



Centres of Opportunity?

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About Your Presenters

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Objectives of the session


- Reflect of the diversity credentials of Assessment Centres (Acs)
- Explore best practice in relation to how graduate ACs are used to recruit diverse talent
- To consider the role of 'practice' or 'rehearsal' ACs in improving the diversity profile of graduate intakes

Group exercise – The diversity credentials of ACs

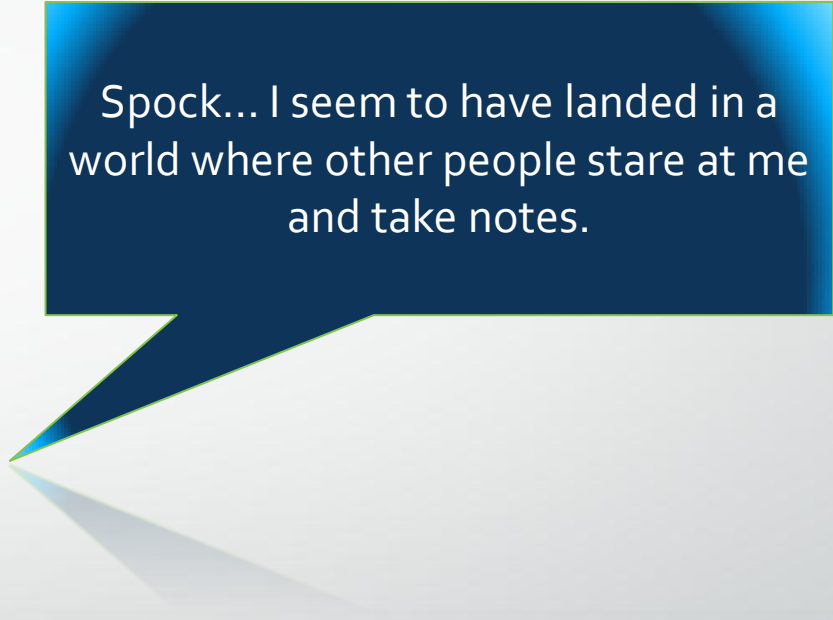
- What gives ACs their reputation of enhanced fairness and equitable outcomes?
- What specific activities and practices do you employ to ensure your ACs are fair and equitable?
- Do you use best practice guidelines to improve diversity outcomes?
- What do you perceive as the main barriers to underrepresented groups in organizational life being successful in graduate ACs




The diversity credentials of ACs



What if stepping into an AC was like stepping into another world?



Spock... I seem to have landed in a world where other people stare at me and take notes.



It's easy to assume that ACs present a
universally familiar environment

Folklore

- Historically, folklore has suggested that ACs are fairly bias free, going way back to early AC literature (Huck & Bray, 1976)

Empirical Research

- Empirical research on ACs tells a different story
- Bias against underrepresented ethnic groups has been found in
 - The USA (Dean, Roth, & Bobko, 2008)
 - The UK (Healy, Kirton, Özbilgin, & Oikelome, 2010; Kirton & Healy, 2009)



Areas for future research

Negative Experiences and Social Inhibition

- Negative experiences in an AC can reinforce feelings of discouragement and social inhibition can affect performance (Fletcher, 2011)
- Perhaps compounding the problem of bias for underrepresented groups

Latest Edition of IOP: Stereotype Threat

- An under-researched concept in organizational studies (Kalokerinos, von Hippel, & Zacher, 2014) – focal article
 - Pressure experienced when individuals feel that they are at risk of confirming (or being perceived as confirming) a negative stereotype about a group to which they belong (Steele & Davies, 2003)

Latest Edition of IOP: Stereotype Threat

- Stereotype threat has been found to influence performance across a range of different contexts from playing computer games (Montgomery, 2010) to cognitive ability scores (Palumbo & Steele-Johnson, 2014)
- Could stereotype threat also affect performance in ACs?

Stereotype Threat and its Complex Dynamics

- Research findings indicate that having solo status (i.e., being the only representative of a group) OR the presence of acute stereotype threat can lead to performance *increments* (Hoyt, Johnson, Murphy, & Skinnell, 2010)
 - Perhaps this invokes a kind of “I’ll prove them wrong!” mentality
 - The presence of solo status in addition to stereotype threat can lead to performance *decrements*

How do we ensure that access to organizational life is fair and open at the entry level

- Diversity management and ACs are both perceived to form the heart of talent management strategies (Woodruffe, 2011).
- Yet Black graduates are three times more likely to be unemployed than their white counterparts six months after graduating (Race for Opportunity, 2012).
- A recent survey of Black graduates, 47% of respondents revealed they perceived potential bias and discrimination in graduate recruitment processes (Elevation Networks, 2012).
- Large graduate recruiters providing positive action schemes to practice the conditions of the their graduate ACs

Case study: Positive Action Practice Graduate AC's

- Target post 1992 Universities
- Provide an opportunity to rehearse practice the conditions of their graduate recruitment process
- Psychometric tests
- Day with the graduate recruitment manager and hear the perspective of the assessors
- Practice behavioural elements of the assessment centre

Group exercise

- What other key elements should the case study organization build into their programme of practice ACs?
- How could stereo- threat play a role in practice ACs? How could this be diminished?
- Do you think practice graduate ACs could support/improve the diversity of graduate intakes?

Best practice check list for enhanced diversity outcomes

- ✓ Provide extensive feedback to candidates through the process
- ✓ Perceive ACs as a talent development exercise
- ✓ Remember ACs are not 'fixed/neutral' places but social entities
- ✓ Avoid poorly designed and applied competencies that do not reflect necessary organizational behaviours and do not take into account how they could bias some groups
- ✓ Avoid ambiguous rating criteria as this can lead to the potential for prejudice and discrimination in the judgments of assessor
- ✓ Assessor training in diversity issues and concepts of unconscious bias and stereotype threat.
- ✓ Review the performance and experiences of assessors
- ✓ Monitor diversity outcomes

Conclusions and summary

- Often heralded as more objective and bias-free compared to other approaches of selection (Thornton & Rupp, 2006) ACs are increasingly used for meeting diversity objectives (Kirton and Healy, 2009).
- Previous research has highlighted that even within ACs designed to support the recruitment and promotion of underrepresented group's discrimination can occur (Kirton and Healy, 2009).
- Important to focus on best practice standards and review objectives and diversity outcomes

Sources of additional information

- Woodruffe, C. (2011). Whiter than white? The diversity credentials of assessment and development centres. In N. Povah & G. C. Thornton, III. (Eds.), *Assessment centres and global talent management* (pp. 131-142). Surrey: Gower Publishing
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