

CHAPTER 14

POTENTIAL ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT AS A MANAGEMENT TASK

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Personnel selection and development are complex decisions. Noel Tichy and Warren Bennis (2007) consider them, together with decisions about strategy and crisis management, to be the three most central decisions of managers and advocate the following principles in making such decisions: recognize decisions as complex phenomena and design a decision-making process, establish explicit parameters for decisions, and develop a common language among all involved. Transferred into an organizational development-oriented system of potential assessment, this means primarily that potential assessment should be designed less as a diagnostic evaluation of the individual and more as a decision-making process. Doing justice to the accompanying complexity necessitates a multistage working process which makes the various perspectives clear and adequately involves everyone concerned.

This chapter results from authors consulting practice over a decade combining strategy, organization development, learning and potential assessment in different types of organizations, primarily in long-term contracts (Untermarzoner, 2011). This experience allows to see the consequences of

different approaches to personal decisions for people, the organization design and corporate performance. Based on this we can conclude, that potential assessment and development occurs best when chief executives recognize the value of learning as the primary force to facilitate change. The paper discusses principles of an organizational development-oriented approach to potential development based on own casework applying tests and organization-design oriented settings.

Taking a look at the approaches commonly used in personnel selection in many organizations today: The job specification generally forms the starting point when it comes to filling a vacancy. This usually states the most important tasks of the job and the necessary “competences” to complete them, which—if a “competence-based management system” was taken as the basis for the whole—are probably broken down into “observable capabilities.” Candidates are invited to take one or more tests which promise to “measure” the potential and to participate in one or more interviews. If an external consultant is commissioned with the assessment, then a report of the candidate is provided. Finally the responsible managers make their selection—with or without reference to the advisory opinions.

In addition to the potential for error inherent in this form of personnel diagnostics, which will be highlighted in this chapter, such procedures unintentionally promote a judging culture, which is diametrically opposed to an open learning organization. An organizational development-oriented system of potential assessment has to do with the creation of “dialog partnerships” (Deissler & Gergen, 2005) which can contribute as key elements to the establishment of a culture of appreciation. Realizing such a dialog-based process requires certain specific design principles, steps and organizational arrangements which will be explained in the following chapters.

DEVELOPING THE LEADER'S POTENTIAL ASSESSMENT COMPETENCE

We assume that the capability to assess potential will become a central competence for success of organizations. In many cases, however, it is no longer sufficient to employ external assessors and read their reports. Decision makers themselves need a stronger capability to assess potential in their everyday professional lives which is not limited to assessment procedures. It has much more to do with promptly solving temporary organizational problems: Why does a project not proceed, what are the structural and personal obstacles? Whom can I deploy for the handling of the nonfunctional processes? Whom can I involve in a strategy development project? Who has a special talent in bringing wayward projects back on track? Organizations and businesses must increasingly be in a position

to get current problems under control, not through restructuring involving lengthy planning, but through concrete, prompt steering.

These challenges require an accompanying qualification of today's leaders.

Setting up an organizational development-oriented system of potential assessment includes the leader's diagnostic competence as well as appropriate structures for the assessment and decision making process.

Because such a process of qualification always begins with self-use, the decision maker can profit doubly: On the one hand his own diagnostic skills are increased; on the other hand, the long-term development of his own competences can be fostered.

Example: Illustrating the development of leaders' potential assessment competence.

A department head is looking for a new product manager. Several potential assessments had been carried out in the past for this client, for internal product managers as well as for new employees. Despite clear recommendations, he always chose people who had specific weaknesses in creating a good customer relationship. He himself is a person, who is more interested in the world of finance than in creating relationships. In this dimension the engaged employees were very much like him, yet he would not or could not realize and accept these weaknesses in himself.

On the basis of this case history we suggest to him this time that he (1) allow himself to be trained in the use of two self assessment tests, (2) evaluate the initial results in a first interpretation together with the consultant, (3) develop a question outline for the interviews with the candidates whose results would then be reflected on together with the consultant, and (4) make the final choice himself. This procedure places the bigger part of the responsibility back to the one who decides. And, what do you know? Suddenly he is in a position to clearly see the weaknesses or unsuitableness of applicants and to discover similar aspects in himself.

Today more than ever, potential assessment demands that the decision maker be made responsible while nevertheless making sure that he achieves an informed understanding of how he is to make the decision.

ADDRESSING THE ORGANIZATION DESIGN

The first problem with procedures focusing on comparing competence models with test results is their oversimplified view of the person. Although typically described as a personnel development instrument, potential assessment should be established at the interface between organization and person; in so doing, the artificial division between personnel development and organizational development should itself be critically scrutinized. In order to be at all meaningfully designed, potential assessment requires an

intensive examination of and careful engagement with the context of the entire organization and its future. Thus linking potential assessment and development with the organization requires a conceptual model and a practical approach that bridges the disciplines of human resource management and organization development.

In recent years organization development researchers and practitioners became increasingly aware of the need to develop an understanding of the interrelationships among work on strategy, organizational structures, process management, and human resource management. A concept which specifically refers to the links between strategy, structures and human resource management is currently broadly discussed under the term “organization design” (Galbraith, 2002, 2009; Kesler & Kates, 2011). While organization development focuses primarily on the process to achieve change based on the understanding of the organization as a social system, organization design works out the elements of the organization and leadership tasks in creating structures and processes. Following Galbraith (2002, 2009) the organization design concept deals with the interconnection and simultaneity in the development of organizations in five dimensions: strategy, structure, processes, human resources and reward systems. This so called star-model of organization design argues, that overemphasizing one single dimension brings unbalanced results and limits organizational effectiveness. As all these dimensions are nowadays accounted to specialized functions within organizations, this results into isolation between the different initiatives within the organization. Organization design processes focus on creating models of organization and on (re)connecting the different initiatives and their inherent logics through lateral coordinating mechanisms. In summary, organization design provides a conceptual framework and a set of instruments to model a desired organization, but it requires organization development in the process of designing as well as implementing the desired form of the organization. Thus organization development and organization design can be seen as the two sides of a coin when organizations are undergoing significant change in multidimensional areas.

Although a strategy-based human resource approach reached a common understanding in the professional community, we can see in practice that many organizations—especially in Europe—are struggling with the alignment of human resources (HR), corporate strategy and organization development. One reason for this lies in the overestimation of standardized HR-instruments, which promise to work just as implemented (Kates, 2008). However company examples show that it brings a big shift in HR, when line managers and strategic taskforces really start to engage in HR through experimenting, learning and practice (see also Cheung-Judge & Holbecke, 2011).

Of all things it is specifically potential analysis which is usually, with regard both to organization and to content, realized as a separate activity, and also those forms which relate to explicit job specifications do not adequately realize that these mostly do not correspond to a future-oriented specific organizational reality. However, when the top management starts to incorporate potential assessment and development as a core task, things begin to move. HR is then more lively integrated in strategic initiatives and corporate development (Untermarzoner, 2011).

On the organizational level, therefore, the following questions are crucial to potential assessment: What is the core reason for being of the organization? How does the organization's organizational design look at present? Where are there currently contradictions in the design, which must be dealt with? What are the primary benefits, which the function should yield? In and between which business processes is this person active? Without understanding strategy (Where is the organization going?) and business practices which are necessary for its realization (What are the primary activities which should result in the realization of this strategy?) any potential assessment is left hanging. Potential assessment is, in this sense, an advisory service at the interface of organization and person.

Without an appropriate understanding of core questions of organizational development and design, it withers away to a selective evaluation of people by means of the appraiser's own methods or theoretical constructs.

FROM STABLE TASKS TO DYNAMIC ROLES

Key positions in organizations today are no longer intended to be stable, but rather established as "dynamic roles." More and more often one sees that managers and experts change their roles with time and often must temporarily fill more than one role at a time. An example will make this clear: Two years ago a bank hired a promising sales expert for complex financial products. In the course of the successful expansion, it was expected that not only would this expert manage ever more complex customer projects, but that he would also share his knowledge with junior sales agents. At the same time it became clear that because of his experience he was one of the few people who were in a position to stimulate the lateral process coordination between the cooperating departments. Therefore he was also assigned to help ensure that these processes could be managed better. This expert's reward system remained the same; he is still compensated based on his turnover, but within a short period of time his role was differentiated into three partial roles. After a year, he was

demotivated as he had not reached his goals and had not received the rewards. He left the company.

This happens regularly, when talents are engaged in developing the company but rewards do not match or even contradict it.

In addition to their original area of expertise (functional expert functions), people in many organizations are more and more active in roles in which they further develop, at the implicit or explicit instruction of their organization. Three more roles can be distinguished: the teacher/instructor (development of new or younger colleagues, knowledge management, mentor), the integrator (management of lateral processes between parts of the organization, teamwork, cooperation, networking processes) and the leader (not in the line but in various scopes of duties like process management, project management, strategic work, creation of structures, human resources management of temporary groups)

The dynamic of the differentiation of these roles can derive from the special area of expertise of the person involved or from a current problem situation within the organization. An organizational development-oriented system of potential assessment must therefore constantly ask, based on the specific business processes: What are the partial roles and their various requirements which are to be performed based on a person's function? And which capabilities and attitudes are necessary and desirable?

Since in daily practice more and more people are simultaneously active in multiple roles, job specifications must emphasize much more strongly than ever before what benefits the person should be able to bring to the company as a whole. It is therefore much less a description of tasks than a presentation in which functional units and processes the successful candidate will be involved and which competences are necessary for this.

Example: Illustrating the difficulty that organizations have in understanding dynamic roles.

An industrial organization founds a new organizational unit to take responsibility for the central sales direction of a number of countries and build up the sales operations on site. Thus on the one hand these experts in the central office lead the sales units in the countries and help to carry out projects there, and on the other hand they function as a development unit which is intended to support and develop the capabilities of the people in the countries. The manager of this unit is, moreover, a member of the top management team.

It turns out later that at the founding of the new unit the actual meaning of "development" is not completely clear to those involved. The translation is: "Our good people tell the people on site how it should be done." However, what is actually necessary for real development work is an understanding of teaching and learning, train-the-trainer capabilities and knowledge of coaching and how people learn.

When one observes the partial roles of those involved it becomes clear: (1) they manage the sales unit; (2) they are responsible for development and (3) they have to work as members of the top management team. For HR activities this leads to the following questions: If they are involved in the top management team, what abilities do they need? When they are doing development work, what abilities do they need? When they manage the sales unit, what abilities do they need?

For example, the sales unit needs “hunters,” that is, people who “like to hunt and kill the game.” In contrast, development work needs background work. In this case people are even needed who have the “hunter” mentality but are at the same time highly interested in development and have a great attitude for learning as well as social flexibility, because they can only learn what they need for these assignments when they are already underway. Precisely this knowledge of the basic business processes and the competences which are linked to them is the expertise of the consultant and cannot be provided by the decision maker. In the course of the consultancy the client comes to understand what the organization must achieve and what this implies for the roles and partial roles. They obtain a better understanding of the key business processes and a differentiated picture of process management, and they recognize that not only sales but also development processes and management processes are involved, which in turn require high social sensibility.

If instead classical “sales types” are hired—often with the rationale: “This is a fantastic salesperson; true, he doesn’t know much about learning or development, but that will come with time”—experience shows again and again: the first partial role is fulfilled but the other two are not, either because they do not interest him or are contrary to his mentality, or he lacks the necessary basic abilities to fulfill them.

BROADENING THE LEADERSHIP SYSTEM— “DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP”

Not only does the increasing momentum of organizations which was mentioned earlier bring with it multifaceted, temporary organizational structures, but management functions are also being distributed among an ever-widening circle of experts. Experts and managers must increasingly take into their own hands tasks relating to general organizational design, which means doing something for the entire organization. They must translate strategies into concrete processes, devise new working structures (as temporary organizational structures) and lead correspondingly temporary teams. Experts are increasingly often challenged, in addition to their core tasks, to provide comprehensive results in other fields. Bolden (2011) has recently elaborated the concept of “distributed leadership” for this phenomenon. Leadership is understood not as an assigned function

but as an activity which is can be performed by every member of the organization. It is expected that specifically more “matrixed” and “hybrid” types of organizations may increasingly build on this leadership approach (Lobnig & Untermarzoner, 2012).

For this reason team leaders and experts are in need of more general management skills—not just strategic thinking, but above all the ability to deal with complexity. They must understand whether a problem relates to a person, a team, to strategy or process management; this calls for “multi-diagnosis,” that is, the ability to think simultaneously on various levels and in various disciplines while treating these as coequals, in order to find the appropriate problem-solving action. This capability has traditionally only been expected from top management.

← Au: Coequals is one word in Webster's.

It has been observed that top managers and management teams today feel overextended when leadership tasks may only be delegated to the second level of management. However, when successful young managers (so-called “high potentials”) excel, they feel overwhelmed after a short time, because they are quickly assigned all the challenging tasks (“Give that special project to Tim; he has proved himself again and again.”) Here the perspective of distributed leadership is trend-setting. The requirement, however, is knowledge within the organization about who has what potential—and above all, that the people who are involved have this knowledge themselves. When consistently implemented, distributed leadership means a role change for top management, who move from being leadership providers to being those who maintain an overview of the various leadership activities as well as determining and coordinating initiatives. A potential assessment, in its methodical approach and with its own mindset, must pay attention to these changes. It requires anticipation of future necessary potentials, even when the organization presently cannot consciously name them.

FOCUSING ON CAPABILITIES, ATTITUDES AND METACOMPETENCES

An organizational development-oriented system of potential assessment must differentiate between capabilities, attitudes, and metacompetences. This has to do with contributions to the function and the role itself (capabilities and attitudes) and with contributions to the organization as a complete system (metacompetences). This differentiation is especially important for organizations, which must react to changing environments not only quickly but also appropriately in relation to the business as well as to the process design.

← Au: The prefix *meta* does not require hyphen in APA. *But* meta-analysis.

Definition of terms: Capabilities are those behavioral patterns, which someone can produce when they are necessary for a certain task. Attitude covers a person's emotional and cognitive position (Schreyögg & Conrad, 2006) in relation to a task: the will to do something and the conviction that it makes sense. The attitude gives the behavior a purpose and makes it sustainable. Capabilities and attitudes together result in what we call "competence": the ability, which is linked to the will to do something. Practice clearly shows that attitudes shape organizational culture more strongly than capabilities do. Organizational culture consists of symbols and manifested values, and most especially of emotional and the cognitive attitudes and basic assumptions of key personalities who determine the essential parameters of the organizational design of an organization (Schein, 1999).

Of late there has been an increasing necessity for comprehensive competences, which are not directly related to the tasks of the function or role. This becomes essential particularly when organizations consciously convert to process and project management. Metacompetences, for example the inner orientation to the whole and not only to a person's limited area of responsibility, contribute to an organization's overall development.

SEARCHING FOR THE RIGHT METACOMPETENCES

For the dynamic organizations in the future three metacompetences will appear to be of central meaning cooperation competence, change competence and learning competence.

Cooperation competence as a core competence for developing organizations consists of a set of different capabilities, emotional and cognitive attitudes (modified from Oelsnit & Graf, 2006). (1) cooperation competence requires behavior-related capabilities on the interpersonal level—such as the abilities to communicate, to handle conflict and to recognize and accept various perspectives. (2) capabilities for practical cooperation management are needed: that is, knowledge of how to choose a partner for cooperation, how cooperation can be steered, and which working structures call for cooperation. (3) however, cooperation competence also requires a person to have a specific emotional attitude: Cooperation must be emotionally desired; there must be sufficient inner motivation to consider the cooperation meaningful. This is due to the fact that, on an emotional level, cooperation can be understood in highly different ways: as "employment of others to reach my goals" or as "something that one simply does" or as "a way to generate more sense and value through the combination of different resources." (4) it requires a particular cognitive attitude: the person must be intellectually convinced that cooperation as a respectful consideration of

various interests makes more sense than subordinating one partner to the other (“If you want us to cooperate with you, then you must follow our principles!”). In particular, the level of attitudes is increasingly relevant for organizations and is discussed under the term “personality”.

The subject of change competence has two theoretical approaches: First, one can have the attitude that one is convinced of one’s own approach to change. In this case one is change-competent if one has the “right” approach. One can, however, also have the attitude that, both for organizations and for people, there are totally different approaches, which coexist and which are to be understood and, when possible, integrated. In this second case, one is change-competent if one recognizes these differences cognitively and emotionally, can deal with them, and is flexible in their implementation (Caluwé & Vermaak 2003, Untermarzoner, 2007). Dynamic organizations need fewer and fewer people who are convinced of their own approaches (“This model is the best; you only have to understand it”) and more and more people who can cognitively understand and integrate multifaceted approaches to change (“In this situation we could do this; the other situation requires a completely different approach to change”).

The subject of learning will also require specific forms of learning competence in the future. Learning is no longer to be considered as the accumulation of cognitive content, but rather as the discovery of new worlds. Learning is a process, which leads, via uncertainty, to new abilities; one must travel beyond the path of existing abilities through the unknown. This “unknown,” which actually is a “not-yet-known,” is highly unpleasant for most people. An encounter with something new brings about familiar negative feelings such as fear or anger; when certainty dissolves, the learner, in this phase of “I can’t,” becomes unstable. Learning competence is the capability and attitude of opening oneself to what is new and allowing uncertainty to happen. Dynamic organizations need fewer people who “already know it all”; rather they need more people with a high attitude towards reflecting and acting, as well as the readiness to develop themselves as important instruments of change. This competence as the cornerstone for the future of organizational development is within the international organizational development community also conducted under the term “the self as instrument” (Cheung-Judge, 2001).

POTENTIAL ASSESSMENT AS A PROCESS FOR UNDERSTANDING ONESELF AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The competence realistically to assess themselves develops in most people during the course of their professional development. There are many

sources which participate in the development of this competence: feedback from others, comparison of one's own behavior with that of others, use of concepts to describe one's own working styles. It can, however, be observed in practice, that the increasing pressure of competition leads to an ever more idealized self-portrayal; to admit weaknesses actually becomes a personal risk. At the same time, the organizations' interest in the ability of individuals to assess their own weaknesses is growing—the new risk management in human resource management. In view of this, a non-judgmental, understanding approach to potential is an additional benefit for all who are involved. Only valuing people in their entirety makes it possible for a person to observe his own light and dark side. An organizational development-oriented system of potential assessment emphasizes the systematic further development of this competence for self-assessment (for decision makers as well as for candidates).

Successful development of potentials begins with our understanding of ourselves and our competences and the development of a language to describe them. Therefore in potential assessment we work out, together with the person concerned, a solid picture of his potential with a view to the requirements, in a language, which both he and the leader can understand. On the other hand we employ preferred instruments, which, in addition to their diagnostic function, provide him with a map of his possible further potential. In the course of a potential assessment he learns to describe himself appropriately and can at the same time learn to use models, which will help him, other people and the organization to make better assessments.

Potential assessment can also develop an understanding for one's own patterns of action in the organization as well as a better understanding of the organizational culture: What do I pay attention to, when I initiate changes? How do I believe that change can successfully occur? How do I deal with opposition? How does the organizational culture match my values and beliefs? Understanding these dynamics between people and organizations expands the diagnostic instruments. Thus, for example, the person concerned may himself be very suitable for a function. But a comparison with the existing dominant organizational culture can nevertheless identify a significant cultural difference, which can be a valuable input for both sides. Thus potential areas of conflict can be understood in advance.

POTENTIAL ASSESSMENT AS A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS AND THE SPECIAL ROLE OF HR EXPERTS

Most of potential assessment procedures commonly used today promise an objective culling of capabilities, attitudes, and metacompetences. In so

doing, they methodically—sometimes perhaps even deliberately—overlook the fact that tests can always be manipulated and falsified, or at least so dishonestly completed. In consequence to this growing phenomenon of manipulative practice of participants, decision makers are confronted with results that actually not provide a valid information. This development has lead to a broad discussion about potential sources of error (Lang-von Wins, Triebel, Buchner, & Sandor, 2008). The authors suggest not relying on test procedures alone, but rather actively training the diagnostic competence.

Potential assessment must therefore create a dialog situation which can provide more information: the best information here is the evaluation of the results of the assessment itself, since in this delicate situation the competence of the participant actualizes itself in dialogue among the participant, the HR expert and the decision maker. This makes clear what a central role the HR expert plays: If he steps primarily into a judging position he constructs a social reality in which the candidate behaves as if he is being judged—one will be more cooperative, another somewhat more resistant. The underlying assumption is the observed data are indicators for the candidates' usual behavior.

In the planning of potential assessment consultancy, two basic approaches can be differentiated. The first is the idea of assessment by an external party, like a consultant: the candidate is put through various tests and an interview is conducted; thereafter an assessment, that is, a judgment is presented to the decision maker. The second is the concept of potential assessment as development instrument, in which the HR expert or consultant, the candidate and the leader engage in a dialog to discuss together the business activities and the competences needed for them, and to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses as well as how the organization and the person could develop together.

When the organization conceives of potential assessment as an external process, it is logical for a candidate to present him- or herself in as ideal a light as possible, after which an open, honest dialog becomes irrelevant, especially when the candidate neither sees the consultant's final report nor is told, "You have potential in three of our required dimensions but not in two others." On the other hand, if potential assessment is viewed as a development step, the process must be designed so that the candidate can study both him- or herself and the situation and understand the idiosyncrasies of both. This involves a consulting service, usually a workshop with the candidate, ideally preceded by a conversation during which the candidate learns what the consulting service is about and what will happen, and during which the candidate is asked if he or she is willing to participate in order to learn more about him- or herself. However this is not intended as a diagnostic judgment over a person, but as the understanding of (1) working processes, partial roles and the demands associated

with them, (2) the candidate's own strengths and weaknesses and (3) how well these two have the potential to function well together for the benefit of the whole organization. This means that the key point is mutual understanding of what is important for the organization and thus what is important for the position, what the candidate can contribute, and where the opportunities and risks lie. Together the HR expert and the candidate investigate the situation and try to reach a good decision. Instead of a process of deception in which the parties show only their best sides, often followed by a rude awakening, in this system a serious dialog between the person and the organization has already begun in the recruiting stage.

During the decision process the HR expert is advised to bear in mind that, whether internally or externally located, the expert does not play the role of a "whisperer," a shadowy figure influencing personnel decisions, but rather essentially concentrates on supporting the decision-making process. The central task is thus the shaping and containing of a working structure for the communicative handling of demands, expectations, and evaluations among the parties involved.

In summary the specific process of an organizational development perspective in potential assessment incorporates for HR professionals: consultation with the person whose potential is being assessed, in order to reach an appropriate understanding of his or her capabilities and attitudes in relation to the requirements of the function and the complete relevant context within the organization; consulting the decision maker about an appropriate design for the function: How can the organizational design of the organization be translated into the design of a role? Consultation with both parties on questions of strategic fit, opportunities, risks and areas for development.

The described system of potential assessment is a multistage working process in which the HR expert or consultant is involved in all steps between all participants. Experience shows that the exchange of professional opinions and reports without the active participation of the HR expert or the HR consultant is seriously prone to error and does not come up to the actual complexity of potential assessment processes.

EMPLOYING TESTS AND DIAGNOSTIC JUDGEMENTS AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION

On the one hand the growing use of "objective" procedures is progress and reflects the need for differentiated bases for decision making. On the other hand studies have already shown that they do not lead to better results (Lang-von-Wins et al., 2008). Tests create a myth of objectivity and reality. In fact they are always instruments of self-assessment, which have

no informative value without consideration of the biographical development and the professional and personal context of the individual person. Basically potential tests represent a great temptation to diagnose and, in the end, to judge social behavior. If these tests are not carried out in the context of a fully professional organizational development survey, but rather simply by a certified user of the test without an explicit organizational development consulting context, the results are to a great extent deprived of their context, that is, their meaning for the organization is neither understood nor communicated. The organizational consultant and psychotherapist Klaus Deissler (2008) explains that with the aid of certain methodic gimmicks: experts in diagnostic processes act as if there were social facts which are independent of observer and participant, and thus objective. Following the axiom “the Good Lord placed diagnosis before treatment” an attempt is made to construct diagnostic ultimate justifications which cannot be challenged—although there is hardly an area in the shaping of human relationships which would make the character of social construction clearer than that of diagnosis. In short, diagnoses are socially constructed stipulations by experts, which evaluate human behavior “independently of observers.”

Diagnostic judgments over individuals therefore can be seen as ‘socially’ constructed by experts, who pretend that the instruments they use are independent of the observers influences and therefore objective. The objects of the diagnosis—the candidates—are not given a voice on the experts’ judgments, to ensure the myth of the “independent observer.” Thus those who are judged are not involved in the process of judgment—the experts make their decisions behind the backs or over the heads of their subjects, and a participatory scientific orientation falls by the wayside.

As we know today, so called objective personnel decisions are not always the best in practice. Since this involves not simply logical comparisons of “what should be” with “what is” but rather complex decision processes with different perspectives, objectivity in personnel decisions is not possible. Instead of objectivity there must be reflection on various dimensions in a comprehensible working context where bases for decision making can be discussed and negotiated (see Lang-von-Wins et al., 2008).

It is furthermore frequently disregarded that one of the most common causes for wrong personnel choices is faulty qualification profiles. In this case, the qualifications which are considered necessary do not turn out to be critical for success in practice. Organizations which concentrate too heavily on competence models and tests, tend to lose sight of this connection.

The more organizations commit themselves to one instrument (“We always use the XY test”) the more they lose connection between the test

results, people and challenges of the organization design. Personnel decisions are then based on very questionable foundations. To provide adequate quality, using tests and is a highly professional task, which requires corresponding training and reflective practice lasting a number of years. However test providers usually offer a 2-day seminar plus reflecting three tests followed by formal accreditation to use the test.

Finally we have to consider that working with people on their potential means working in the area of their personal identity. Organizational changes (whether already in process or intended) trigger a change process in the person him- or herself; this can under certain circumstances cause a lessening of reliability. Previous strengths of individuals fall away, while undiscovered idiosyncrasies move to the fore. The personal disclosure and interpretation of idiosyncrasies and weaknesses also harbors a risk for the person: he or she may be of less value for the organization or be placed in a situation of greater competition. During the consultation there is no diagnosis without a corresponding intervention. This means that during a potential assessment the person involved may be irritated about his or her self-image. The associated temporary destabilization of the self-image must therefore be organized so that it can be understood and handled with a view to the future by both the person and the organization.

Finally, to assume that an organization is fixed and the people are inserted into it rather like pieces of a puzzle is simply not consistent with reality. Often there is no one who fits the ideal competence profile. Therefore we need an iterative process to match potentials of individuals with the needs of the organization.

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← Au: In APA style, use numerals when talking about time: 2 days, 17 hr, 3 min, 5 s, 0.22 ms, 4 decades, 1 year, 2 centuries, 4 months, 6 weeks.

← Au: Page number(s)?

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