

The Use of Assessment Centers in Companies in the Northern Zone of Portugal - an exploratory study

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Studies on assessment centers (AC) in Portugal are practically non-existent. The present study aims to contribute to the analysis of the level of use of CA in Portugal, more concretely in the northern zone, thus contributing to the verification of what the real practices in the labor market are at this level, going beyond what until now is the empirical idea of common sense.

At present, it is unquestionable the importance that competences and their identification have gained in the labor market. It is therefore increasingly essential for companies to hire people who fit into their organizational reality, but also ensure that they are the "professionals of excellence" they need for the continuity of their growth and success.

Since AC are a tool that has been used since the 1940s, in order to identify the best professionals, by identifying the presence of key competences (Afonso, 2012; Ceitil, 2006; Shangi, 2007), the interest arises to know in detail the reality in Portugal around it.

The data for this study were collected based on a questionnaire survey distributed online in August and September 2016, and to the staff that deal with the human resources function, and obtained 125 responses.

The results show that two-thirds of the companies in the sample do not use AC in the selection process, confirming what was empirically perceived.

Respondents who effectively use CA, point out as the most obvious reason for their use the reliability that is attributed to the results considering that many of the respondents (and most of them are professionals who work in a specialized manner in the area of human resources), there is a high level of confidence in the results obtained, either at the level of identifying the key competencies for a particular position or in the consequent predictability of success in the performance of that position.

Although the AC are used for various positions, it is in the positions of intermediate management and management that their use stands out, which may be explained by the importance they have for the organization, and the need to define clearly the behavioral competencies that professionals in these positions, normally key in organizations, must possess and that are seen as complex.

One of the disadvantages most attributed and recognized by the respondents is the one already expected empirically: the cost. In the northern part of Portugal, AC are mostly used by large companies. This fact can be explained either by their financial availability, by their awareness of the importance of having the professionals best suited to their needs, and to do so from the outset, since the selection. It is well known that the great part of the Portuguese business niche is SMEs and it is therefore important and urgent to make them understand the importance of the process of selection of professionals, namely their impact on companies through individual performance, and that there are techniques and tools that are more reliable than others so that they can understand the benefits of using AC and that the investment pays off.

Contributions to the literature and practice, limitations of the study and indications for future studies are presented.

References

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