ensure that the content of the feedback delivered is thorough and accurate.
  - Moreover, researchers should develop feedback delivery mechanisms in a way that will guide companies to commit to addressing the development needs of the participants.



Thank you.

