

**A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF ASSESSMENT CENTERS FOR
THE SELECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF
SECONDARY-SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS**

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PREFACE

This descriptive study is concerned with the documentation and analysis of the application of assessment center methodology for the selection and development of building-level administrators in school districts in central Kansas and northeastern Oklahoma. The primary objective is to obtain information concerning the current status of assessment center methodology in Kansas and Oklahoma so that other universities or colleges considering operating an assessment center to serve their school districts can see why, when, and how this methodology is being used.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

School districts have traditionally relied on the interview as the primary method for selection of secondary school administrators. Arvey and Campion (1982) concluded that interviews often do not have sufficient reliability and validity for use in personnel selection, and Reilly and Chao (1982) seriously questioned the utility of the selection interview for selecting personnel because of the low level of validity and cost of the interview. According to Reilly and Chao, there was impressive evidence to support the reliability and validity of assessment centers in predicting the performance of managers.

The Problem

Since the traditional interview process for hiring and promoting has been found to be low in reliability and validity, there is need to identify and examine alternative methods for making personnel decisions for hiring and promoting.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to describe how two states, Kansas and Oklahoma, have used the assessment center methodology for selection and development of their secondary school administrators. To accomplish this purpose, eight objectives were defined. They were

to determine: (1) why assessment centers were established, (2) how assessment centers operated, (3) how assessment centers chose their behavior determinants, (4) how assessment centers were funded, (5) assessment centers' purposes and goals, (6) how assessment centers prepared their staffs to achieve these goals, (7) what population the assessment centers served, and (8) the assessment centers' plans for future services.

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions were accepted by the investigator:

1. That the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) assessment center selected for the study was representative of the other NASSP assessment centers in America.
2. That directors and staff members interviewed at the selected assessment centers could provide accurate information on the development and operation of their centers.

Limitations and Scope

Although this study looked at assessment centers in only two states (because of limited time and finances), the scope was broader than it appeared at first glance. One center studied was a NASSP assessment center and was considered representative of the 14 other NASSP assessment centers across the United States. All NASSP assessment centers use the same standard instruments and accreditation procedures. The other assessment center studied developed its own

instruments and did its own validation study, which made it an interesting contrast between a NASSP model and an independent model.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions provide clear and concise meaning of terms used in this study:

Structured Interviews. Rigidly standardized and formal interviews that present the same questions in the same manner and order to each subject.

Leaderless Group Exercises. May have nonassigned roles and assigned roles. In a nonassigned role, the group of assessees (six) is handed short case studies or management problems. As administrators, they are asked to resolve the problems. Problems dealing with students, teachers, and setting of priorities among alternative actions are examples. An example of a leaderless group exercise with an assigned role is one used frequently by assessment centers. Each of six assessees in a group is given a description of a fictitious subordinate he/she is recommending for promotion. The descriptions are formulated so that the candidates are about equally qualified. The assessees study their candidate descriptions and each is then allowed five minutes to make a pitch for its candidate the assessee is sponsoring. After all six assessees are heard, a period of free discussion is followed by a rank-ordering of the job candidates by the assessers from "most deserving" to "least deserving." Assessors observing the group (each assessor commonly observing two assessees) judge the assessees on ability to sell their candidates and what they

have done to aid the group in reaching a decision. Here again, individual skills and group process variables can be observed.

3. In-Basket Exercises. The person taking the exercise is provided with selected background material and references and a package of problems which have built-in priorities, relationships, and required decision making. The assessee is asked to work on the problems in a specific time period as if actually on the job as described in the instructions. In this way, a sample of the person's administrative behavior is obtained.

4. Assessment Center. An organizational entity which functions to evaluate performance or potential for performance of an individual.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Effective Management Process

Administrative Problem Areas and Strategies for Improvement

The literature indicated that school principals had some challenges to overcome before they could become effective managers. According to Fields (1982), one challenge was a lack of training in their formal education programs in skills they needed most to be successful managers. Such things as initiating and maintaining management methods were left to be learned on the job.

Principals also faced a need for more sophistication in communicating school accomplishments to the local public. According to Hodgkinson (1982), the individual school site was the place to start educational change and improvement. This made the school principal the most important leader in the improvement of public schools; therefore, better management training for the principal was needed to help accomplish this public relations.

Like Hodgkinson (1982), Oden (1984) recommended that educational renewal and improvement begin at the individual school unit and that better management of the educational system included strengthening the skills of principals. Oden described low-cost strategies to further

such educational excellence. One of these strategies was the use of assistance programs financed by the federal government to improve the effectiveness of principals, other administrators, and of entire school staffs. He described an individual program to meet these goals, which he called "Administrator Academies," that could be financed for one to three dollars per student. Money to initiate the program would come from previously allocated staff development budgets. Several states (including Arkansas, Florida, Maryland, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina) and some individual school districts established Administrator Academies to improve the skills of educational managers. Initially, these academies provided training in administrative skills only; later, they began to address the task of instructional management. The program placed importance on clinical observation, supervision, and human relations as means of implementing change.

Selection of Key Personnel

The literature indicated that one of the important responsibilities of a school principal was the task of choosing which teacher applicant to recommend to the superintendent and board of education. According to Fuhr (1977), selecting the right teacher by depending on weak and biased profile data was difficult. Most school districts scan the application files, pull those that look promising, and call those candidates for an interview; however, using the standard interviewing process did not provide enough information to judge teaching competencies. Candidates could disguise their weaknesses during an interview by answering all the questions in a positive manner and by

making a good presentation of themselves, but could end up as teacher casualties after one semester. Because of this, Fuhr proposed a pilot model teacher selection program based on performance, which provided better insight into the teaching qualifications of individuals, as opposed to the single interview method. The model Fuhr described consisted of eight steps. The first involved the personnel director of the school district who would initially select and interview a number of applicants. In the second step, the personnel director narrowed the field to four or six candidates and invited them back individually for an interview with a committee, which consisted of the principal and six or seven teachers from the school with the vacancy. The third step consisted of rating each candidate by the committee members in the areas of initiative, compatability, knowledge, and personality. In the fourth step, the final candidates completed a teacher inventory form which presumably indicated whether the person leaned toward a student-centered or teacher-centered approach to learning. In the fifth step, the final candidates taught a 10-minute video-taped mini-lesson to a group of five or six students. The lesson was agreed upon by the candidate and the committee prior to its presentation. In step six, committee members individually analyzed the performance of the candidates through the first five steps and correlated the performances of each candidate with a job description of the position. In step seven, each committee member cast his/her vote for the candidate he/she felt would best fulfill the responsibilities and duties of the vacant position. In step eight, the personnel director counted the votes and recommended the best candidate to the board of education.

The model was time-consuming but justified, when compared to the risk of selecting ineffective teachers. The time and expense of the model was further justified by the supervisors using the videotape of the teacher candidate's mini-lesson for diagnostic procedures.

School districts traditionally relied on the interview as their primary method of selection for their teachers and, more importantly, they have relied on the interview process as their primary method of selecting their secondary school administrators. Arvey and Campion (1982) concluded that interviews often did not have sufficient reliability and validity for use in personnel selection. In 1982, Arvey and Campion completed a summary of prior research and a review of recent research on the employment interview. In their study, validity was usually judged by correlating interview judgments with actual one-the-job performance of a candidate. Reliability was usually judged by correlating evaluations of different interviewers who had rated the same job applicants. Their findings consistently reported low reliability and validity for the employment interview when done by a single interviewer. Another shortcoming of the employment interview was the interviewer's lack of capacity to integrate information. Some of the other findings were: (1) a lack of consistency in material covered in an unstructured interview, (2) the likelihood of interviewers weighting the same information differently, (3) the interviewees' responses being affected by the interviewers' attitudes, (4) unfavorable information influencing interviewers more than favorable information, (5) interviewers making their decisions in the first five minutes of the interview, and (6) early impressions being more important than factual information in shaping the interviewers' evaluation.

On the other hand, Arvey and Campion's (1982) research indicated that interviews done by a board or panel had greater reliability and validity. For instance, a board or panel forced the interviewers to share their different perceptions and to become aware of irrelevant inferences made about nonjob-related variables. Reliability and validity of the employment interview were also improved by a careful linking of job analysis and the content of the interview. Some of the research suggested that interviewers should be sitting on the sidelines and observing the candidates perform tasks like giving a speech or participating in a group discussion--an exercise which is an important component in the assessment center approach. This approach is discussed in the next section of this review of literature.

Good Development of Assessment Centers

Specific Components of an Assessment Center

The purpose of this section of the review of literature was to define and describe the characteristics and components which made up an assessment center and which provided a general description of the minimum requirements for consideration and accreditation as an assessment center. According to Moses and Byham (1977), the following criteria had to be met: the assessment center had to use multiple assessment techniques in its evaluation process. One of these techniques had to be a simulation that required the participant to use the same behavior dimensions required by a particular job by responding to situational stimuli that resembled stimuli in that particular job. Some of these simulations would include group exercises, in-basket

exercises, and fact-finding exercises. Multiple assessors had to be used to evaluate the participants. The assessors had to be trained before they could participate in a center. Judgments that would result in a recommendation for promotion, specific training, or development had to be dependent on proving information from assessors and techniques. The overall evaluation of the participants' behaviors had to be done by the assessors in a separate time from the observation of behaviors. The simulation exercises used to tap a variety of predetermined behaviors had to be tested for reliability, objectivity, and relevancy before they were used. Analysis of relevant job behaviors had to be used to determine the dimensions, characteristics, and attributes used in the evaluation process.

Aside from the specific requirements of a legitimate assessment center, Moses and Byham (1977) described critical factors in the establishment of an assessment center. One was the choosing of the kinds of qualities or dimensions that would be evaluated in the center. According to Moses and Byham:

Generally, these dimensions should be ones that are stable and do not change rapidly over time, and are observable using assessment center techniques, can be definable and meaningfully interpreted, and make sense to the organization (p. 6).

Another critical factor considered was the assessment technique. Generally, no single technique provided information on all the dimensions to be evaluated. Research indicated that certain techniques provided information relevant to certain dimensions. For example, standardized mental ability tests worked best for measuring intellectual abilities. Interpersonal skills were best evaluated by live interpersonal interaction with others. Administrative skills, like planning and decision

making, were best evaluated through an individual exercise called the "in-basket" exercise. Finally, the most critical component of the assessment process was the quality of the judges or assessors. The assessor had to be free of bias, capable of assimilating much information quickly, and perceived by his/her organization as representing the best that organization had to offer.

School Uses

The most common use of assessment centers by schools was for the selection of secondary school principals. The model used most often for this purpose was the model developed in 1975 by the NASSP and the American Psychological Association (APA). According to Education USA ("The Spy Principle Works for Selecting Principals," 1982), a team of industrial psychologists interviewed a wide range of school personnel and came up with 12 skill areas associated with successful assistant principals and principals: problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, oral and written communication, range of interests, personal motivation, and educational values. Simulation exercises and tests were designed to evaluate the degree to which the assessees possessed the skills. According to Hersey (1983), in a typical assessment center, six assessors observed and recorded the behavior of the 12 participants in the 12 skill areas or dimensions. The assessments were based on the use of the dimensions with two in-basket exercises, a semi-structured interview, a fact finding and decision making exercise with an oral presentation to a live audience, and an analysis and group discussion of a hypothetical case study. The six assessors discussed each

participant's observed behavior and reached a consensus regarding performance in the 12 dimensions. The assessors prepared a comprehensive report for each candidate which described his/her strengths, areas for improvement, and suggestions for the development of these weak areas. This comprehensive report was given to each candidate in an intensive feedback session. This allowed the candidate to ask questions and understand the results provided in the report.

A typical NASSP Assessment Center ran for three consecutive days. At the end of the three days, a summary placement recommendation was made. The candidate was either recommended or not recommended.

The NASSP Assessment Project was expanded in 1982 to include the building and testing of effective developmental packages for use with potential and current school administrators. Guidelines were established for the development of both materials and support processes in administrative and interpersonal skill areas. The interpersonal skill areas included: problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, and sensitivity. In 1983, the NASSP signed a developmental contract with Moses and Associates, Inc., to build a training course for integrating assessment and development. The training course was for administrators who demonstrated a moderate to high level of skill in the NASSP Assessment Center evaluation process. The course strengthened the administrative and interpersonal skills of the administrators by relating their skills to a self-analysis of development needs following assessment center feedback. A prototypical school district was simulated and multiple sources of information were used to provide feedback to the participants. Behavior modeling principles were used to identify and personalize examples of effective

performance in: problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, and sensitivity. These administrative and interpersonal skills were then practiced in a learning environment created by using organizational simulation principles.

The NASSP Assessment Center model was well accepted because it was validated by an independent Michigan State University research team during 1979-81. According to Schmitt, Noe, Meritt, and Fitzgerald (1984), the sample was comprised of 153 school administrators from school districts all over the country who had been evaluated at assessment centers between 1976 and 1981. Fifteen behaviorally anchored rating scales were developed by job analysis interviews conducted in 13 different school districts over the country. These rating scales were used for one set of criterion measurements in the study and administered to the supervisors of each of the 153 administrators, along with two teachers and two support staff personnel from the administrator's school. Also, seven climate measures for different job-performance dimensions were developed from the job-analysis interviews. They were administered by two teachers, two support staff, and four students in each of the 153 administrators' schools. These eight were asked to describe the school climate relating to curriculum issues, student activities, support services, staff selection, evaluation and development, community relations, school plant maintenance, and structured communication. The results of the validity study showed that placement recommendations were significantly related to all but two of the performance dimensions as rated by supervisors. Results also showed correlations between placement recommendations to teacher ratings of performance, with three exceptions. The assessment

center dimensions that showed high and consistent correlation with job performance were: leadership, oral communication, organizational ability, decisiveness, judgment, and problem analysis. The results did not show a high correlation between assessment center skill dimension ratings and student perception of the school climate. Results indicated assessment centers were effective selection devices in most educational settings. The significant validities observed for most performance dimensions suggested that assessment centers were valid predictors of job performance. According to Hersey (1983), the NASSP Assessment Center model was tested for nine years and was proven to be a very effective tool for identifying talented administrative leadership.

Other Uses and Other Applications

According to Moses and Byham (1977), more than 1,000 organizations throughout the world were using the assessment center method. More than 30,000 individuals were evaluated through the assessment center process yearly and the number was increasing each year. The largest use of assessment centers was for the identification of supervisory potential. Bell Telephone assessed at least 10,000 potential supervisors each year and used the information obtained from the assessment for promotional and for training development decisions. Assessment centers were originally developed for selecting management personnel, but the process was also used for individual counseling, management development, and organizational development. Initially, only large organizations with great manpower needs used the assessment center method, but over the years the method was used successfully by

civilian and military agencies, universities, and by many smaller organizations.

According to Moses and Byham (1977), the first industrial use of assessment centers was in the early 1950's by Robert K. Greenleaf and Douglas W. Bray at American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) Company in their longitudinal research project, which was a Management Progress Study. The purpose was to trace the growth and development of a large sample of young business managers during their careers in the telephone business. A research assessment center was developed to determine the initial effectiveness of the sample. The process lasted three and one-half days and used leaderless group exercises, business games, in-basket exercises, and in-depth interviews, with a host of psychological and personality measures. The business managers were rated on 25 dimensions for a summative prediction of the likelihood of reaching middle management in a 10-year period. The results from this study helped establish the validity of the assessment center process. The study showed strong relationships between predictions made by the assessment centers and subsequent career progress.

Some of the managers from the telephone companies in the management progress study were so impressed with the assessment method that they asked for an assessment program to select first level foremen. This program was developed in 1958. It became the first operational assessment program for line use. It was a modification of the management progress study assessment center method, with more emphasis placed on behavioral data than on test data. The scope of the assessment center activities gradually expanded at the Bell System to the

point where over 150,000 men and women participated in an assessment center program of one type or another.

More organizations began adapting the AT&T assessment method-- companies such as: Standard Oil of Ohio, International Business Machines (IBM), General Electric, Sears and Roebuck, and Caterpillar Tractor. Soon the assessment center method was being used internationally by Shell Brazil, IBM World Trade, and the Canadian government.

According to Thornton and Byham (1982), assessment center methodology can be used to predict potential success in any type position, but 95% of the time assessment centers were used for the selection and promotion of supervisors and managers in business and government. During the 1970's, however, several nontraditional uses of assessment center methodology began to emerge. Some of these were for: (1) establishing a criterion for personnel research, (2) establishing a criterion for the evaluation of professional competency, (3) career planning, (4) nonsupervisory-nonmanagement selection, and (5) nontraditional (unusual) management evaluation. Two companies that used assessment center methodology for personnel research were the Metropolitan Transit Authority of New York City and AT&T. The Metropolitan Transit Authority of New York City used this methodology pre-assessment and post-assessment of a group participating in a supervisory training program. AT&T used the assessment center methodology to assess the effectiveness of its behavior modeling training.

One of the later applications of assessment center methodology was for evaluating professional competence for licensing and certification. The American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP), with

the help of Douglas Bray, developed an assessment center for the position of clinical psychologists as part of the certification of diplomates. Job analysis techniques were used to develop a list of dimensions and special exercises were built to assess these dimensions. This methodology for certification was run in some states as an alternative to the standard ABPP procedures for certification. The University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy developed an assessment center to assess the professional competencies of its pharmacists. An example of criterion-based learning to establish educational competence was the Alverno College Faculty Assessment Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Alverno developed some competencies that had to be achieved by its undergraduates. The Alverno faculty came up with the following eight competencies: effective communication abilities, analytical capability, problem-solving ability, valuing in a decision making context, effective social interaction, effectiveness in individual-environment relationships, responsible involvement in the contemporary world, and aesthetic responsiveness. Paper and pencil tests were used to evaluate some of the knowledge competencies, but most of the competencies were assessed by assessment center-like exercises. The Alverno program achieved wide acceptance from its faculty members, its students, and its community. The Alverno Assessment Center received national attention and was awarded federal grants to pay for the recording of its experiences and making them available to other interested colleges. Another college that used the assessment center methodology as an educational criterion was Nova University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. From 1974 to 1976, Nova University used an assessment center methodology to assess the leadership skills of its

students. The Nova Assessment Center used videotape and paper-and-pencil technology to gather the assessment center data. Brigham Young University offered a two-and-a-half day assessment center program for its Master of Business Administration (MBA) students' career and development planning. Organizational behavior students served as the assessors for the program.

Nonsupervisory and nonmanagement assessment center programs were used by AT&T for selecting its sales persons. Bell companies filled some first-level, nonprofessional engineering positions with candidates who had gone through its assessment program. The Canadian Civil Service Commission used an in-basket exercise to predict the advancement of its scientists. The U.S. State Department used a paper-and-pencil test for initial screening of its foreign service officers. The candidates that passed the paper-and-pencil test went through the assessment center where they were assessed by: a panel interview, a presentation, an in-basket, a writing sample, and a leaderless group discussion. One of the uses of assessment center methodology that experienced rapid growth was the use of assessment centers to select sergeants, lieutenants, captains, and chiefs in police and fire departments. Sixty-five cities and state agencies used this methodology for selection of its managers in police and fire departments. However, 90% of all the recent court cases dealing with the utilization of assessment centers involved the selection of police and fire-fighting employees. According to Thornton and Byham (1982):

We believe many cities and states are not taking the methodology seriously. They are not spending the money necessary to install and run an assessment center correctly. Instead, they are spending much larger sums of

money on lawyers in trying to defend selection decisions after the fact (p. 370).

Recognition of National Concerns for
Education Leadership

Commission Report on Excellence

Due to a widespread public belief that something was wrong with the educational systems in America, Secretary of Education T. H. Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) on August 26, 1981. The purpose of the commission was to examine the quality of education in America. The commission completed its report on April 26, 1983. According to the NCEE (1983), our educational systems were undermined by a rising tide of mediocrity that could threaten our competitive edge in world markets and threaten our democratic society which is dependent on a high level of shared education. This mediocrity was documented in several different areas of decline. Some of the areas were: a decline in the College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT), a decline in science achievement scores, and a decline in average tested achievement of students graduating from college.

The commission concluded that the declines in educational performance were largely the results of inadequacies in the way the educational process was conducted, especially in content, expectations, time, and teaching. The commission reported that the current declining trend stemmed more from weakness of purpose, confusion of vision, underuse of talent, and lack of leadership, than from conditions beyond our control. The commission further concluded that effective

Leadership was necessary to mobilize the essential raw materials needed to reform the educational systems in America. Since principals and superintendents played an important leadership role in raising school and community support for the educational reforms proposal, the commission believed that school boards should consciously develop necessary leadership skills at the school and district levels.

The commission also stated that there was broad public support for education in America and that the public clearly understood the primary importance of education in building a satisfying life, an enlightened and civil society, strong economy, and a secure nation. The public felt education was a top priority for additional federal funds.

Leadership in Educational Administration

In partial response to the "Commission Report on Excellence," the United States Congress enacted the "Leadership in Educational Administration Development act of 1984" under Title IX of the "Human Services Reauthorization Act," Public Law 98-558, October 30, 1984. According to the Leadership in Educational Administration Act (LEAA) (1984), technical assistance centers were to be established in each state. This would improve the level of student achievement in elementary and secondary schools through improvement of leadership skills of the elementary and secondary school administrators.

These centers would design programs to: (1) improve administrators' skills in assessing and improving school climates, (2) assess school curriculum, (3) improve skills in instructional analysis, (4) develop techniques for evaluating teacher performance, and (5) upgrade

communication, problem-solving, student discipline, time management, and budgetary skills.

Each state was to be appropriated \$150,000 a year to enter into contracts with local educational agencies, intermediate school districts, state educational agencies, institutions of higher education, and private or nonprofit organizations to establish the technical assistance centers. The technical assistance centers were required to: (1) provide services to school administrators from any local educational agency in the state served by that contractor, (2) record information on school leadership skills, (3) assess individual administrator's leadership skills, (4) run leadership training programs for new school administrators and conduct leadership skill seminars, (5) operate consulting programs on leadership skills, (6) provide training curricula and materials on leadership skills, (7) operate programs which will bring in executives from business and scholars from various institutions of higher education and provide internships in business (and effective school districts) to school administrators in order to improve the leadership skills of the administrators, (8) supply information on leadership skills associated with effective schools, and (9) develop model administration projects.

The LEAA authorized funds for the program from 1985 through 1990. The technical assistance centers were to have a three-year contract that could be renewed for another three years at a 50% reduction in federal funding. The contractors were required to match federal funds and the contractors were required to continue its center after federal funds terminated. As of December 17, 1984, no federal funds had been appropriated to implement the authorizing provisions of the act.

Legal Aspects of Fair and Open Hiring and
Promotion Procedures

Studies Related to School Uses

According to the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) (Advisory Commission on Sex Equality in Education, 1975):

The chief executive officer of the public school system--the superintendent of schools--whether state or local, elected or appointed, is legally responsible for implementation of equal opportunity (p. 4).

In the past, schools, like other employers, have associated different levels of authority and different positions with gender. As a consequence, women in school staffs have been concentrated in lower level positions and in certain areas of work, such as elementary teachers, librarians, teachers' aides, and teachers of clerical courses. Not many women have broken into administrative ranks. According to the AASA (Advisory Commission on Sex Equality in Education, 1975)

Less than one percent of the superintendents of schools and less than six percent of the deputy, associate, and assistant superintendents are women. Less than two percent of the senior high school principals are women. The number of women principals declined from fifty-five percent in 1928 to thirteen percent in 1973 (p. 2).

Equal employment opportunity is the law and its intent is to eliminate discrimination in employment based on gender, race, color, and religion. It does not matter if a school system does not intend to discriminate. Definitive rulings established that it was the consequences of employment practices, not the intent, that determined violation of the law; therefore, any employment procedure, however neutral in intent, that resulted in a disparate effect on women and minorities constituted unlawful discrimination. To prevent discriminatory

personnel policies and procedures, the personnel staff should use job-related criteria in their recruitment and selection procedures. The personnel staff should develop evaluation and appraisal programs based on objective measurable factors that will ensure equal opportunity in promotion.

Studies Related to Private Industry and Government

From 1964 to 1972, the equal employment and affirmative action legislation created a demand for selection programs based on job relevance. According to Moses and Byham (1977):

Since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed and particularly since the landmark Supreme Court decision on personnel selection (Griggs vs Duke Power) organizations have continually compared their selection program at all levels against the yardstick of job relevance. As Chief Justice Burger put it in his opinion in the Griggs vs Duke Power case, the touchstone of compliance is job relatedness (pp. 34-35).

Organizations began throwing out nonjob related selection devices such as psychological tests and began looking for something to use. Many organizations in industry and government turned to the assessment center method for selection and promotion of personnel because the assessment center method was fair for any race or sex. The assessment center based its selection instruments on content validity, which allows an organization to put this type of selection device into operation quicker than procedures requiring other forms of validity. Another way organizations responded to pressure from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission was to change the method of input into the assessment center programs. Traditionally, the usual way of obtaining

people for assessment was through supervisory nomination. Soon organizations began to use self-nomination to avoid the possible biases of immediate supervisors and made the procedure more open to everyone.

New Direction in Affirmative Action

Hiring programs that favored minorities were coming under Justice Department attack. According to Richey (1985):

The U.S. Justice Department is gearing up for an all-out attack on affirmative action employment programs that it says discriminate against whites by granting 'preferential treatment' to blacks, women, and other minorities (p. 1).

The Justice Department recommended that 51 affirmative-action programs across the United States eliminate unfair racial or other hiring quotas for minorities. The Reagan Administration was opposed to using race or gender-based numerical quotas to meet affirmative action goals. Justice officials reported that past remedies to eliminate discrimination were themselves discriminatory. The Justice Department began contacting 51 city programs because of a 1984 Supreme Court decision concerning the Memphis Fire Department. The decision of the Supreme Court was that the Memphis officials could not negate the fire department's seniority system to protect black firefighters from being laid off. The Justice Department officials interpreted the Memphis decision as outlawing the use of quotas based on race or gender in affirmative-action programs. On April 1, 1985, District Court Judge Charles Richey ruled the District of Columbia's fire department violated the rights of white firefighters by promoting blacks with less seniority. Judge Richey based his decision on the belief that the white firefighters' rights were unnecessarily trammled in regard to

promotions within the fire department and ordered the District of Columbia to redraft the fire department's affirmative-action program.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

The instrument, a summary of development and refinement of the instrument, and the instruments' reliability and limitations is discussed in this chapter. The collection and analysis of data is described and the selected sample from which the data were obtained is discussed. The study was a descriptive study which documented the existing applications and uses the two sample assessment centers presented.

The Sample

The selected sample consisted of the assessment centers at Wichita State University and the University of Tulsa. The Wichita State University Assessment Center was chosen because it was a NASSP Assessment Center and therefore was representative of the other 14 NASSP Assessment Centers established in the United States. All NASSP Assessment Centers use the same standardized instruments and go through the same accreditation procedures.

The University of Tulsa Assessment Center was selected because of its originality. It developed its own instruments and did its own validation study. Both assessment centers used structured interviews, leaderless group exercises, and in-basket exercises, but the University of Tulsa Assessment Center staff developed a new personality inventory called the "Hogan Personality Inventory."

Instrumentation

To achieve the objectives stated in Chapter I of this study, a structured interview schedule was designed. The interview schedule consisted of 13 questions. After the initial interview schedule was designed, it was refined by a testing specialist at the Department of Human Services Rehabilitations Assessment Center in Tulsa. Every attempt was made to design questions that were not loaded in one direction, biased, or emotionally toned. The same interview schedule was used at Wichita State University's Assessment Center and at the University of Tulsa's Assessment Center. Although the use of a structured interview brought more rigidity into the documentary analysis, the structure was needed to permit formulation of scientific generalizations and comparisons in documenting both assessment centers. Errors in recording responses were reduced by tape recording the interviews; however, the reliability of the interviews was dependent on the respondents answering the questions honestly and without bias.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for the documentary analysis of Wichita State University's Assessment Center and the University of Tulsa's Assessment Center was gathered from structured interviews with the directors of the two centers. Data was also obtained from structured interviews with two additional staff members at the University of Tulsa's Assessment Center. Hard data was also available on each center, and additional data was obtained by the direct observation of the University of Tulsa's Assessment Center in operation. The interviews provided

information on the establishment, operation, instruments, funding, purposes, goals, population served, and future plans for the two assessment centers. The hard data from both assessment centers provided information on the validation, accreditation, and instrumentation at the two assessment centers. The direct observation at the University of Tulsa's Assessment Center consisted of the observation of six potential principals going through a leaderless group exercise and the observation of the scoring of the participants by the assessors. The recordings of the interviews were typed and analyzed for comparison and the formulation of scientific generalizations. The time spent observing the University of Tulsa's Assessment Center in operation made the synthesis of the data from the interviews easier and more accurate.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter includes the findings, based on the eight objectives stated in the introductory chapters, which are derived from the structured interviews and hard data. For the sake of clarity, this chapter was divided into two main sections. The first covers the findings describing how the University of Tulsa used assessment center methodology for the selection and development of its secondary school administrators in northeastern Oklahoma. The second covers findings on how Wichita State University used the NASSA assessment center methodology for the selection and development of its school administrators in central Kansas. (The Wichita State University Assessment Center is an accredited NASSP Assessment Center.)

University of Tulsa Assessment Center

1. Why the center was established. The assessment center was established as a result of a discussion with superintendents regarding the evaluation of incumbent administrators and the assessment of entry-level administrators. A presentation was made to county superintendents by the University of Tulsa and at that time the county superintendents wanted the University to pursue the program for assessing incumbent administrators.

2. How the assessment center operated. During the summer of 1984, 103 administrators participated in an intensive, two-day assessment program which provided a multi-rating of each participant on seven predetermined dimensions. The assessment consisted of an in-basket exercise, two interviews, two leaderless group discussions, and an oral presentation. The assessment program also included a battery of paper-and-pencil measures which included the California Psychology Inventory, the Hogan Personality Inventory, and the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory. These cognitive paper-and-pencil tests provided a comprehensive personality and interest profile for each participant. Behaviorally anchored rating scales were completed for each participant by a team of three to six trained observers for each exercise and judgments were reported based on pooled information from all observers. Since there were 103 incumbent administrators in the Tulsa School District to be assessed, the program was divided into four classes of approximately 25 incumbent principals. On four Mondays and Tuesdays in June, a different class went through the assessment. In July, each incumbent principal assessed took one of three seminars entitled "Managing Yourself," "Managing People," and "Managing Your Organization." The seminars lasted three five-hour days. From the seminars, each individual developed an independent study project which was worked on back in their school districts. The principals were urged to complete their projects in the first semester. The projects included time management, curriculum improvement, and communication improvement between themselves and their subordinates. All the assessment material and a copy of each individual's independent study project was forwarded to the superintendent of the incumbent principal.

The program to assess potential administrators was developed because of the superintendents' enthusiasm over the incumbent assessment program. They asked the University of Tulsa to develop some screening that would enable them to look more objectively at the applicants for administrative positions in their school districts. The entry-level screening program for administrators was a simplified version of the incumbent assessment process. The potential principals approved by school districts presented themselves at the University of Tulsa Assessment Center on two consecutive Saturdays. During the first Saturday, the participants took approximately six hours of paper-and-pencil tests and in-basket exercises. The next Saturday, they were subjected to a five-minute video interview where they were asked questions prepared by the superintendents. In addition, they participated in a small, leaderless group discussion session. Again, behaviorally anchored rating scales were completed for each participant by a team of trained observers. The contents of the paper-and-pencil tests, in-basket exercises, and micro-video tape were forwarded to the superintendents for review.

3. How the assessment center chose its behavior determinants.

The behavior dimensions chosen to make the framework of its assessment program were derived from a nine-month, extensive job analysis of secondary school administrators in northeastern Oklahoma. The assessment center staff conducted 640 individual interviews with secondary school administrators in northeastern Oklahoma. Realizing that many of the interviews were similar, they reduced them to 70 individual interviews that were representative of actual school problems. From these 70 problems, they identified seven managerial dimensions which

formed the framework of their assessment program. The seven dimensions were: organizational ability, problem solving, decision making, communication skills, interpersonal competency, leadership ability, and stress tolerance.

4. How the assessment center was funded. The University of Tulsa paid the start-up cost, which amounted to \$225 for each incumbent principal assessed for development, and \$150 for each participant going through the entry-level assessment for selection purposes.

5. What the assessment center purposes and goals were. The University of Tulsa had two purposes in mind when it established the assessment center. The primary purpose or reason for establishing the center was to provide a service that was vitally needed by the public schools (a center for the selection and development of its secondary school principals). The secondary purpose was to provide an archival research base for the faculty and students at the University of Tulsa. After operating the assessment center for one year, enough data was accumulated to provide a research base for the University of Tulsa's doctoral students for several years. Such data would continue to be accumulated for as long as the center operated.

The goal to provide professional development of the school districts' incumbent principals was met so successfully that the superintendents asked the assessment center to expand its services selection of entry-level administrators.

6. How the assessment center prepared its staff to achieve their goals. Once the initial research was done to identify the dimensions to assess and develop the instruments, assessors or observers had to

be trained to make up a team to assess the participants in each class coming through the assessment center.

The assessors or observers came from two sources. One source was the subject matter experts in the field who had held principal jobs or may have been principals when asked to be observers. The other source of observers was graduate students who were trained in personnel selection and psychometrics.

The assessment center used two observers for each participant going through the program. During the first year the assessment center ran its program, the observers received one day of training. Thereafter, the center developed a formal training process for its observers that covered one exercise a day and lasted one week. It developed observers' manuals from a seminar in the assessment center process at the University of Tulsa and developed a video-tape library for training observers.

7. What population the assessment center served. The assessment center served the 16 school districts making up the greater metropolitan area of Tulsa, Oklahoma. These 16 districts included approximately 300 administrators and each district agreed to have one-third of those administrators assessed during each school year. The incumbent administrators and the entry-level candidates, were chosen by their school districts to go through the assessment center program.

8. The assessment center's plans for future services. The University of Tulsa Assessment Center planned to emphasize development of those administrators already holding jobs in the greater metropolitan area of Tulsa, since there were not many vacancies for principals in the Tulsa Public School system.

Wichita State University Assessment Center

1. Why the center was established. This center was established to provide Central Kansas school districts with identification of skills and attributes of candidates for school principalship positions for elementary and secondary schools. Also, the center was established to provide the participants with information regarding their own strengths and needs for improvement and to stimulate their thinking about career goals and self-development. Finally, the center was established to provide information for the school administration to use in planning inservice activities.

2. How the assessment center operated. The assessment process was held three times a year with 12 persons attending each session in October, February, and April, for a total assessment of 36 people per year.

Since the Wichita State University Assessment Center is an accredited NASSP Assessment Center, it used the materials and exercises developed by the NASSP, with the help of the Division of Industrial and Organizational Psychology of the American Psychological Association. In each session, 12 potential administrators went through two days of intensive participation under the observation of six assessors. The candidates participated in six exercises during this period, which included two leaderless groups. One group had an assigned role, while the other had an nonassigned role. There were two strenuous, in-basket exercises which involved problems which would typically face an administrator. There was an oral presentation exercise whereby the candidate working with a resource person was given some minimal facts

and data which he/she was expected to integrate into a written report and an oral presentation, which was given to a mock board of education. The last exercise was an exit interview which explored his range of interest, motivation, and sensitivity to people. The exit interview also looked at a candidate's experiences and how he dealt with these experience.

Assessors then spent three days developing a consensus report detailing the candidates' strengths and weaknesses. The assessment program involved over 400 pieces of data collected for each candidate. Each piece of data was juried by the six assessors and there had to be agreement on those data. An extensive interview was held with each participant to review the assessment report and to make suggestions for personnel development. At that point, the assessment report was forwarded to the appropriate school district. The candidate was either highly recommended, recommended, or not recommended. A positive recommendation indicated only that the candidate had the strengths necessary for building leadership in an elementary or secondary school and did not mean that he/she would be selected. The candidate's other data, such as references and job and educational history, were also considered in the selection process by the school district.

3. How the assessment center chose its behavior determinants.

Since the assessment center was a NASSP Assessment Center, the behavior determinants or skill dimensions were provided by the Association. The NASSP, with the help of a team of industrial psychologists from the APA, conducted a job analysis prior to the development of its first assessment center and pinpointed the 12 dimensions that are now

assessed in all NASSP Assessment Centers. The 12 dimensions of behavior were: problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, oral communication, written communication, range of interest, personal motivation, and educational values.

4. How the assessment center was funded. Wichita State University provided the seed money to initiate its center. The front-load expenses included the cost of paying for the NASSP training fee of \$150 for each assessor trained for the Wichita State University Assessment Center and the cost of the NASSP exercises and packets for 12 participants at approximately \$400. Each participating school district paid \$175 for materials and training for each assessor that school district provided. Each participating school district paid \$125 for each candidate the assessment center assessed. Therefore, each school district paid the cost for providing trained assessors from its district and paid for each individual sent through the assessment center.

Wichita State University provided the space, a director, an assistant director, clerical assistance, and program coordination. The center was run on a nonprofit basis and the front-end expense was paid off gradually from the individual fees the school district paid for each candidate it sent through the center.

5. What the assessment center purposes and goals were. The goals of the center were twofold. The main goal was to serve the Kansas School Districts by improving the quality of building-level administrators in the schools of central Kansas. The secondary goal was to develop an extensive data base that would identify strengths

and weaknesses that represented the needs of those wishing to become school principals and to direct the university's existing programs in educational administration to meet these needs. Also, the Wichita State University staff expected to develop short courses or workshops designed to address specific topics related to skill areas.

The purpose of the center was to provide the school districts in central Kansas with the identification of skills and attributes of aspirants for school principalship positions. The center was to provide the school district with an objective profile of the candidate's performance and a recommendation of either highly recommended, recommended, or not recommended. This assessment report provided predictive data to be used with the school districts' other data available: references; job history; education history; or interview information which focused on past performance, character or personality, but did not provide appropriate insight into future job performance.

6. How the assessment center prepared its staff to achieve its goals. Selected principals and central office personnel from participating school districts were trained by NASSP personnel to be assessors in an intensive, three-day training period. In addition, all university staff participating in the assessment program had to be trained by the NASSP personnel in the three-day training session. On completion of training, each assessor must have met minimum standards in order to be certified to participate in the assessment center.

7. What population the assessment center served. The center served a nine-school district consortium in central Kansas. Each of the nine school districts sent people through the assessment training session, which gave them the privilege of sending their administrative

aspirants through the assessment center. Wichita State University ran two centers for the school districts in Wichita and a third center for the other school districts.

8. The assessment center's plans for future services. Wichita State University was considering opening a satellite center in western Kansas to meet the assessment needs of the school districts there.

Other plans included the incorporation of new assessment exercises in its next center. The university also planned to collaborate with the NASSP on the development of prescriptive materials for the assessment center alumni. (Wichita State University Assessment Center is a participant in the national consortium of schools, universities, and the NASSP, which is in the process of designed and field-testing developmental materials to be used as a follow-up to the assessment procedure.) The university also plans to present training programs throughout the year for assessment center alumni and others. In addition, the university plans to be involved with the Springfield Developmental Seminar, an advanced skills development model piloted by the NASSP. The first session for their assessment graduates was held in Lincoln, Nebraska, on February 27, 1985.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter includes a summary of the findings from both assessment models studied and based upon the eight objectives stated in the introductory chapter. Conclusions will be drawn from the results of these findings to relate to practical considerations.

Summary

Since the theoretical questions of the interviews unreliability and nonvalidity for use in personnel selection was already established by Arvey and Campion (1982) and the theoretical question of reliability and validity of assessment center methodology for predicting performance was already established by Reilly and Chao (1982), a descriptive study of how two states, Kansas and Oklahoma, were applying assessment center methodology for the selection and development of their secondary school administrators was conducted. The intent of the study was to document and analyze the different methodologies used at the two assessment centers so that other universities or colleges considering operating an assessment center to serve their school districts could see what other states were doing in this field.

To accomplish this purpose, the study focused on eight objectives or questions to explore. The eight objectives covered were: (1) why the assessment centers were established, (2) how the centers operated,

(3) how the center chose their behavior determinants or dimensions to assess, (4) how the centers were funded, (5) the centers' purposes and goals, (6) how the centers trained their staffs, (7) what population the centers served, and (8) what the centers' future service plans were.

Both the University of Tulsa and Wichita State University had dual purposes and goals in mind when they established their assessment centers. The University of Tulsa wanted to establish an assessment center to serve its constituent school districts in the development of the school districts' building-level administrators by identifying the administrators' strengths and weaknesses and by providing seminars to correct these weaknesses. The University of Tulsa also wanted to establish an assessment center because it would provide an archival research base for its faculty and graduate students.

Wichita State University wanted to establish an assessment center to serve its constituent school district in the selection process of building-level administrators by providing predictatory data and an objective profile of the candidate. Wichita State University also wanted to provide a data base for their education department to draw upon in order to identify common needs of aspirant administrators going through the assessment process. The education department wanted to direct and design classes to address these common needs identified from the data base.

The University of Tulsa Assessment Center operated an intensive, two-day assessment program which included a multi-rating of each participant on seven dimensions by trained observers during six exercises, which included: an in-basket exercise, two interviews, two

leaderless groups, and an oral presentation. The program also included a battery of paper-and-pencil measures.

Wichita State University operated an intensive, two-day assessment program in which the candidates participated in six exercises while being observed by six assessors. The exercises were: two leaderless groups, two in-basket exercises, an oral presentation, and an exit interview.

The University of Tulsa completed an extensive job analysis of secondary school administrators in northeastern Oklahoma and identified seven dimensions of behavior that were critical to the effectiveness of a building-level administrator. The seven dimensions were: organizational ability, problem solving, decision making, communication skills, interpersonal competency, leadership ability, and stress tolerance.

Wichita State University is a NASSP Assessment Center, so the NASSP furnished the prevalidated dimensions. The NASSP Assessment Centers use 12 dimensions, which are: problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, oral communication, written communication, range of interest, personal motivation, and educational values.

The University of Tulsa provided the seed money to start their assessment center. Once the center was in operation, the school districts paid \$225 for each incumbent principal that was assessed and \$150 for each entry-level participant going through the assessment program for selection purposes.

Wichita State University paid the seed money to start their assessment center and each participating school district paid \$175 for each assessor trained and \$125 for each candidate assessed.

The University of Tulsa Assessment Center gave their observers one day of training the first year they ran their program and later expanded the observer training to one week of training.

Wichita State University's assessors were trained by the NASSP in an intensive, three-day training period.

The University of Tulsa Assessment Center served the 16 school districts making up the greater metropolitan area of Tulsa.

Wichita State University served a nine school district consortium in central Kansas.

The University of Tulsa Assessment Center planned to put greater emphasis on developing incumbent principals in the greater metropolitan area of Tulsa.

The Wichita State University Assessment Center was considering opening a satellite center in western Kansas. They also planned to present training programs throughout the year for their assessment center alumni.

Conclusions

The assessment center was found to be a viable alternative to traditional methods of interview for making decisions to hire or promote employees. Because the assessment center programs tend to target into specific types of jobs, it requires a sufficiently large service population in order to justify the costs for developing the process. Possible client groups for other assessment centers might be professional associations, similar kinds of business organizations, or similar types of educational organizations such as colleges, universities, or vocational-technical educational systems.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What is your academic background; your title; your duties?
2. What is the purpose of your assessment center and who is it designed to assess?
3. How does your assessment center obtain people to be assessed?
4. Would you explain how it operates?
5. How did you determine what behavior dimensions you would assess?
6. How were your exercises developed?
7. How were your assessors trained and how many days of training did they receive?
8. How many staff members does your assessment team consist of?
9. How is the center funded?
10. How old is your assessment center and who set it up?
11. How many times a year do you assess people? Is it used year round or only on an as needed basis?
12. What do you foresee for future services to be provided by your assessment center?
13. What is the goal of your assessment center?

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