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Jaymon D. Kirk
University of Western Australia

Serena Wee
University of Western Australia

Patrick D. Dunlop
Curtin University

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Personnel Selection in Australia: Identifying Research–Practice Gaps and Understanding the Importance of Culture Fit

Jaymon D. Kirk[1], Serena Wee[1], and Patrick D. Dunlop[2]

1. University of Western Australia
2. Curtin University

ABSTRACT

This study examined current personnel selection practices in Australia including (a) the types of assessments used, (b) the factors considered when choosing assessments, and (c) the characteristics targeted in successful applicants. Participants from 68 organizations responded to a questionnaire that asked about current selection practices. Several areas where current practice deviated from research-supported best practice were identified. First, psychometric tests were used rarely: Cognitive ability tests were used by 26% of organizations and self-report questionnaires (e.g., personality inventories) by 18% of organizations. Second, when choosing assessments, the three most important considerations (in order) were the candidate experience, reducing bias, and that the assessment provides consistent scores; validity of the assessment was fourth. Finally, the most common characteristic organizations considered when selecting applicants was "culture fit." Supplementary analyses to determine how culture fit was defined and assessed suggested there is little consistency in what it means and how it is measured.

KEYWORDS

Australia, assessment, culture fit, selection practice

When evaluating job applicants, organizations have many assessment options at their disposal, which vary substantially in quality, fairness, and appropriateness. Although there is an abundance of evidence to inform *best* selection practices, researchers have limited visibility regarding what practices organizations adopt. Indeed, the few available studies (e.g., Risavy et al., 2019) have suggested that gaps exist between best and actual practice. The current study investigates selection practices with an Australian sample and provides insight into the factors that contribute toward the decision to use particular assessments and the applicant characteristics that are targeted.

Assessment Use

The tools organizations use to assess job applicants can have a large impact on their ability to identify the strongest candidates, with obvious implications for an organization's overall capacity to perform (Crook et al., 2011). We currently know very little, however, about which assessments organizations use for selection, nor do we understand fully why these assessments are chosen. Several studies have investigated selection practices in North America and Europe (e.g., Risavy et al., 2019) and some studies have provided global comparisons (e.g., Ryan et al., 2015, 2017); however, selection practices in countries such as Australia remain under researched. Although selection practices in Australia are likely similar in many ways to practices employed in other countries, differences in the cultural history, legal climate, protected classes, economic conditions, and privacy laws may contribute to differences in practice in Australia compared to western democratic countries such as the United States (US; e.g., the legality of race norming; Shen et al., 2017) or countries in Europe (e.g., privacy laws; Woods et al., 2020), and thus shed light on how these factors affect selection practice. Although some studies have investigated selection practices used by employers of Australian workers (e.g., Di Milia et al., 1994; Patrickson & Haydon, 1988; Vaughan & McLean, 1989), in the time since their publication, there have been substantial changes to the availability of assessment methods, the composition of Australia's population, and the extent of its participation in the globalized economy (Collins, 2013). More recently, selection practices for graduate recruitment (Carless, 2007) and managerial

Corresponding author:
Jaymon Kirk
Author Email: jaymon.kirk@research.uwa.edu.au

recruitment (Di Milia, 2004) in Australia have been investigated. Although these studies provide insight into the evolution of selection practices in Australia, aside from the passage of time, the findings may have limited generalizability to the selection of other types of employees. A more comprehensive and contemporary understanding of selection practices in Australia is needed.

Personnel selection practices can also change rapidly as technological advancements are made (Woods et al., 2020). However, technological advancements (e.g., asynchronous video interviews; Dunlop et al., 2022; Lukacik et al., 2021; game-based tests; Landers et al., 2018; "artificial intelligence" based evaluation; Tippins et al., 2022) can lead to assessments being used in practice before an evidence base is established. Monitoring the adoption rates of new technology can yield benefits for both practitioners and academics. For example, practitioners may be interested in benchmarking their organization's hiring practices against those of other organizations. Meanwhile, raising academics' awareness of current selection practices can help drive research that addresses the most pressing challenges that practitioners are facing. Therefore, the current research aims to provide an up-to-date snapshot of the use of assessments (both new and traditional) in Australian organizations. This study will compare the usage rates of assessments in the current sample to those obtained by Carless (2007) and Risavy et al. (2019), as both these studies asked about assessment use in a manner similar to this investigation. The comparison to Carless (2007) will show how selection practices in Australia have changed over time whereas the comparison to Risavy et al. (2019) provides insights into how selection practices in Australia differ to a recent estimate of practices in Canada and the US.

How Organizations Choose Assessments

Understanding how organizations in Australia hire employees also provides insight into research–practice gaps in personnel selection (Highhouse, 2008). For example, studies have commonly found cognitive ability tests and personality inventories are rarely used (e.g., Diekmann & König, 2015; Risavy et al., 2019). This is despite considerable evidence suggesting the characteristics measured by these tests are predictors of job performance. More specifically, cognitive ability has consistently been found to be among the strongest predictors of job performance (Sackett et al., 2021). Additionally, of the Big Five personality traits, conscientiousness has been found to be a consistent, albeit relatively weaker, predictor of job performance across all jobs (Barrick et al., 2001), whereas other personality traits have been found to be predictive of performance in specific roles (e.g., extraversion in managerial and sales roles; Barrick et al., 2001). Further, when personality measures are contextualized to the work context, they have been found to be stronger predictors of job performance (Shaffer & Postlethwaite, 2012). Additionally, when used in combination with other assessment tools (e.g., interviews), cognitive ability tests and personality inventories can add incremental validity to the prediction of job performance (Cortina et al., 2000). A possible explanation for the research–practice gap in assessment use is that academics and practitioners have different priorities (Risavy et al., 2021). In research, an assessment is typically evaluated based on its validity, reliability, and susceptibility to bias (Guion, 2011). Although practitioners may be interested in these factors, they may also consider factors such as the candidate experience or the extent that an assessment portrays a positive image of the employer (Risavy et al., 2021). Altogether, an improved understanding of the factors that practitioners prioritize when choosing assessments could prove beneficial for both practitioners and academics. For example, if academics hope to undertake research that ultimately improves practice, it may require a shift in focus beyond the traditional domains of reliability, validity, and bias when setting their research agendas.

Characteristics That Organizations Target in Successful Applicants

This research also investigates the characteristics that Australian employers seek from a successful applicant. Given that cognitive ability and conscientiousness have been found to be predictors of job performance (Sackett et al., 2021), one may expect employers to consider these characteristics to be important. However, the gaps between research and practice in assessment and selection imply that employers almost certainly consider other characteristics to be of importance and may partly explain the limited use of cognitive ability and personality assessments. For example, Waldner (2012) analyzed job advertisements to determine the applicant characteristics that employers in Switzerland sought. Formal education was by far the most common characteristic (mentioned in 95% of public sector job advertisements and 89% of private sector job advertisements), followed by work experience (public = 56%, private = 74%). Although we acknowledge that advertisements are unlikely to explicitly identify "cognitive ability" as a job requirement, related concepts such as quick comprehension (public = 16%, private = 13%) and analytical thinking (public = 16%) were mentioned only infrequently, perhaps suggesting that cognitive ability is not considered important by employers. However, it is possible that formal education was considered by employers to be a proxy for cognitive ability.

In summary, this research aims to provide insight into current selection practices in Australia by answering the following research questions:

> ***Research Question 1 (RQ1)***: What assessments are organizations in Australia using to evaluate applicants?

How do the current usage rates compare: (a) with older usage rates in Australia, and (b) with usage rates in other countries?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What factors do organizations in Australia consider important when choosing an assessment to use in personnel selection?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): What are the characteristics that organizations in Australia target in successful applicants?

METHOD

Participants

This research was conducted over two phases. Initially, we conducted 11 semistructured interviews with Australian talent acquisition professionals where we asked about the entire selection process: attraction, identification, and selection. We drew from the responses to these interviews to construct an online questionnaire, which is the focus of this study. Questionnaire participants were 68 talent acquisition professionals working in organizations in Australia across the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors. Participants were recruited during February and March 2021 through the research team's professional networks via direct approaches, LinkedIn posts, promotion through informal talent acquisition communities in Australia, and through snowball methods. Participants (43 female, 20 male, and 5 that chose not to provide gender) had, on average, worked in talent acquisition for 12.71 years (SD = 7.26) and been in their current positions for 3.27 years (SD = 2.73).

Organizations in the sample varied substantially in size (see Table 1), with larger organizations employing more talent acquisition staff and hiring more employees per year. Compared to Carless (2007), the current sample provides a closer-to-uniform distribution of organization sizes and with a larger number smaller organizations. The discrepancy here is likely a product of Carless' (2007) focus on graduate recruitment which is more common in larger organizations. Table 2 shows that, compared to the Australian organizations (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021), the current sample over represented several industries including (a) information media & telecommunications, (b) financial and insurance services, and (c) education and training, and under represented industries such as (a) construction; (b) transport, postal, and real estate services; and (c) agriculture, forestry, and fishing. Similarly, Table 2 shows that in comparison to Carless (2007), the current sample involved fewer respondents from the health care and social assistance, and manufacturing industries, among others.

Materials and Procedure

Based on interview responses, we developed items and response sets for the questionnaire, capturing topics relevant to recruitment and selection processes (i.e., applicant attraction, technology and assessment use, and managing the candidate experience). The final questionnaire consisted of 52 items, including multiple choice and text-response formats.

When beginning the questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate in which of the following recruitment "use cases" their organization engages: (a) *high volume*, *infrequent* (e.g., graduate recruitment); (b) *high volume*, *ongoing* (e.g., retail staff); (c) *lower volume*, *ad hoc recruitment* (e.g., specialist or professional roles); and (d) *talent pool recruitment* (i.e., applicants are hired to a general starting position

TABLE 1.

Number of Talent Acquisition Personnel and Hires in a Typical Year by Organization Size

Organization size (Number of employees)	Percentage of organizations in the sample (N = 68)	Percentage of organizations in Carless (2007) (N = 50)	Mean number of talent acquisition personnel (SD)	Mean hires in a typical year (SD)
1–99	28%	6%	1.17 (0.29)	25.17 (25.88)
100–499	22%	10%	3.00 (1.41)	78.00 (90.80)
500–4999	28%	44%	6.91 (4.31)	547.89 (690.01)
5000+	22%	40%	34.53 (34.41)	3155.67 (3221.75)

Note. The question about the number of talent acquisition personnel was optional and was answered by 49% of participants, so it may not be reflective of all organizations in the sample. Additionally, the groupings for organizational size are the four response options from the survey. We could find no common standard for capturing organization size so we chose to use these groupings as we felt they would allow the sample to be divided into meaningful groups.

TABLE 2.
Industries of the Organizations in the Study Sample

Industry	Percentage of organizations in the sample (N = 68)	Percentage of organizations in Australia (N = 2,402,254)	Percentage of organizations in Carless (2007) (N = 50)
Professional, scientific, & technical services	19%	13.03%	20%
Financial & insurance services	15%	4.71%	10%
Information media & telecommunications	12%	0.98%	14%
Education & training	10%	1.58%	-
Public administration & safety	9%	0.29%	-
Manufacturing	7%	3.56%	12%
Mining	6%	0.33%	10%
Health care & social assistance	4%	6.74%	14%
Retail trade	4%	6.16%	-
Accommodation & food services	1%	4.40%	-
Administrative & support services	1%	4.60%	-
Arts & recreation services	1%	1.43%	-
Construction	1%	17.09%	4%
Electricity, gas, water, & waste services	1%	0.33%	-
Rental, hiring, & real estate services	1%	4.91%	-
Transport, postal, & real estate services	1%	11.25%	-
Wholesale trade	1%	8.16%	4%
Other	1%	3.31%	6%
Agriculture, forestry, & fishing	0%	7.01%	4%

Note. The percentages of public administration & safety; education & training; and health care & social assistance in Australia are higher than reflected in this table as the Australian Bureau of Statistics data do not include the public sector.

and then further specialized). Because different hiring procedures are likely used for different use cases, it was important that participants responded to some questions in the survey with reference to a consistent use case. Accordingly, if participants selected one use case, we asked them to focus on that use case when responding to those survey items; otherwise, we randomly allocated participants to one of the use cases they selected. Participants were then asked to specify the name of the most recent position they hired for in the allocated use case, which we henceforth refer to as the "named position." Participants described hiring projects in *high volume*, *infrequent recruitment* (n = 13); *high volume*, *ongoing* recruitment (n = 15); *lower volume*, *ad hoc recruitment* (n = 39); and *talent pool* recruitment (n = 1).

The usage rates of assessments were measured by presenting a list of assessments,[1] shown in Table 3, and asking participants to indicate which were used when selecting for the named position. To measure the considerations when choosing assessments, we asked participants to rate a set of factors (shown in Table 4) on a 3-point scale from *not at all important* to *very important*. The applicant characteristics that organizations value when making selection decisions were assessed by presenting participants with a set of characteristics and asking them to indicate which they considered when selecting for the named position. Table 5 contains this list of characteristics.[2]

Finally, a notable finding from the preliminary interviews was that "culture fit" emerged as the primary consideration for almost all interviewees when assessing applicant

1 Situational judgement tests (SJTs) were not included as a standalone category because they were rarely mentioned by the interviewees in the first phase of the research. We note, however, Risavy et al. (2019) identified SJTs as a standalone category, and so to integrate their findings into Table 3, we incorporated SJTs into a wider job simulations/work samples category.

2 Personality was not included as a response option because it was rarely mentioned by interviewees. Therefore, other characteristics, such as social skills, were included instead, to ensure face validity of the survey.

TABLE 3.

Use of Assessments in the Current Study With Comparisons to Australian Graduates in 2007 and Canada and the US in 2019

Assessment	Current study (N = 68)	Australia (*N* = 50) (Carless, 2007)	Canada (*n* = 119) (Risavy et al., 2019)	United States (*n* = 334) (Risavy et al., 2019)
Interview	93%	92%	90.8%	93.4%
CV screen	90%	NA	82.4%	70.1%
Reference Check	76%	76% (Phone) 28% (Written)	70.6% (references provided by applicant) 16.8% (references not provided by applicant)	53.0% (references provided by applicant) 11.1% (references not provided by applicant)
Phone screen	68%	NA	NA	NA
Pre-employment check (e.g., police check, drug screening)	59%	14% (Drug test) 38% (Medical) 8% (Physical ability)	12.6% (in-house) 35.3% (third-party)	19.5% (in-house) 41.6% (third party)
Job simulation/work sample	31%	NA	25.2% 26.1% (SJTs)	18.6% 17.1% (SJTs)
Cognitive ability tests	26%	40%	4.2%	6.0%
Asynchronous video interview	25%	NA	NA	NA
Self-report questionnaires (personality, values, interests, etc.)	18%	40% (Personality) 10% (Integrity) 8% (Vocational interest)	6.7% (Personality) 15.1% (Integrity) 14.3% (Emotional intelligence)	6.6% (Personality) 11.4% (Integrity) 6.0% (Emotional intelligence)
Social media checks	13%	NA	21.0%	19.5%
Other	7%	NA	0.0%	1.8%

suitability. This finding is consistent with Risavy et al.'s (2021) report that practitioners' most oft-mentioned reason for using an assessment was to obtain information about applicants' "fit with company culture/values" and, in combination with our results, highlights how important culture fit appears to be to employers. Indeed, the importance of "recruiting for culture fit" is also discussed in the broader practitioner literature (e.g., Bouton, 2015). Yet, we could find no commonly agreed upon definition for culture fit in either the academic or gray literatures (e.g., Spiegelman, 2021). Conceptually, culture fit *resembles* the concept of person–organization fit, which has been extensively studied and is often defined in terms of the congruence between the characteristics of an organization and an individual (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). However, it is unclear if organizations define and operationalize culture fit in the same manner as person–organization fit, or whether such a definition is consistent across organizations. Taken together, we felt that there is a strong and practical need to gain a better understanding of how organizations define culture fit and to determine the degree of consistency in these definitions. Thus, we included exploratory, optional, text-response items in the questionnaire, which asked participants how their organization defined and assessed culture fit.

RESULTS

Research Question 1 was concerned with the assessments that organizations in Australia use to evaluate applicants and how they compare with a past Australian investigation (Carless, 2007) and assessment use in other countries (Risavy et al., 2019). Table 3 summarizes the findings for these research questions, and it shows that interviews are the most common method of assessing applicants across all samples. A reviewer suggested statistically examining the differences between the current sample and the samples from Carless (2007) and Risavy et al. (2019). In the current sample, cognitive ability tests were not often used in absolute terms (26%). However, the results of the chi-square tests of independence suggest that cognitive ability tests were used by a greater proportion of our sample than in the Canadian ($\chi^2(1, N = 187) = 17.88, p < .001, \varphi = .31$) and US

TABLE 4.

Importance of Factors When Choosing an Assessment for Personnel Selection

Factor	M	SD
1. Provides a good candidate experience	2.66	0.53
2. Helps us improve diversity or reduce bias	2.64	0.59
3. Provides consistent evaluations if it were used on the same candidate multiple times	2.63	0.59
4. Provides an indicator of a work outcome for the candidate (e.g., job performance)	2.52	0.56
5. Is legally defensible (e.g., avoid OHS violations, lawsuits)	2.50	0.68
6. Is transparent to the candidates (i.e., candidates could easily understand why we use it for selection)	2.49	0.63
7. Affects the organization's image or brand	2.46	0.63
8. Speeds up the decision process	2.35	0.59
9. Makes it easy to document decisions (i.e., maintain a paper trail for auditing purposes)	2.33	0.72
10. Affects the likelihood of people being willing to apply for the job or accept it if it were offered to them	2.18	0.66

Note. OHS = Occupational Health and Safety. Additionally, importance was rated on a 3-point scale from *not at all important* to *very important*.

TABLE 5.

Applicant Characteristics That Employers Considered to be Important When Selecting Applicants

Applicant characteristic	Percentage
Culture/value fit	93%
Work experience	84%
Specific technical skills and expertise	78%
Social skills/emotional intelligence	72%
Teamwork	71%
Adaptability	63%
Formal qualifications/experience	56%
Cognitive ability/mental aptitude	50%
Resilience	49%
Safety awareness	34%
Other	6%

($\chi^2(1, N = 402) = 25.35$, $p < .001$, $\varphi = .25$) samples reported by Risavy et al. (2019). Additionally, compared to Risavy et al.'s (2019) US sample, CV screens were used by a greater proportion of the current sample ($\chi^2(1, N = 402) = 10.18$, $p = .001$, $\varphi = .16$). All other comparisons were not statistically significant. Unfortunately, making clear comparisons across studies was not possible for all assessments because of the differences between studies in how the assessments were categorized. For example, Carless (2007) reported statistically significantly greater use of personality inventories, when compared to the use of self-report questionnaires in this study ($\chi^2(1, N = 118) = 6.20$, $p = .01$, $\varphi = .23$); however, the self-report assessment category of this study encompassed self-report assessments of all types, thus the difference is likely an underestimate. In terms of the influence of technology in selection practices, we found that assessing applicants via their social media profiles was about as common in our sample as it was in both the Canadian ($\chi^2(1, N = 187) = 1.27$, $p = .26$, $\varphi = .08$) and US samples ($\chi^2(1, N = 402) = 1.07$, $p = .30$, $\varphi = .05$) from Risavy et al. (2019). Further, we found that asynchronous video interviews were adopted by 25% of organizations in Australia, a rate similar to that of cognitive ability tests. Finally, phone screens were one of the most common assessments in this sample, whereas Carless (2007) and Risavy et al. (2019) did not ask about this method in their surveys.

Research Question 2 aimed to determine the factors that organizations in Australia consider important when choosing an assessment for personnel selection. Table 4 shows that all 10 factors were regarded as at least somewhat important. The four most important factors were that the assessment provides a positive experience to the candidate, that it reduces bias, and that it is reliable and a valid predictor of outcomes. The three least important considerations were the impact that the assessment has on people being willing to apply for or accept a job, its ease to document, and its speed of use.

Research Question 3 aimed to investigate the characteristics that Australian employers seek in successful applicants. Results are shown in Table 5. Culture or value fit was the most common characteristic, identified by nearly all participants as critical to the hiring decision. Interestingly,

cognitive ability, one of the strongest predictors of job performance (Kuncel & Hezlett, 2007), was only considered important by half of the respondents, and cognitive ability assessments were used by an even smaller proportion. Work experience was also highly valued, despite research suggesting that it is a relatively poor predictor of job performance (Van Iddekinge et al., 2019). A high proportion of participants identified some of the contemporary "soft" skills as being important: social skills, teamwork, adaptability, and resilience.

Understanding Culture Fit

The two open-ended exploratory culture fit questions were answered by 55 participants. The responses to both were analyzed independently by two raters to identify the most common themes. Most of the participants provided very brief definitions (e.g., "Value alignment") and the themes identified by both raters were very similar, with differences mainly attributable to the use of synonyms. There was at least "substantial agreement" (Cohen's kappa, $\kappa > .61$), according to Landis and Koch's (1977) guidelines for all themes. See Tables 6 and 7 for Cohen's kappas for each theme.

Table 6 presents the results of the thematic analysis of the text-responses to the question "How do you define culture fit, as assessed in your talent acquisition processes?" Responses referred to a wide range of concepts, with the most common being alignment with organizational values. Some of the less frequent responses likely reflect the context in which the organization operated. For example, a participant noted "safety" as a concrete element of culture fit, which is likely relevant to organizations operating in safety critical industries.

Table 7 presents a summary of the responses to the question "How do you assess culture fit?" References to multiple assessments were counted separately. We found that interviews were by far the most common method for assessing culture fit though it was unclear how structured these interviews would have been.

TABLE 6.
Defining Culture Fit

Theme	Frequency	Percentage of responses mentioning assessment	Cohen's κ
Alignment with organizational values	34	62%	0.88
Behavioral alignment	12	22%	0.76
Personality	10	18%	0.76
Interpersonal skills	6	11%	0.78
Adaptability	6	11%	0.78
Diversity	4	7%	0.73
Teamwork skills	4	7%	0.88
Alignment with organizational purpose	3	5%	0.79
Communication style	3	5%	1.00
Team fit	3	5%	0.73
Belief alignment	2	4%	0.79
Customer focus	2	4%	1.00
Innovation	2	4%	1.00
Resilience	2	4%	1.00
Person–job fit	2	4%	1.00
Alignment with leadership framework	1	2%	1.00
Career aspirations	1	2%	1.00
Commercial mindset	1	2%	1.00
Interest alignment	1	2%	1.00
Safety	1	2%	1.00

DISCUSSION

The current study provides new insights into selection practices in Australia, including (RQ 1) the assessments used, (RQ 2) why those assessments are chosen, (RQ 3) the desired applicant characteristics, and how culture fit is defined and assessed.

We first aimed to discover what assessments organizations in Australia use to evaluate applicants and we found that, consistent with research from other countries, interviews and CV screens were the most commonly used (Risavy et al., 2019). Additionally, relative to Carless' (2007) observations of graduate recruitment practices, the current sample reported lower use rates of self-report questionnaires, particularly personality inventories. Although it is possible that personality inventories are more common in graduate recruitment generally, our results could also indicate a decline in popularity of personality inventories over time. Future research could investigate this potential trend further, both in Australia and around the world. Another noteworthy finding was that the current sample reported significantly higher use rates of cognitive ability tests than both samples in Risavy et al. (2019). Future research could investigate whether different legal climates, coupled with the well-documented group differences associated with cognitive ability tests (Roth et al., 2001, 2017), makes these assessments less appealing to North American organizations.

TABLE 7.
Assessing Culture Fit

Assessment	Frequency	Percentage of responses mentioning assessment	Cohen's κ
Interview	45	82%	0.74
Reference checks	6	11%	1.00
Psychometric testing	6	11%	0.91
Personality assessment	3	5%	1.00
Phone screen	3	5%	0.79
Intuition	2	4%	1.00
Online culture and values assessment	1	2%	1.00
Work experience	1	2%	1.00
Social media check	1	2%	1.00
Assessment center	1	2%	1.00
Informal conversation	1	2%	1.00
Safety assessment	1	2%	1.00
Skills assessment	1	2%	1.00
Artificial intelligence assessment	1	2%	1.00

We also investigated the factors Australian employers consider when choosing an assessment for use in personnel selection. Participants in this sample judged reliability and validity as important, which is encouraging in that it suggests overlapping priorities among academics and practitioners. However, given that the choices of assessments by organizations in our study appeared not to service these two goals as well as some alternatives, there is clearly a need to identify ways to improve the translation of evidence into better selection practice (Neumann et al., 2020). A method for achieving this would be to further investigate the process by which talent acquisition professionals choose which tests they will use in personnel selection.

We also found that employers in this sample were most concerned that assessments would provide a positive experience to the candidates during the application process. This result perhaps reflects the concerns that talent acquisition personnel would have regarding the negative consequences of a bad experience (Miles & McCamey, 2018), such as withdrawal or refusal to apply for future roles. In any case, this finding suggests that a ripe opportunity for research to improve selection practice is to build an evidence base for interventions that improve candidates' experiences with assessments. Indeed, Ryan and Huth (2008) lamented the lack of concrete recommendations to emerge from the literature on applicant reactions, although we note that recent studies have provided some insights (e.g., McCarthy et al., 2018).

When examining what characteristics employers are seeking from their applicants, we found that culture fit was cited by nearly all participants. From an evidence-based perspective, this finding seems surprising given the ambiguity around the definition and assessment of culture fit, and the lack of research suggesting that it is linked to work outcomes. Similarly, given that cognitive ability is among the strongest known predictors of job performance (Sackett et al., 2021), it was surprising to see that it was so undervalued. Thus, there appear to be clear gaps between evidence-informed best practice and current practices in Australian organizations. Such a finding is similar to that observed elsewhere in the world (Highhouse, 2008), and it highlights the need for work to be done to close the gap in the Australian context. A related finding was that there appears to be a disconnect between the way academics and practitioners label constructs (e.g., "personality" vs. "social skills") and assessments (e.g., "phone screens" vs. "interviews"). Such differences could contribute toward the research–practice gap and may vary from country to country. Future research in this area could help researchers communicate with practitioners more effectively.

The results from this study also highlighted a noteworthy contrast between the applicant characteristics that employers wish to target and the assessments they use to evaluate applicants. Specifically, 50% of the organizations indicated that cognitive ability/mental aptitude is an important characteristic, and yet only 26% of employers indicated that they use cognitive ability tests. There is strong consensus in the academic literature that cognitive ability tests are one of the most efficient and effective measures of cognitive ability (Murphy et al., 2003). So, this raises questions about the extent to which cognitive ability is truly being evaluated and how effectively it may be evaluated with other assessments. One potential explanation for organizations shying away from using cognitive ability tests to assess cognitive ability could be the well-known—and sizeable—group differences on such tests (Roth et al., 2001, 2017). Consistent with this explanation, our participants reported that reducing bias was a major concern when selecting assessments. However, research has shown that adjustments to the weighting of cognitive assessments can alleviate bias while making only small sacrifices to validity (De Corte et al., 2008; Wee et al., 2014), and that changing the test format (e.g., paper and pencil vs. video) could also minimize group differences on test scores (Chan & Schmitt, 1997). Hence, a ripe avenue for future research might be to identify ways to assist practitioners to incorporate the relevant weighting adjustments or to investigate whether different test formats would make cognitive ability tests more appealing to practitioners.

Finally, in exploring the culture fit concept, we found that it was primarily defined in terms of an alignment with the values of an organization, although definitions also varied considerably. Most organizations in our sample used interviews to assess culture fit, but the way that "culture fit" interviews were conducted varied substantially (e.g., specific, targeted behavioral interview questions to assess culture fit vs. informal meetings with members of the teams within which the prospective employee would be working). Thus, it appears that the way culture is assessed is variable and is often not objective. Admittedly, if culture fit was assessed using a structured interview with a carefully designed rating scale, this would represent a closer-to-objective method; however, the descriptions of interviews given by the participants suggest that culture fit interviews were rarely being conducted in this way. Unfortunately, given the exploratory and optional nature of the culture fit questions and the resulting inconsistent level of detail provided by participants, it was not possible to separate the interview responses into more specific subcategories during the coding process. Overall, there appears to be an urgent need for researchers to examine culture fit in the context of selection more closely.

Limitations

A limitation of this research is the small sample size. Additionally, most of the participants were from three Australian States: Western Australia (n = 22), New South Wales (n = 20), and Victoria (n = 20). Therefore, the results of this research may not be fully representative of the other states and territories. Additionally, large organizations were over represented in this study sample, though unfortunately, like-for-like size comparisons of our sample with the population of organizations in Australia were not possible because the Australian Bureau of Statistics uses different size categories to the ones used in this study. A further limitation regarding the sample is that we did not collect sufficient information from participants to calculate an exact breakdown of the distributions of organizations in the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors.

A further consideration regarding the representativeness of the sample and comparisons to past studies is differences in participant recruitment methods. Carless (2007) focused only on graduate recruitment, whereas Risavy et al. (2019) used a Qualtrics panel that provided a sample distributed based on the population of the states (i.e., more participants from larger states). Although a comparison of organization sizes and industries was included in Tables 1 and 2 for Carless (2007), such a comparison was not possible for Risavy et al. (2019). The available descriptive information in Risavy et al. (2019) was that mean organization size was 4,720 (SD = 45,203), and the most common industries were healthcare and social assistance (17.12%), manufacturing (8.2%), government and public administration (7.9%), and retail (6.0%).

Finally, we note that phone screens may have been classified as interviews in the Carless (2007) and Risavy et al. (2019) studies. In the current study, phone screens were distinguished from interviews because initial interviewees described phone screens specifically as being used (a) very early in the process and (b) to obtain different information than would be collected in an interview. Phone screens were commonly used to assess eligibility or qualifications rather than constructs typically assessed in interviews such as cognitive ability, personality, or interests (Huffcutt, 2011). Because this same distinction was not made in Carless (2007) and Risavy et al. (2019), the comparisons for interviews and phone screens across studies should be interpreted with caution.

CONCLUSION

The results of this investigation highlight similarities and differences in assessment use over time and between countries. In summary, practice remains somewhat divergent from research in terms of the use of assessments that have been found to predict performance (e.g., cognitive ability tests). The current study provides insight into the factors that may contribute to this gap between research and practice by showing that practitioners appear to have different priorities when it comes to selecting both assessments and applicants.

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