

Intercultural Job Interviews

- How we can recognize the right ones, even if they look different from us -

Summary

When we conduct interviews, we like to imagine that we can find out the truth about how the candidates *really* are. Psychologically developed aptitude testing suggests that it is objectively possible to determine whether a person is fit for a job or not.

Taking intercultural job interviews as an illustration, this book shows how this is not true, and cannot be true after all. It is our own perspective, and our own impact on the way the interview develops, which strongly affects how we evaluate our candidates. We do not see the candidate as *they* are, but we see them as *we* are. If we want to validly assess candidates who are culturally different from us, we must therefore reconsider the general approach to our selection processes.

Based on the analysis of interviews with candidates from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe, the book draws on sources in cognitive psychology, neurology, and the whole spectrum of intercultural research, in order to prepare the readers for the dynamics of intercultural job interviews. In this manner we learn about the logic behind the answers of candidates from China, India, or Russia, and we realize what kind of reactions these cultural patterns trigger within us. Building on this groundwork, the author – as an intercultural trainer and recruitment consultant a practitioner himself – develops detailed recommendations for designing job interviews and assessment centers into our daily recruitment work which are more sensitive towards diversity and cultural differences.

A sound and well-researched book that will open your eyes - well beyond the scope of just international recruitment.

TESTIMONIALS

The psychologically founded aptitude testing of our times has two challenges to deal with: Despite its undoubted successes and achievements, it still struggles with a certain degree of scepticism among practitioners, who resent the standardization, formality and effort involved in its processes. In addition, it has not developed satisfactory answers yet to the question, how intercultural differences and diversity can be validly integrated into its models and tools.

The book written by Tim Riedel approaches those two challenges by transferring current findings of other disciplines (like intercultural research, neurology, cognitive psychology or systems theory) into our arena and applying them to practical observations and analyses from international job interviews in his company. With this methodology, „Intercultural Job Interviews“ has become a well researched, enlightening and entertaining piece of scientific literature. It can only be wished that its findings and conclusions will find their way and have an impact on the worlds of both practitioners and theorists in our field.

Prof. Dr. Werner Sarges, Editor of „Management–Diagnostik“ and of "Psychologie für das Personalmanagement“

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The book vividly illuminates how we often struggle interviewing applicants from Asia, Eastern Europe and other cultures, and how much we are bound to build our choices on just our own cultural imprint. Its multifold practical examples and analyses from real world interviews are embedded in a well described scientific context. An excellent book.

Katharina Heuer, Managing Director of the German Association for Personnel Management (DGFP)

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Diversity in recruitment processes - a very important aspect to address given the increasing mobility of our workforce. We need to improve our cultural sensitivity in order to better tap into the global talent pool, so that we can boost our innovative strengths and adapt to the advancing globalization. An exciting topic, presented in a highly readable and resourceful manner.

Prof. Dr. Gunther Olesch, Vice President HR, IT and Legal Affairs, PHOENIX CONTACT Group

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The topic chosen is relevant not only in the light of increasing globalization and international migration. The more complex our market environments, the more relevant our abilities will become to break new ground and to discover innovative solutions. International Recruitment is a great practice field for this. Tim Riedel's book is comprehensive and very well researched, the reader always taken by the hand and walked through the subject along his or her personal experiences. An absolutely recommendable reading not just for recruiters.

Stefan Brindt, General Manager Human Resources and Organization Development at SMS Siemag AG and Head of the Section Recruitment and Employer Branding at the German Federation of HR Managers (BPM)

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Analyzing the role of culture in the selection and assessment process, this book fills a major gap in intercultural literature. Well-founded and written for practitioners - a must read for leaders in international management and an absolute enrichment for anyone interested in international and intercultural studies.

Frank Bannys, author of "Intercultural Management", since 2010 international management consultant, before that 20 years in various international management positions as Senior Vice President of Giesecke & Devrient group.

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The author shows how different styles of thinking and opposite concepts of self-presentation in East and West may strike you in the job interview. You can sense the reference to higher academic science, while delivering an option to the needs and questions of HR managers on the ground, which is of course the balancing act for all of us. Congratulations, that's a good throw!

Prof. Dr. Jürgen Henze, Professor of Comparative Education at the Humboldt University of Berlin, consultant and trainer with a focus on Asian cultures and Chairman of the Institute for Intercultural Didactics (INDIC e.V.)

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PREFACE

The selection of personnel is one of the elementary management tasks. No organization can do without. Its economic relevance is obvious.

No other function can change the performance of entire teams more immediately for the better or for the worse. Hiring the wrong candidates costs a lot of money if they are made to leave, and even more money if they stay.

Nevertheless, recruitment and assessment of new employees has been given only little attention in recent years. Out of a total of 592 presentations given at Germany's most important HR conferences over the last three years, 229 (39%) were on topics of Human Resource Development, around 70 (12%) each on HR Policies and on Employer Branding, 9% on Leadership, 7% each on Organizational Development, Health Management and General HR Administration. Only 4% of the lectures were dedicated to aspects of Recruitment, and the majority of those dealt with IT tools.

However, there are four megatrends that suggest to dedicate more attention to selection and interviewing processes in the future:

1) Given the ever increasing competition for talent, identifying the right candidates for a job is of growing importance. In times of demographic change, it is no longer just a matter of figuring out the best out of many qualified candidates. More and more often, there are no candidates available at all who are matching the required criteria at first sight. Accordingly, the perspective on aptitude testing needs to be widened. It is more important than ever to identify hidden skills, potentials and resources which do not appear obvious initially, or which present themselves in different manners than what we are used to.

2) According to a study by the Hay Group (2013), the attrition rate in the labor market will continue to grow. For Germany, the percentage of those who leave their employer to join a new company will rise to 15.2% per year in 2018 from only around 14% now. Translating this trend into the overall macroeconomic fluctuation rate of currently already 28% per year (which includes all voluntary and involuntary beginnings and terminations of employment, Stettes, 2011), the overall German workforce will completely renew itself statistically every three years by then.

3) Given to accelerating innovation cycles on the global markets, we are experiencing an unprecedented complexity and speed of change in our organisations. This leads to new challenges in the selection of personnel: a) How long-term is the commitment that our applicants are prepared to show? b) How much potential do they hold beyond of what is demanded by the role they applied for? c) How well will they be able to deal with ambiguity, with complex reporting lines and an ever-changing environment? d) How innovative and "out of the box" is the way they can think, and are they (nonetheless) prepared to integrate into existing roles and structures?

4) Last but not least, globalization inevitably leads to more cultural diversity in our recruitment. HR Managers at headquarters are increasingly charged with finding candidates at their global subsidiaries, and also at home the number of candidates with an international

or multicultural background keeps growing. The need for a more international, open-minded recruitment is becoming more and more urgent, in order to make our companies fit for the necessary growth in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Seen from this perspective, the ability to identify the right people across cultural differences becomes crucial for our economic survival.

This book is written by a practitioner of international recruitment, in order to provide new insights and tools to HR Managers for their daily intercultural job interviews and assessment processes. The globalization of our businesses and the increasing internationality of our applicants make it indispensable that we become more aware and more skillful with regard to diversity in our selection processes.

However, the following pages are not only aiming at our competencies in international recruitment. This book will make a point that international aptitude testing has in fact a lot to do with openness, with self-reflection, and with holistic, comprehensive thinking, all of which are qualities we need in any kind of complex and unprecedented environment. Intercultural interviews offer us a great area of experiencing, learning, and practicing these capacities.

Ultimately, intercultural job interviews can teach us a certain degree of humility and mindfulness, which are additional competencies of increasing relevance in our globalized economy. How quick are we ready to believe that we know how others think and who they are? What was our contribution to the fact that a certain impression was created in our minds? This caution before judging others, this moment of self-reflection before rating our counterparts, it adds a special quality to our interaction with other people. It would be nice if this book contributed also to this fundamental value in any kind of cooperation.

INTRODUCTION - Why we need new concepts in aptitude testing, not just in an intercultural environment

„There has been some progress here and there, yet one seldom hears the remark: The trouble I have with him is me“

Edward T. Hall

Let us begin with an excerpt of an international job interview¹, in order to illustrate the background and objectives of this book.

An experienced German HR Business Partner, in her mid 30`s, is interviewing a Chinese engineer, about the same age, both have an excellent command of English. The candidate has been living in Germany for about a year already at the time of the interview. He holds a renowned scholarship and will later be offered a challenging position within the Business Development department of a German Machine Tool manufacturer.

How do you motivate yourself?

Interviewer: *We have talked extensively on how you motivate others. Now how do you motivate yourself?*

Candidate: *That`s a good question. Pause. I think, ah, I, ah, I think, I have, ah, I have a big milestone, of course. But in the meantime I also have short milestones and deadlines, to make myself really running as I really wanted, of course, I also have good times and bad times, and whenever these times come, I, ah, I have already trained myself to, ah, to adjust myself to a more positive position to carry on the work...*

Interviewer: *What do you mean by that, I am not sure I can follow you on that?*

Candidate: *Yeah, because you don`t really, ah, you are not always, ahm, somehow ...*

Interviewer: *Or maybe you can give me an example of that?*

Candidate: *OK, I mean, you are not always successful on certain things you want to achieve, like, maybe you, of course everybody makes mistakes, so whenever, like there were certain periods of time, somehow, during my work where I made several mistakes in a week, and I blamed myself and also made trouble to other counterparts that I worked with, so, and during this time you need somehow, ah, ah, also a moment to reflect yourself, and also to, to, to... – of course you feel bad - but you have to, to do something to make yourself really catch up*

¹ This sequence is taken from a one-hour job interview conducted in September 2012 under „laboratory conditions“, which means that there was no real position to fill, there was audience in the room, the interview was recorded on video, and following the conversation both interviewer, candidate and the audience discussed together the perceived meanings, intentions and evaluations of questions and answers.

with the others faster, like sometimes, ah, ah.... I cannot give you a really concrete example, but, just a feeling, so, yeah, yeah, yeah..., but you understand what I am saying....?

Interviewer: *Yes, I think I am getting the idea of what you want to say now...*

What kind of thoughts and associations crossed your mind, dear reader, when you went through this sequence? What did you like about the response of the candidate, what did you not like, and above all: how you did get to your perception? You may want to imagine a concrete Chinese candidate and picture the scene again in your mind as a real life situation before continuing.

Now let us start interpreting the dialogue: We witness a comparatively normal, standard interview question with both personality-oriented and competency-oriented objectives: "How do you motivate yourself?" The German interviewer probably wants to find out first of all, what the candidate is generally motivated by, what he enjoys and what drives him. Secondly, she most likely wants to know how he manages himself, how he sets his goals, how he plans and designs his work, and how he deals with eventual setbacks. So on one hand she is aiming to find out more about his overall motivation, on the other hand she tries to assess something like his "self-starting- and self-management skills". Lastly, she presumably wants to gain an impression on his degree of self-reflection and maturity when answering such a question; the better he knows himself, the better he will probably be in interacting with others.

The way the interviewer addresses her question is personality-based at first, seeking a response like "I am a person who is motivated by: ...". After she apparently receives no clear answer through this approach, the interviewer shifts to a more biographical style question, requesting an example as an answer like "a situation in which I have recently motivated myself, was the following incident:".

However, both alternatives did not really yield the results she had hoped for. The interviewer still does not know what inspires and drives the candidate. And she has gained only a very rudimentary idea of how the candidate organizes his life and reaches his goals. Instead, she may think, his answers were somehow evasive, vague and diffuse. The candidate left a thoughtful impression, but he did not really answer her question. Perhaps he did not understand the question, or he did not feel comfortable with it?

Maybe it was owed to his Chinese origin that he talked so much of his mistakes and weaknesses, since modesty is of high esteem in China? Perhaps he could not relate to the importance she attributed to self-motivation, as he comes from a cultural context that is marked by steep hierarchies, with little room for independent thinking and acting? Was it due to language barriers that he might not have understood her question, or is he lacking intellectual capacities? It is even possible that he felt offended, as if his general motivation for his job and his employer was doubted? When we show this interview sequence in our interview trainings, these are some of the interpretations and images that arise among the participants.

So what was cultural to the question and to the answer, afterall? We cannot know. Not even the candidate probably knew. But without being able to avoid it, we immediately and

constantly form hypotheses, we attribute explanations and meaning to the behavior of our counterparts.

The interviewer, coming from a western country like Germany, probably knows her way around competency-based interviewing techniques. With this background she is somewhat expecting that the candidate can relate to her objectives, and that he will thus volunteer information about his personality and his skills with regard to the topic of "self-motivation".

Doing so, she wants the candidate to answer her abstract question with a concrete reply, possibly enriched with a suitable example. Her preferred methodology in this response is likely to be deductive and analytical, first pre-structuring the question according to its general meaning, then answering it with a more general self description, and finally adding specific details and illustrations to it. A sample answer could have therefore been something like this: "Self motivation is important because I can motivate others convincingly only if I am motivated myself. I am a guy who is motivated strongly by goals and challenges (alternatively: "by a positive atmosphere in our team" or "by recognition I receive from my surroundings"). I really enjoy for example when I do this ... At work I try to structure my days in a way that there is some variety in what I do. In this manner I can quickly regain my motivation, even if there are smaller disappointments or moments of badluck, as they can always happen, like when a customer call is not going well or we lose a contract."

Important aspects of a „strong answer“ in this cultural perspective are that the applicant is aware of his goals and actions, that he can explicitly point out his preferences and positions, and that his answers are focused and "to the point". The model answer should leave no room for ambiguities and allusions; the interviewer wants to be clear about where the candidate stands. As a German interviewer she probably tends to prefer a firm, clear voice, direct and reassuring eye contact, an upright and open posture and active, but not exaggerated gestures and facial expression. If she were US-American, she would most likely be more appreciative of enthusiasm and expressions of a positive attitude, if she were British, she might prefer a more subtle, polite and low-key approach.

He, coming from China, presumably does not know her objectives. He gets an abstract question, and he is not sure what she is looking for. Maybe she is checking on his overall loyalty and commitment? Perhaps she wants to know in what kind of balance he is both with his surroundings and with himself? Or she possibly tries to assess how he interacts socially, how he reaches a harmonic and productive atmosphere with his team, his colleagues and superiors, and how he integrates into his environment?

He decides to give her an insight into the inner structure of his personality. Doing so, he appears to be influenced by East Asian, Taoist thinking, as he knows no clear and linear conditions and targets.² He describes to her how he deals with the simultaneity of success and failure, of objectives and setbacks, and how he has trained himself to deal with those ambiguities with an attitude of maturity and positive energy.

But with the interruption by the interviewer he realizes that this was not the desired answer, and he loses his balance a bit. His answer had already been following a rather circular,

² Please find more explanations and details on culturally influenced patterns of thought and styles of argumentation in chapter 3.3.

circumscribing structure, but now he is desperately looking for an example of which he assumes that the interviewer might understand it. However, since he has been living in Germany for a while already, he knows that her way of thinking is different from his. So the incidents which come to his mind will probably not match her expectations. Looking for a suitable situation, he emphasizes relational and contextual aspects of his work ("I blamed myself and also made trouble to other counterparts", "But you have to do something to really catch up with the others faster"), but he does not find a good example any more. The fact, that he indirectly answers her question in this process (self-motivation through mental preparation to crises, by brief moments of reflection, through not wanting to let down colleagues, and by his own performance orientation), it goes unnoticed by the interviewer. He hopes for a face-saving ending of the sequence ("But you understand what I am saying?"), which she gives him in a half-hearted manner ("Yes, I think I am getting the idea of what you want to say now").

Presumably this exchange will now leave an emotional trace with both interviewer and interviewee. He will notice that his answer was not what she had hoped for, and he will become a little nervous. She may wonder why the candidate did not understand better what she wanted, and maybe feel hints of anger. Is he really missing the self-management skills she was trying to assess, or is he not structured and analytical enough for the position? Why did he appear so vague, so unclear to her? The interview will thus continue with a weaker and more negative bias now, with both sides focusing their attention intuitively on the connotations of failure associated with the first sequence. The respective mental box for each other - She: "He is not clear and not structured," He: "I do not know what she wants, but the meeting does not go well" - is opened a little bit.

Intercultural Job Interviews

With this sequence, the topic and target of this book are introduced. It is designed to help you, dear readers, prepare for intercultural differences in your recruitment processes. You have probably bought this book to gain more confidence in cross-cultural interviews, and to improve your skills in assessing the strengths and potentials of your candidates, even if they communicate differently from what you are used to it. First of all you probably want to understand which cultural differences there are, and how they become visible in a job interview. And secondly you are looking for advice and tools that will help you to validly recognize the competencies of your applicants despite these differences; or we shall better say to integrate these differences successfully into your judgement. In the end it comes down to finding the best possible candidate for a vacancy regardless of his or her cultural background, and to avoiding costly mistakes in your hiring process.

It is exactly these objectives which are pursued by this book. Doing so, it is mainly targeted at an audience of HR and line managers with a Western cultural imprint, while of course also Easterners may benefit from this – Western – view on intercultural skills assessment. However, the path to understanding intercultural job interviews is not as straightforward as we would hope for. It would be nice if we could memorize the ten main differences e.g. in the Chinese response behavior before an interview, and then know how to correctly interpret the answers of the Chinese applicant in the example above, as he had *really* meant them. But it is not as easy as that, unfortunately. Because we are dealing with two structural challenges in intercultural recruitment, or one could also say dilemmas:

Dilemma 1: In intercultural job interviews we encounter differences in behaviour and its ascribed meanings that we need to assess, without knowing them. Regardless of how thoroughly the interviewer in the above sequence has studied the Chinese cultural background before the meeting, she will never be able to think and feel like a Chinese. She must therefore always judge a behavior from *her* cultural perspective, which ultimately only makes sense from *his* cultural perspective.

Dilemma 2: If we prepare for a particular cultural background of a candidate and integrate the assumed cultural differences into our assessment, then we ultimately presume something which we are in fact charged to find out and assess only *during* the job interview. Of course not all the Chinese people are equally "Chinese", just like not all Americans are equally "American" nor are all Australians the same. The interviewer in the above sequence cannot predict with certainty whether the average Chinese cultural standards generated by cultural research are actually valid parameters to understand the behaviour of her specific Chinese candidate. Maybe he had an English father, or he studied in France, or he simply tried to adapt to her? She must therefore assess the candidate using a cultural scale which she cannot know beforehand, she can develop it only during the interview.

Intercultural Job Interviews thus put us in a situation characterized by a high degree of uncertainty and ambiguity. If we apply these two dilemmas to the interviewer in the above interview sequence, she is then faced by two challenges: 1.) she must at least partly take on his cultural perspective, although his way of thinking and of perceiving the world is unfamiliar to her. 2.) she must use the interview to identify the cultural patterns which influenced his answers, and then incorporate these imprints into her assessment of his skills and potential. In light of these two challenges, it can surely help her to know what an average Chinese cultural background implies, and how it may find its expression in a job interview - but just by itself this will not be enough. She will always have to base her assessment and her cultural assumptions on knowledge which is a) not complete, and b) possibly not applicable at all in this specific situation. She will thus need to assess and recognize something of which she does not know yet, what it actually looks like.

Subjectivity

It is a core thesis of this book that the prevailing psychological concepts of aptitude testing and skills assessment do not provide satisfactory answers to these two challenges. This does not mean that we no longer need these concepts. They are just not sufficient any more.

The dominant theme of today`s diagnostic models is objectivity. They emerged at a time when personnel selection was based largely on unstructured interviews. Sympathy and personal liking decided who was offered a job and who was not. Modern and scientifically founded methods were therefore developed to detect the relevant skills and competencies of the candidates regardless of the personal preferences of the interviewers. Carefully analyzed job specifications, methodically validated criteria for subsequent behavioral observations, and a standardized interviewing process were supposed to overcome the arbitrary influence of personal chemistry, gut feelings and "nose factors". Subjectivity became in this sense a mere "selection error" and a "problem of social judgment" (Schuler, 2007, p. 314), as it disguised or distorted the objective picture of the applicants. This approach has increased the accuracy and validity of personnel selection since (Dipboye, Macan and Shahani-

Denning, 2012, p. 333). However, it reaches its limits in an intercultural context, as we have seen. The more interviewers and candidates differ from each other, the more this is the case. Classical modern aptitude testing neglects the above described dilemmas of our subjectivity. There is no argument about the need to reduce the impact of personal preferences in the selection process through a scientifically founded and structured process. But the dominating approach tends to play down the fact that we still have these preferences, and that we interact with our candidates on the basis of these preferences. Just following a carefully designed selection process does not make us interviewers a neutral measuring device; our own personal and cultural backgrounds, likings, and previous experiences still influence the selection process in many different ways. Our observations, interpretations and reactions take place in the specific perspective and logic which is available to us. We can neither see the candidates as they see themselves, nor can we see them objectively. We can only see them as we see them.

The guiding principle of intercultural job interviews therefore is subjectivity. We are not talking about the subjectivity of the old days, when interviewers simply conducted an informal conversation in order to get to know each other personally, and then decide on the basis of sympathy. What is meant is a trained, a refined and reflected subjectivity in which the observers are aware that their way of asking and evaluating the candidates is influenced by their personal and cultural imprint.

For such a trained subjectivity we must first understand our own personal and cultural patterns, and which role they play when we form our judgement. Only then, as a second step, does it make sense to learn about the others, about foreign cultural standards and their impact on the selection process. It is the combination of both skills which enables us to conduct effective intercultural interviews even when we are not sure about the specific cultural meaning of a particular statement or gesture of our candidates. Which - in fact - is always the case.

The structure of this book

Accordingly, this book follows a structure that combines a review of the subjectivity of our judgment with knowledge on the impact of cultural factors in the selection process. Recorded sequences of intercultural job interviews with applicants from China, India, Russia, Nigeria, Syria and Indonesia will serve as illustrations to the central messages of each chapter, just like the exchange with the Chinese candidate did in the initial section of this introduction.

Part I: In the first part (The Challenges of International Personnel Selection) you, as the reader of this book, will find your questions with regard to intercultural job interviews integrated into the context of modern aptitude testing. Here you will understand not only where the specific challenges of international skills assessment lie, but also why you cannot deal with them sufficiently yet within the scope of the currently available methodology. And you will begin to recognize what a solution could look like.

Part II: In the second part (How our Judgment is formed) we will say farewell to the idea that an interview can at all be conducted in a repeatable and rational format, generating objective information about the candidates. This section will probably challenge your current understanding of yourself as a professional and effective interviewer. If everything in the interview process is subjective, culturally biased and influenced by situational circumstances, how can we ever conduct valid interviews and reach on-target conclusions about the

applicants? This notion of uncertainty is important, since in intercultural job interviews there is no room for the belief in objective meanings of a statement any more. Instead we should strive to decode the subjective intention which our candidates followed with their answers, and derive conclusions as to their skills and competencies from there.

At the end of Part II you will have realized, how much of a certain picture and impression of a candidate came into being not due to the candidate, but due to you yourself. Your judgement and assessment depends just as much on you as it depends on the candidates, by choosing a specific format for your questions, by reacting in a particular manner, and by interpreting the answers in patterns and frames which are familiar to you. Learning more about these inevitable processes you will learn how to reduce their impact in the most efficient manner: by shifting your attention a little bit away from just observing the applicants, and instead monitoring yourself in a parallel process as well.

Part III: The third part (Cultural Differences in the Job Interview) will deepen your understanding of eventual cultural differences between you and your candidates. This may reestablish some of the confidence that has been challenged in Part II, as it provides a framework to decode what the candidates possibly meant, even if their answers were not immediately clear to you. By receiving concrete examples and explanations for cultural differences in the job interview, these differences now become manageable again.

If you are in a hurry, you may think that skipping Part II and starting directly with this section is a valid option. And it is to some extent, as most of the explanations concerning the actual topic of intercultural job interviews are given here. However, it would be a pity if you did, as you would be missing out on an important foundation for this knowledge. Because nobody will be able to tell you in advance whether your candidates will actually behave in a manner suggested by the cultural standards described and explained in Part III. You would then be missing the toolbox for dealing with candidates whose answers remain strange to you despite your efforts in preparing for their cultural background. Intercultural competence in the end is not so much about knowledge of other cultures, as it is about skillfully dealing with not knowing of other cultures.

Part IV: The fourth and final section (Tools for Intercultural Job Interviews) will then prepare you for your concrete and hands on international recruitment. Here the findings of the book will be transferred into practical tools and recommendations for conducting intercultural job interviews with more confidence and validity: in order to recognize the right candidates, even if they look different from us.

Surely you can start also right away with Part IV, if your international applicant is already waiting at your doorstep, and you want to receive last minute support for the upcoming interview. I hope that this would also provide you with some valuable insight and useful short notice tools. But it would not be sustainable. As we have seen from the two dilemmas mentioned above, we cannot prepare for intercultural job interviews by memorizing the cultural standards of our target countries and by validating and restructuring our assessment processes accordingly. The most important traits needed in intercultural job interviews are self reflection, empathy, flexibility, tolerance of ambiguous situations, and curiosity, not mere structure and due process.

Why we need new concepts in aptitude testing, not just in an intercultural environment

There has not been much attention devoted to the topic of staff selection for the last 20 years. HR Conferences – at least in Germany – only seldomly touch the subject. Scientific research has arguably not generated any striking new ideas in the field for a while.

Practitioners tend to follow some of the proposed methodology of modern skills assessment, but they tenaciously refuse to adopt their rigid process requirements completely.³ Gut feeling and intuition still make up the most relevant advisors when it comes to a final hiring decision (Nachtwei, Bernstorff, Uedelhoven, and Liebenow, 2013). At the same time, interview trainings are not much in demand, especially not among line managers. And there seems to be barely any structured evaluation of the quality of job interviews in companies, based on specific targets and regular measurement following established performance indicators (Riedel and Krotoschak, 2015). Despite megatrends like globalisation and the demographic transition, almost nobody seems to see aptitude testing as an arena deserving particular attention or increased efforts and investments.

The growing number of intercultural job interviews is now providing us with an opportunity to redirect more focus and resources to this field. Three reasons make it a business requirement to do so:

- First of all it is the simple fact of globalization – be it through international university graduates, candidates with an immigration background, ex- and impatriation processes, or through the cooperation with international subsidiaries – which makes it apparent to today's HR managers that their skills assessment processes need new tools and insights. When interviewing candidates from Asia, Africa, or Eastern Europe, Western interviewers realize more and more often that their familiar questions and patterns of interpretations have unexpected limitations. It is probably for exactly this reason that you are reading this book.
- Secondly, it is exactly this experience of classical diagnostic concepts not yielding the expected results, which provides us with the momentum of questioning those concepts. It is my hypotheses that practitioners are reluctant to follow the classical models of aptitude testing more rigidly, because they do not completely believe in them. They trust their personal experience and their gut feeling more than those theories.

Since we put personal experiences and gut feelings more into the focus of our attention in intercultural job interviews, we now align the theory in a way which matches better what practitioners believe in. Not structure and standardized processes are the main focus any longer, reducing the role of the interviewers somewhat to a mere mechanical instrument, but the trained and reflected subjectivity of HR and the hiring managers. Sentiments, personal beliefs, and individual or cultural imprints are shifted towards the center of our assessment processes, but in a conscious, reflected manner. Intercultural job interviews therefore offer the chance – if my hypotheses is correct – to bring theory and practice into a better mutual understanding again.

In this manner, this book pursues the secondary agenda of trying to reaffirm faith within companies that thorough and high quality aptitude testing is not only important, but that it can

³ Some data supporting this argument will be presented through a survey conducted by the author in Part I of this book.

also be improved even among experienced managers through regular training and self evaluation.

- Lastly, by conducting intercultural job interviews more consciously, we develop important skills in this process which are relevant far beyond just recruitment. The moment we succeed to realize that our own perspective is subjective and relativ, we also realize that other perspectives are just as relevant and justified. We then open up for new ideas and approaches more easily, we become more prepared to question our ways, and this leads us to being more innovative, changeable and embracing of the future. We then learn from international recruitment to be more self aware, mindful, appreciative, open minded, and flexible. Training ourselves in intercultural skills assessment thus makes us improve also in other areas, like leadership, project management, customer relationship management, product development, or basically in any kind of cooperation.

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DANKSAGUNGEN

Viele, viele Menschen haben wichtigen Anteil am Entstehen dieses Buches. Manche haben große Abschnitte teilweise mehrmals Korrektur gelesen. Andere gaben in einzelnen Gesprächen genau die Inspiration, Anregung und Rückmeldung, die in diesem Moment weitergeholfen hat. Wieder andere standen mir menschlich oder logistisch mit Ermutigung, Geduld und Unterstützung zur Seite. Weitere haben viel dazu beigetragen, dass das Buch nun bekannt gemacht und verbreitet wird. All diesen Menschen gilt mein großer Dank. Es hat so viel Spaß gemacht, dieses Buch zu schreiben, auch wegen euch und Ihnen!

Drei Personen – Frank Bannys, Monika Stahl und Doris Schemmel – möchte ich herausheben, deren Unterstützung als Lektoren und Ratgeber von besonderer Bedeutung war. Sie haben mir erfolgreich die textlichen Selbstverliebtheiten und akademischen Pirouetten ausgetrieben und mich immer wieder hartnäckig daran erinnert, dass dieses Buch ja irgendwann einmal Leserinnen und Leser haben soll. Alle anderen Menschen, die auf die eine oder andere Art an diesem Buchprojekt beteiligt waren, möchte ich einfach alphabetisch aufzählen; alle waren wichtig:

Martin Andree, Nilgün Aygen, Rüdiger Bechstein, Stefan Brindt, Johanna Charpentier, Valeria Chignoli, Gabriella Gal, Anne Heiduck, Simone Heinrich, Romina Helm, Prof. Dr. Jürgen Henze, Jessie Hütter, Eva Krotoschak, Magdalena Lozowska, Maria Kapaki, Wolfgang Kissel, Philipp Kunze, Nicole Kurz, René Kusch, Julia Mützel, Christoph Nagler, Moritz Neugebauer, Günter Presting, Ke Rao, Prof. Dr. Jürgen Olesch, Britta Riedel, Susanne Riedel, Prof. Dr. Werner Sarges, Philipp Scharff, Prof. Dr. Heinz Schuler, Sein Schmidt, Anne Schwarz, Regina Stoyhe, Jingjing Wang, Volker Wenzel, Andras Wienands, Frauke Wrage sowie alle Kandidaten und Interviewerinnen unserer interkulturellen Interviewsimulationen.

Danke!