THE EVALUATION OF ASSESSMENT CENTERS, STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS, AND PERSONALITY TESTS AS THE METHODS OF PERSONNEL SELECTION IN HRM

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to critically analyze the three contemporary personnel selection practices - assessment centers, structured interview, and personality tests. The main strengths and weaknesses of the presented methods have been pointed and evaluated. Based on the reviewing of the related literature the common and individual strengths of each of the approaches have been identified and it includes the level of validity and the convergence of each techniques towards the overall organizational HRM framework. In counterweight to the beneficial aspects, negative prospects include overcomplexity, cost-efficiency, and a certain level of bias, which can cause direct and collateral damage for the work of HR practitioners and organizational overall HRM development. Overall, there is a necessity for the future studies in the field of organizational recruitment and selection practices, in order to clarify and develop the existing knowledge of the subject of discussion.

Introduction

In the current rapidly changing economic conditions organizations are forced to react quickly and adopt the most effective practices and policies. The key activity for every organization and especially HR practitioners is the process of recruitment and selection of personnel. Former managing director of McKinsey Rajat Gupta considered the selection process as the «war for talent» (Singh 2001). The majority of companies spend a huge amount of funds and resources in order to attract the best fitting to their organizational needs candidates. However, there are constant debates on the effectiveness of different selection methods as well as their convergence towards the overall organizational strategy and policies. In general, selections methods can be divided into two distinctive groups - KSA-based assessment (Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities) and Task-Based Assessment, which are applicable for both external and internal selection practices (Pulakos 2005: 6). Moreover, each type of assessment has an impact on the overall organizational HR practice and development. Therefore, three employee selection methods - assessment center, structured interview, and personality test are going to be discussed and critically analyzed in this paper. In addition, the effectiveness of each of the chosen methods towards organizational HR management is going to be considered and evaluated.

Assessment centers

One of the popular methods of personnel selection is the assessment center. The assessment center method of selection includes the usage of different evaluation techniques with a common focus on job-related simulations, some aspects of psychological testing, and behavioral observation of potential employees (Byham n.d.: 1). The functioning of the assessment center is usually base on the observations of behavior displayed assesses in the complex organizational simulation by trained assessors (Thornton and Gibbson 2009: 169). The typical dimensions of performance, which are identified throughout the process of job-analysis and competencies modeling, include leadership and managerial skills, marketing and sales abilities, conflict resistance and solving skills, etc. (Thornton and Gibbson 2009: 170). There are constant debates over the effectiveness, cost-efficiency, and convergence towards organizational HR management of the assessment center as an approach of selection.

One of the advantages of the assessment center as the method for selection is the objectivity and fair opportunities for assesses (Tripathi 2016: 31). The assessment is commonly conducted by the group of trained experts who are either line managers or hired externally psychologists or HR experts, who after the observation discuss and share their opinions and agree on evaluations. The research showed that assessment centers are seen as significantly unbiased in their prediction of future performance as well as in their observation of participants with different background ages and races (Thornton and Byham 1982).

Another beneficial aspect of the assessment center is that the job analysis training identifies the core characteristics for any role and thus, assures the future effectiveness of the potential employee performance (BPS n.d.: 17). Throughout the process, a wide range of sufficient techniques is highlighted for the later implementation in job practice. That is to say, the assessment center is an efficient method for not only the selection of candidate but also as a source of primary training and development of core job competencies. Moreover, it diminishes the risks of future incompatibility of an employee to job responsibilities as well as collateral expenditures on the replacement of insufficient employees. It is important to highlight, that is some companies' assessment centers have functional responsibilities not only for selection purposes but also as development centers for training current and prospective staff.

The main adverse aspects of assessment centers are its cost-efficiency and complexity of the method (Tripathi 2016: 32). The centers are usually costly to establish due to a lot of skilled assessors and appropriate

test facilities are required for effective functioning (US OPM n.d.). Thus, there are critical concerns that arise on whether it is cost-efficient to implement an assessment center method for initial screening and selection of low-profile, interim, or entry-level employees. Some organizations including AT&T, Standard Oil, Sears, and IBM utilize assessment centers only for the selection of candidates for manufacturing and sales entry-level positions (Thornton and Gibbons 2009: 170). Consequently, the question of efficiency of AC in terms of middle-level and top-level personnel selection arises. In addition, there are some difficulties with the method regarding the over-complexity of it. In other words, assessment center selection practice requires a number of employees who either perform the role of assessors (line managers, HR practitioners, or psychologists, etc.) or fulfill operational duties. Furthermore, it requires a considerable amount of time, since it usually takes one or two days to complete the assessment process (Tripathi 2016: 32). Thus, that time can be utilized more productive in other working areas of involved staff members.

Structured interview

According to Topor, Colarelli, and Han (2007) interviews are seen as the most preferred types of assessment among HR specialists. Thus, structured interview practice has gained considerable interest among the researchers especially in terms of its validity and reliability in terms of overall organizational HRM strategical fit and job performance forecasting. Before starting the evaluation of the approach, it is pivotal to highlight what is considered under the ten structured interview. Among several different definitions propose, the characterization of Dipboye, Wooten, and Halverson (2004) can be considered the most coherent. They stated that structured interview is a quintessence of the three aspects which are interview's job-relatedness, accordance of the interview towards the accepted standards, and methodical handling of the data in the process of candidate evaluation (Dipboye, Wooten and Halverson 2004). That is to say, despite the overall perspicuity of the method there are constantly disputed over the effectiveness, suitability, and accuracy of the structured interview approach.

The positive aspect of the structured interview method is its relatively high level of accuracy in terms of validity and reliability. That is to say, a number of qualitative and quantitative research papers suggested that adding structure to the interview heightens the level of validity and reliability in the evaluation process (Posthuma, Morgeson, and Campion 2002). According to Schmidt and Zimmerman (2004: 553), structured selection interviews tend to have a higher level of criterion-related validity in terms of the prediction of job performance, in comparison with unstructured interviews. In addition, a high level of reliability is typically achieved in counterpart with a high level of validity.

The major hindrances that restrain HR practitioners from the implementation of structured interview method are the absence of personal contact between applicant and interviewer, and interviewer's need for autonomy and power (van Der Zee, Bakker and Bakker 2002: 176). Firstly, applicants mostly lean towards a socially and attentive manner interview, which is more related to unstructured interviews due to it allows direct communication rather than «cold» structural dialogue (Dipboye 1992). Secondly, a structured interview scheme tends to diminish the role and autonomy of the interviewer and transform it into a tedious and monotonous process, which results in the lack of interest and effectiveness of both parties (van Der Zee, Bakker and Bakker 2002: 176).

In general, in terms of the overall organizational HRM practice, structured interview selection methods are considered as the less risky and highly accurate for the projection of the potential employees' future performance. On the other hand, the approach is continually losing its relevance due to a lack of personal aspects and the development of other selection approaches.

Personality test

Personality test selection method targeting the evaluation of the and prediction of human behavior with the focus on working conditions. The integration of the personality testing approach in organizational HRM framework beneficially results not only for selection and recruitment processes but also for the increase of overall efficiency and teamwork abilities and leadership skills (CPS HR n.d: 5). That is to say, the personality test method is considered as an efficient due to its focus on a comprehensive assessment of applicant rather than considering only cognitive skills, basement for current and future personnel development, accurate and meticulous method of evaluation (Kelly 2010: 3). However, the main points of criticism are high probability o faking and excessively holistic personality portrait.

The first pivotal beneficial aspect of personality test is that method presumes an overall analysis of the personality traits with the focus on interpersonal, leadership, and interpersonal abilities of the candidate, which are the main essential traits for the working practice (CPS n.d: 5). The strengths and weaknesses of potential employees are revealed, so it alleviates the future training and development process. Thus, the personality test is appropriate techniques not only for selection but also for coaching and mentoring existing staff (Kelly 2010: 4). In addition, it is beneficial for the participants due to sufficient analysis is received and they will be able to take into account the information and apply it in their working practice as well as in personal life.

Secondly, personality tests are considered as relatively valid due to its clear and accurate structuring. Personality testing is a criterion-validity type method and it involves rigorous juxtaposition and calculating of correlation between collected test scores of applicants (predictive validity) and some dimensions of job performance (criterion measurement) (Thomas and Scroggins 2006: 31). Thus, the greater degree of correlation between two variables is the guarantee for the greater validity of the personality test method for personnel selection.

The major criticism regarding personality testing for selection purposes is the possibility of faking and extremely comprehensive personality evaluation. Morgeson et al. (2007) suggested that it is somewhat easy for the applicant to fake his testing score for the purposes of improving his attractiveness and fit for the selection, which in terms critically reduces the validity and the power of test predictive. Another potential drawback is that some aspects of personality testing measurement can be irrelevant and non-job related, however, despite that their existence can seriously predetermine the hiring decision process (Carless 2009: 2522). Thus, some components of personality testing need to be excluded from the consideration in order to mitigate potential bias and prejudice.

Conclusion

All things considered, the selection and recruitment process is essential and one of the most significant parts of the HRM practice. There is a scope of an employee of selection techniques that are applied in the contemporary organization. The following methods have been discussed and analyzed in the review paper - assessment centers, structured interviews, and personality testing. Each of the methods bases its own strengths and weaknesses, which directly correlated with organizational overall HR management and development. The core beneficial aspect of each of the evaluated techniques is a considerable level of validity and supportive function for future job performance and training and development, which in terms guarantee stability and easiness for the implementation of the overall organizational HRM models and frameworks. On the other hand, major points of criticism include overcomplexity, cost-efficiency, and a certain level of bias, which can cause direct and collateral damage for the work of HR practitioners and organizational overall HRM development.

Apart from the presented arguments, there is a necessity for future research works in the field of selection and training practices in order to develop the existing knowledge and support or disprove the current base of study.

Acknowledgment

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