

## VIRTUAL ASSESSMENT CENTRE

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### Abstract

Nowadays virtualization of human resources is obvious. It is connected with the digitalization and the beginning of the fourth industrial revolution. Assessment centre (AC) is one of the most common methods of recruitment, but changes in society and digitalization change this trend, too.

AC is a systematic selection tool that assesses current capabilities of the participants and determines their future professional development. It is a combined diagnostic method based on monitoring conduct of participants/participant in a diagnostic situation.

Virtual assessment centre (VAC) means that different tasks be solved is in an electronic environment. Otherwise, it has a very similar structure as the classic AC. The aim of the paper is to characterize the VAC as a systematic selection tool, to characterize to basic methods of its structure, analyse advantages and disadvantages of VAC, and compare AC and VAC and identify and diagnose the situation in which it is more efficient to apply the AC or the VAC.

**Key words:** virtual assessment centre, assessment centre, recruitment

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### Introduction

The digitalization of the company processes is around us and HR has to prepare for the fourth industrial revolution. The digitalization of processes and the worldwide availability of the Internet facilitate the communication between human beings and machines (Bettel, 2014). Digitalization is a background for the fourth industrial revolution. The fourth industrial revolution is defined as a robotic automation of industry and a cooperation of people and machines (Arbeitskreis Industrie 4.0, 2013). The system of labour and labour environment is rapidly changing. One example of this is virtual assessment centre.

## **1 Assessment centre**

The oral assessment centre is one of the methods used to recruit people. It is a recruitment method which uses an examination process capable of recruiting people within or outside of a company. It is designed to simulate situations that are common to the rank being tested. Exercises in an assessment can be designed in a structured, evolving or interactive format.

AC is a systematic selection tool that assesses current capabilities of the participants and determines their future professional development. It is a combined diagnostic method based on monitoring conduct of participants/participant in a diagnostic situation (Chadt, 2014).

## **2 Virtual assessment centre**

The virtual assessment centre is a special method for new employee recruitment or a small list of management candidates or current employees. The virtual assessment centre is a complex and flexible product for high quality recruitment and development of present employees.

Candidates solve individual tasks and a model situation which are exactly related to the future job. First they solve the tasks alone and later with other candidates. The duration of this training can be different, for example one week. The analysis of the results is possible to view on-line in real time, therefore companies can get individual reports and they can compare all candidates (Hroník, 2016).

The price of VAC is around 900 Czech crowns in the Czech Republic, the classic assessment centre costs around 4 000 Czech crowns.

## **3 Structure of the assessment centre and virtual assessment centre**

### **3.1 Structure of the assessment centre**

Every company has different recruitments from this recruitment tool and it significantly influences its composition. A required profile is the headstone for this composition. The company has to prepare a position profile, and then it can start the AC preparation. The first company decision is insourcing or outsourcing the AC. The second step is preparation and realization of the AC. The last point of this process is the evaluation and the feedback for candidates.

The most used tasks of the AC are psycho diagnostics, sociometrics, group discussion, group games, individual presentation, role games, in Basket method, case studies, essay, the demonstration of work, knowledge tests and interview with candidate (Svoboda, 1999).

### **3.2 The advantages and disadvantages of the assessment centre**

As well as any other method of recruitment, the AC has its advantages and disadvantages. It is clear, for successful realization the advantages have to compensate the disadvantages and the AC.

The most mentioned advantages of the traditional assessment centre are in the following text. They are complexness, flexibility, the possibility to compare the candidates, feedback, loyalty.

The complexness of the evaluation brings high validity of this recruitment method. One candidate is evaluated by more assessors in the different situations; it brings impartiality to the evaluation of the candidates (Vaculík, 2010; Woehr, 2003).

The AC uses many different methods. Thanks to this flexibility, every AC can be customized to the need of the actual position (Hroník, 2005).

The possibility to compare the candidates in one place and one time and to observe their interaction is an added value of the AC.

The AC is not only a recruitment tool, but it can also be used for training. Feedback is a great opportunity for candidate evolution and improvement for future challenges (Hroník, 2005).

One advantage the competition also brings to this method is that candidates have to fight for this position and they meet with their competitor. Victory becomes more important for candidates. They value the position more which makes them more loyal to the company (Kyrianová, Gruber, 2006).

After the above mentioned advantages we must also address the disadvantages of the assessment centre too. They are costs and mistakes of the evaluators.

In our opinion the biggest disadvantages of AC are the costs. This method needs lots of time, people, rooms and more. The time demand is high not only for candidates, but also for

evaluators, moderators and HR. We have to compare the financial costs with the selection of the wrong candidates (Kyriánová, 2003).

The human factor is very important during AC. The evaluators can make many mistakes, for example the halo effect, effects of the generalization or effects of the middle value (Hroník, 2002).

### 3.3 Structure of virtual assessment centre

The structure of the virtual assessment centre can differ depending on the job description of each company. In the following text you can find the most common structure of the virtual assessment centre.

**Tab. 1: Methods of the virtual assessment centre**

Method	Description
<b>The knowledge tests</b>	It enables the determination of necessary knowledge for this job, soft skills and the candidate's knowledge of the company.
<b>Psychological tests</b>	It can use traditional or t test or an interpersonal questionnaire. This method is often used in stressful jobs or by the state (Svoboda, 1999).
<b>The business essay and the analyse of the text</b>	The business essay is closed to case studies, but there is not such a detailed assignment. The candidate must solve the real situation with the lower structure from the practise.
<b>The solution of the dilemma</b>	The solution of the dilemma is the situation, where a candidate solves an individual, difficult situation, which is usually connected with practise. The solution of the dilemma can also use case studies or a situation which has more than one possible solution. The case studies can be from a real or theoretical situation (Vodáček et. al., 2006).
<b>Dialog simulator</b>	The dialog simulator tests individual communication skills and the candidates' ability to express themselves in the specific situation.
<b>Group simulation of the real situation</b>	A group simulation of the real situation is used also during the classic assessment centre and it solves the real situation in the interaction with other candidates. The virtual assessment centre uses the group simulation of the real situation in a new view. The candidates are not in personal contact and every candidate is in a different location at a different time. This method has the form of a multilevel discussion forum, for example as chat (Hroník, 2011).
<b>Personal interview</b>	The personal interview can be personal or on-line (for example Skype, Lync).

### 3.4 The advantages and the disadvantages of the virtual assessment centre

The virtual assessment centre has many advantages; of course the advantages of the traditional assessment centre are also the advantages of the virtual assessment centre. Now we would like to mention some additional advantages that the virtual assessment centre has in comparison to the assessment centre. They are saving the evaluator's time, financial savings, low time difficulty for candidates, more candidates during one assessment centre, individual

psycho diagnostic and specific tasks or case studies, which can be detailed more than through the classic assessment centre.

The evaluator doesn't have to stay the entire day at the assessment centre since the virtual assessment centre gives him the possibility to check candidates at any time and at any place. The candidates' evaluation time and their output are shorter.

The virtual assessment centre has on-line administration, so the company saves for example personal costs, the cost of renting rooms and the cost of snacks.

The virtual assessment centre is accessible to all candidates. They can choose a convenient time to solve the task. The candidates do not have to travel and they can solve VAC from around the world.

Maximum for the classic assessment centre is 6 or 7 candidates because it is the limit for the evaluators' focus. VAC offers the possibility to test more people in one assessment.

The candidates are more natural as compared to when they attend the classical assessment centre with other candidates since they are in their natural surroundings.

This method offers you a great individual psycho diagnostic of each candidate.

The virtual assessment centre offers more opportunities for longer tasks, it can be used in more languages and the outputs can be in the appropriate language for the evaluator (Intern materials ŠKODA AUTO Vysoká škola, 2016).

On the other hand, the disadvantages of the traditional assessment centre are not the same for the virtual assessment centre. The majority of the disadvantages of the traditional assessment centre are negated by the virtual assessment centre. Unfortunately the virtual assessment centre has a few of its' own disadvantages and they are mentioned in following text. They are cheating, internet connection and own PC, the disadvantage for older people and the impersonality of the method.

There is a risk of cheating since another person can do the test other than the candidate. However, there is an easy and quick solution to this. The HR manager can meet with the best candidates and find out within a few minutes who was cheating. It is a great combination of this method and personal contact (Intern materials ŠKODA AUTO Vysoká škola, 2016).

For VAC the candidates have to have their own PC and internet connection.

Sometimes older people are not able to work as well with computers and the virtual assessment centre can be a barrier for them to apply for a job.

VAC changes the view on recruitment since there is the absence of personal contact. Some HRs see this point as a disadvantage and others as an advantage. The best solution is the combination of the virtual assessment centre with a personal interview with the best candidates (Lichtenegerová, 2011).

To sum it up, VAC is good selection tool with many advantages. On the other hand it has also disadvantages and for us and colleagues from practise the biggest disadvantage is the missing personal contact. Because of it we see nowadays VAC useful mainly as preselection tool.

#### **4 Interview**

First we discussed and interviewed the experts from different companies, and then we interviewed the candidates from the assessment centre and the virtual assessment centre.

Interview is a quantitative method and we used structured interviews. It is intended to ensure the general information from all the individuals interviewed.

In January and February of 2016, interviews were carried out with implementers, evaluators, the organizers, presenters and graduate assessment centres. The goal of these interviews was to map out the processes of the assessment centre and the virtual assessment centre. We would like to determine the fundamental differences and diagnose the situation in which it is more effective to use the assessment centre or the virtual assessment centre. In order to choose who was interviewed we used the snowball method.

We interviewed 80 implementers, evaluators, the organizers and moderators of industrial companies, telecommunications and banking. We followed the possibility of a different point of view and experience of experts in different professional areas.

The other group of individuals interviewed were assessment centre graduates. An interview was carried out with 120 respondents from different professional areas. The questions were formulated on the basis of the brainstorming and brain writing with recruiters and managers of an industrial company.

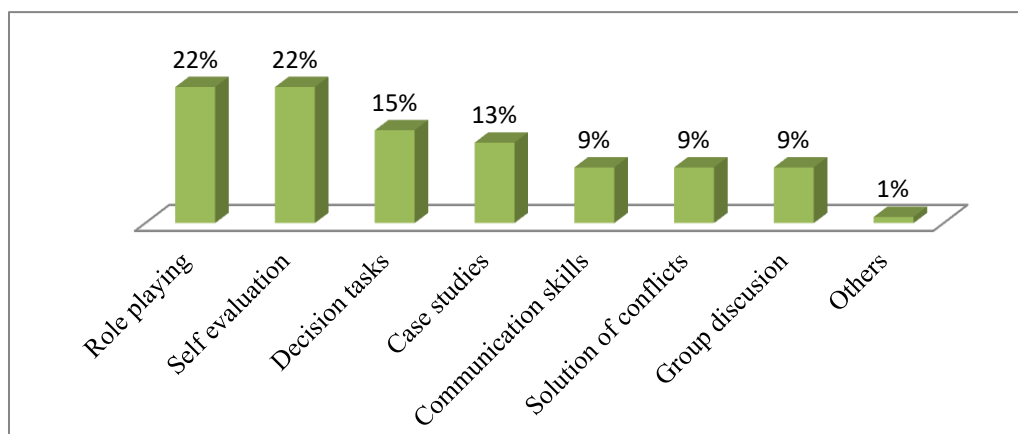
#### 4.1 The outcomes from the interview with the implementers, evaluators, the organizers and moderators

Everyone interviewed from the first group (implementers, assessors, organizers, moderators) agreed that AC is more of a selection method than a development tool. Many of them do not just deal with one area, but they evaluate and organise more areas, at most marketing, accounting, law, HR, sales, logistic, IT, finance and technical development. The majority of interviewed claim, most evaluators are TOP managers (70 %), 15 % create HRs, 10 % leaders and 5 % experts from the branch.

80 % of the individuals interviewed in group one claimed that there are no differences between AC for candidates from different branches. It means that it is not necessary to have evaluators, which are experts in the branch. But they have to be experts in evaluation and for this knowledge, in our opinion, it is necessary to prepare the evaluators. 80 % of the interviewed evaluators have special training for this job. They learn how to evaluate and minimize the mistakes of the evaluations (halo effect, the mistake of the middle value...) and how to describe their opinion and different ideas.

The tasks of the assessment and virtual assessment centre are different for every recruitment, but some methods are used more than others. The following graph depicts the most covered elements in our research.

**Fig. 1: Methods used during AC and VAC**



Source: Own research, 2016

The interviewed practitioners think the advantage of the virtual version is lower stress for candidates, and it allows the candidates to be more natural (22 %). There are lower time difficulties for candidates (33 %) and evaluators plus a possibility to use more evaluators (22

%). Other advantages include the ability to test every candidate's IT knowledge, better environment for introverts, quick language changes to reports and the possibility for more candidates to participate.

This method's biggest disadvantage according to the individuals interviewed is the lack of human contact (31 %), usability for older people (15 %), the risk of a candidate cheating (15 %) and reliance on an external supplier (15%).

To sum it up, experts think VAC has a future. It brings many advantages and it minimizes disadvantages of classic AC, but there is missing human touch. More efficient is used VAC for position where is important IT knowledges or where is not able to get all candidates at one place in one time. They recommended VAC as preselection method or combine it with personal interview. The interviews confirmed our statements in the previous text.

#### **4.2 Interview with candidates of the assessment centre and the virtual AC**

The second group that was interviewed were candidates of the assessment centre and the virtual assessment centre. We interviewed 120 candidates, who had participated in recruitment in different branches from 2011 to 2016. Majority of the candidates had participated in recruitment in 2014 (34 %) and 2015 (50 %).

The biggest difference between the assessment centre and the virtual assessment centre that the interviewed candidates noticed is the limited possibility to observe reaction and nonverbal communication via the virtual assessment centre. On the other hand, they mentioned the possibility to repeat the observation in the virtual version. Another mentioned difference is human contact and stress. The virtual assessment centre does not have human contact, but there is also no contact with other candidates which create lower stress levels.

From respondents - candidates, who go through virtual assessment centre, 85 % prefer the virtual assessment centre to the assessment centre. All of them agreed, the virtual assessment centre have a future.

Advantages mentioned by the interviewed individuals were, for example, language variations (83 %), the opportunity to use more evaluators (43 %), smaller time difficulty for candidates (36 %) or lower stress (36 %). But, on the other hand, the majority of interviewed candidates think that there is a lack of human contact, and that there is also a barrier in



necessity to have good internet connection and one's own computer. The interviewed candidates mentioned that this method can be barrier for older candidates.

To sum it up, the interviewed candidates prefer VAC and it strengthens the importance of this method. The interviewed candidates confirmed the advantages and disadvantages of VAC, which we mentioned in previous text.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion it can be stated that the classical assessment centre is a still modern method for employee recruitment. It is a great combination of methods, which can evaluate the candidates with high validity. On the other hand, the fourth industrial revolution is here and we have to adapt to changes. These changes will be undoubtedly in the HR area as well. The digitalization and virtualization go through the HR processes. We can observe it in the special systems usage for retrieving and saving personal data, in the virtual courses and e-learning or in the recruitment methods.

This situation makes the processes less personal, on the other hand human contact is still irreplaceable. We have to prepare for these changes and find the specific areas where there will be a virtualization benefit and vice versa.

The virtual assessment is the proof of virtualization, and it can be beneficial. Generally the virtual assessment centre uses the reality that the majority of our work is done nowadays in the virtual environment. The examples from practice show that the virtual assessment centre lowers the barriers, not only barriers of time and place, but also language barriers, the price barrier and the barrier of complexity. The low cost is undoubtedly beneficial as well.

In our opinion this tool has a future, but in recruitment human contact is still necessary. Respondents agreed with this idea from practice in our research and 85 % of interviewed candidates of the classic and virtual assessment prefer the virtual assessment centre to the assessment centre. VAC brings same advantages as AC and on top some extra for example lower stress, lower financial costs, savings evaluator's time.

In our opinion the virtual assessment centre is a great new way for recruitment, but there is no human contact. Due to this fact and the mentioned disadvantages of this method we recommend using the virtual assessment centre as preselection tool or in combination with the classic assessment centre or personal interview.

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