Psychological Assessment in South Africa

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Psychological assessment in South Africa is a controversial topic primarily, but not exclusively, because of its links to South Africa’s troubled past. The history of South Africa is a chequered one, characterised by ethnic and racial interaction, integration and conflict (Heuchert, Parker, Stumpf & Myburgh, 2000). The tribal groups that occupied the country prior to the arrival of white settlers in 1650 followed patterns of merging and splitting that were similar to those in most other parts of the world. Some groups were formed voluntarily and others by conquest and subjugation. In 1652, the ancestors of present-day Afrikaans-speaking South Africans arrived. They were originally mainly of Dutch ancestry, and later also of German and French ancestry. Slaves from the former Dutch colonies in the East (mainly the territories now forming part of Malaysia) were also brought to the Cape at this time. In 1834 all slaves were emancipated. Around the same time a common language developed amongst the groups in the Cape consisting of a mixture of words from the Malay, Khoisan, Portuguese, French and Bantu languages, but with Dutch as a base. Towards the late 19th century this language was recognised as Afrikaans. Although the former slaves spoke the same language (Afrikaans) as the white settlers, after 1948 they were separated into two groups based on skin colour – namely, white Afrikaners and coloured Afrikaners. The other main white group in South Africa consisted of English-speaking South Africans who arrived in the early 1800s with the aim of ‘settling the frontier’ (Heuchert et al., 2000, p.113).

In the 1860s, British settlers recruited indentured labourers from India primarily to man the sugar, tea and coffee plantations in the Natal region. These labourers were promised good wages and the right to settle as free men after five years. The failure to implement the freedom policies for Indians led to Gandhi forming the Natal Indian Congress, the first mass political organisation in South Africa. At the same time, members of the Indian merchant class also came to South Africa and were instrumental in setting up trade in the then Transvaal region of the country. Even though this merchant class had more freedom than the indentured Indian labourers and Malay former slaves, they were still regarded as an inferior group by the white population. Together with the indigenous South African tribes, coloureds and Indians were classed as a ‘black’
group. Relationships between the white Afrikaners and white English-speaking South Africans were tense – so much so that two wars were fought between the two groups. However, they were united in their efforts to subjugate black South Africans (Heuchert et al., 2000).

In 1948 the National Party, which was the dominant political party at the time, instituted a formal system of racial segregation called apartheid. Apartheid ensured the reservation of social, economic and political privilege for white South Africans, while black South Africans (referred to as ‘non-whites’) were denied access to basic material resources, opportunities and freedom. This divide-and-rule tactic also created further social stratification within the black population. South African Indians, particularly the merchant classes, had a higher socio-economic status, followed by coloureds, while the section of the population most discriminated against was the indigenous African tribal groups. While opportunities and freedom for Indians and coloureds were curtailed, these groups had better access to infrastructure and basic resources such as water, electricity and housing, whereas the indigenous groups were denied even this. Indigenous African groups were encouraged or forced to accept a tribal identity by means of a series of policies that separated and removed people to rural ‘homelands’ such as Bophuthatswana, Venda and Transkei. Urban residents were separated by racial classification and forced to live in separate residential areas. Those urban areas set aside for indigenous Africans were very small, with little or no infrastructure, resulting in further oppression of this group of people (Heuchert et al., 2000).

The role of psychological assessment within this turbulent history was equally contentious. According to Claassen (1997), psychological testing came to South Africa through Britain, and the development of psychological tests in South Africa followed a similar pattern to that in the USA. There was a difference, however. South African tests were developed in a context of unequal distribution of resources as a result of apartheid policies. According to Nzimande (1995), assessment practices in South Africa were used to justify the exploitation of black labour and to deny black people access to education and economic resources. Sehlapel and Terre Blanche (1996) make the similar point that tests were used in South Africa to determine who would gain access to economic and educational opportunities.

Under apartheid, job preference was given to white individuals and a job reservation policy was put in place that ensured employment for whites. Psychometric testing and psychological assessment were misused to support this policy; for example, tests that were developed and standardised on educated white South Africans were administered to illiterate, uneducated or poorly educated black South Africans, and the results were used as justification for job reservation and preference. They were also used to indicate the superiority of the white intellect over the black intellect, and thus to further justify the logic of the apartheid system. This practice resulted in a general mistrust of psychological assessment, and more specifically psychometric testing, amongst the black population in South Africa (Foxcroft & Davies, 2008; Nzimande, 1995; Sehlapel & Terre Blanche, 1996).
It is important to note that discriminatory practices in psychological testing were not exclusively a product of the apartheid regime. As early as 1929, Fick was conducting research on black children using the Army Beta Test, which was standardised for use on white children. The black children performed noticeably more poorly on the test than the white children. Fick (1929) initially concluded that environmental and educational factors were primary factors in understanding the poor performance of black children. Ten years later, he opined that differences in nonverbal intelligence tests were more likely due to innate differences between blacks and whites (Fick, 1939). However, the Interdepartmental Committee on Native Education (1936) released a report that highlighted the irregular assessment practice of using a test normed on white people to assess black individuals.

Also prior to the advent of apartheid, the National Institute for Personnel Research (NIPR) was established under the leadership of Simon Biesheuvel. The institute focused largely on tests which could identify the occupational suitability of black individuals who had very little or no formal education. Biesheuvel (1943) argued that black individuals were not familiar with the content of items on tests or with the type of test material used, and so he introduced the concept of ‘adaptability testing’ (Biesheuvel, 1949) and developed the General Adaptability Battery (GAB).

While the NIPR focused on developing tests for industry, the Institute for Psychological and Edumetric Research (IPER) developed tests for the educational and clinical spheres. These two bodies dominated the field of psychological assessment from the 1950s to the late 1980s, when both divisions were incorporated into the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). The HSRC specialised in developing local measures. This was necessary primarily because of the sanctions imposed by other countries on South African access to their test materials. Although the work done by the HSRC is often criticised, it needs to be recognised that it was one of the most productive agencies for psychological assessment in South Africa and, in a number of ways, created the foundation on which the field stands today.

The release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the first democratic election in 1994 marked a turning point in South African history. The system of apartheid had failed, and a system that promoted mutual respect, democracy, freedom of expression and transparency was developed and legislated in a very progressive Constitution. Since 1994, South Africa has experienced rapid transformation in all spheres – social, political and economic. In this climate, it was vital that past inequalities be redressed and that a way forward be found that subscribed to the country’s new-found democratic identity.

Psychology, particularly psychometrics and assessment, had played a controversial role in the previous political dispensation of the country and there now arose a pressing need for research and practice in the field to redress the negative effects of these practices. Around this time, the HSRC was restructured and the unit devoted to testing and assessment was repositioned. HSRC tests, as well as international tests such as the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF) for which the HSRC held copyright in South Africa, were sold to private organisations such as Jopie van Rooyen and Partners, Saville and Holdsworth.
Limited (SHL), Psytech and Mindmusik. These organisations took over the test distribution, adaptation and development role.

At the turn of the millennium, South African psychologists were more aware than ever of the need to create instruments or utilise pre-existing instruments in a fair and unbiased manner (Abrahams & Mauer, 1999a; 1999b; Foxcroft, Paterson, Le Roux & Herbst, 2004; Laher, 2007; 2008; 2011; Meiring, 2007; Nel, 2008; Sehlapele & Terre Blanche, 1996; Taylor & De Bruin, 2006; Van Eeden & Mantsha, 2007). This shift in consciousness was strongly linked to legislation promulgated in Section 8 of the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998 which stipulated that ‘[p]sychological testing and other similar assessments are prohibited unless the test or assessment being used (a) has been scientifically shown to be valid and reliable; (b) can be applied fairly to all employees; and (c) is not biased against any employee or group’. Unlike other countries where issues of bias and fairness are addressed by the codes of conduct of professional organisations of psychologists, in South Africa the importance of fair and unbiased testing and assessment was incorporated into national law (Van de Vijver & Rothmann, 2004).

The value of psychological testing remains a contested one in South Africa (Foxcroft, 2011). Its critics see it as being of limited value for culturally diverse populations (Foxcroft, 1997; Nzimande, 1995; Sehlapele & Terre Blanche, 1996). Others argue that, regardless of its flaws, testing remains more reliable and valid than any of the limited number of alternatives. Since testing plays a crucial role within assessment internationally, proponents suggest that the focus be on valid and reliable tests for use within multicultural and multilingual societies (Plug in Foxcroft, 1997).

South Africa is 18 years into democracy and it is essential to determine whether the field of psychological assessment has found a way to address these criticisms. Many academics and practitioners have been extremely active in the discipline of psychological assessment. However, although a substantial portion of this work has been presented at various local and international conferences, it has not always been published and is therefore not widely available. Thus, one of the aims of this book is to collate existing research on commonly used measures and assessment practices so that practitioners and researchers can make informed decisions about their usage with local populations.

Since the 1990s, there have been several excellent and useful textbooks published on psychological assessment, but these tend to be targeted at an introductory level for undergraduate students and, in some cases, for specialist student groups (see Foxcroft & Roodt, 2008; Huysamen, 1996; Kaliski, 2006; Moerdyk, 2009). There is no South African text that approaches the complex phenomenon of psychological assessment in a more in-depth, critical manner. Having taught psychological assessment as a subject at postgraduate level for a number of years, and with our collective experience in the field, we conceptualised this book as a text that would bring together the range of work on psychological assessment in South Africa currently available.

Our aim is to provide an accessible text that gives a comprehensive and critical overview of the psychological tests most commonly used in South Africa,
as well as of research conducted on these instruments. Strauss, Sherman and Spreen (2006) state that a working knowledge of tests without the corresponding knowledge of the psychometric properties and the research that accompanies their use renders us inadequate as practitioners. Thus, we hope that this book will provide readers with an understanding of critical issues relevant to psychological test use in the South African context, including the strengths and weaknesses of psychological tests that have been identified based on empirical research.

Further, we felt it was valuable to present a few alternative approaches to the more traditional views of psychological assessment, some of which have a distinctly South African flavour, such as the chapter on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as a way of evaluating an individual’s acquired learning and skills. In addition to its local relevance, the book interrogates the current Eurocentric and Western cultural hegemonic practices that dominate the field of psychological assessment and engages in international debates in psychological theory and assessment.

In compiling this book, we examined past issues of the South African Journal of Psychology and the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology, as well as some issues of Psychology in Society and the Journal of Psychology in Africa, to establish potential assessment areas and tests currently in use in South Africa, as well as to identify key individuals working in the field. The HSRC needs survey published in 2004 (see Foxcroft et al., 2004) was also a useful source of information. In addition to this, we examined conference programmes in order to locate those who were working in the field of psychological assessment. Invitations to submit abstracts for this book were sent to all individuals identified in this way. Following this, a general call to submit abstracts for the book was sent to all heads of local psychology departments. The chapters presented in this book represent the culmination of this effort.

When authors were invited to contribute to the book, we were careful not to impose too rigid a structure on the format, rather allowing each author to find the structure that best matched their particular chapter focus. Thus, the reader will note slight variations in presentation across the chapters. Furthermore, since the book is intended to be a specialist research text, primarily for postgraduate and professional use, the chapters read more like research articles than textbook chapters. Each chapter addresses significant and sophisticated arguments, and because they are written by local experts in the field who are strong supporters of their fields or instruments, the arguments may not always be evenly balanced. Nonetheless, most chapters maintain a critical focus and the final judgement is left up to the reader.

The chapters form natural groupings into three sections. Sections One and Two focus on particular psychological instruments. The chapters in these sections each provide a brief introduction to the instrument, including its history, development and psychometric properties. This is typically followed by a detailed critical examination of the instrument in the South African context, incorporating local research. These chapters emphasise the applied, practical nature of assessment, as well as the challenges inherent in assessment within a particular area or domain. The first two sections also include more generalist
chapters pertaining to particular assessment methodologies, such as projective techniques and dynamic assessment. Sections One and Two also, for the most part, address assessment from traditional perspectives. Although dynamic assessment is addressed in Section One, and many of the chapters in the first two sections identify progressive ways in which the tests can be used effectively in South Africa, these sections should be supplemented by the chapters in Section Three that offer a broader perspective. This final section is a collation of chapters that highlight issues pertinent to the domain of psychological assessment, but which could not be accommodated within the areas highlighted in the previous two sections – for example, questions of ethics and computerised testing. Many of the chapters in this section go beyond the boundaries of what is traditionally conceptualised as psychological assessment, as the reader is encouraged to think about what constitutes psychological assessment, and to consider innovative ways of addressing the challenges facing assessment practitioners in South Africa. Each of the sections of the book is outlined in detail below.

**Section One: Cognitive tests: conceptual and practical applications**

Cognitive tests are still largely viewed with suspicion in South Africa as a result of their past misuse to enforce and support divisive racial apartheid practices. We need to move beyond this thinking and understand how these tests can benefit society. Consequently, this section details both locally and internationally developed tests of cognitive processes, together with relevant research that has been done on these measures. The section includes discussions of the Wechsler tests, which are widely considered to be the ‘gold standard’ in intelligence testing (Ivnik, Smith & Cerhan, 1992). In their chapters on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Revised Fourth Edition (WISC-IV) and the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale – Third Edition (WAIS-III), Shuttleworth-Edwards and colleagues stress the need for, and describe the process of, obtaining preliminary normative data on these tests for South Africans. Given the educational inequalities still pervasive in South African society, these authors highlight quality of education as an important variable along which research samples should be stratified and which should be considered when conducting and interpreting intelligence quotient (IQ) assessments.

Although the norms for local IQ tests are both outdated and inappropriate for all South Africans, we have included a discussion of these tests as they are still widely used. Consequently, the Senior South African Individual Scales – Revised (SSAIS-R) is presented in its own chapter, together with the (limited) research on its use. Theron, in her chapter on the Junior South African Individual Scales (JSAIS), provides considerable and valuable tips on using the test qualitatively to comment on various aspects of the child’s readiness to cope with formal schooling. She points out how the test can be informative in providing insight regarding the child’s level of resilience and coping. Read this chapter together with that of Amod and Heafield on school readiness assessment and you are likely
to have a balanced view of methods used to determine readiness for school entry and to identify preschool children who may benefit from additional stimulation programmes, learning support or retention.

This section of the book demonstrates that there is a range of conceptualisations of intelligence and how it should be measured. The traditional, static approaches to intelligence presented at the outset of this section have been widely criticised as reflecting only Western, Eurocentric, middle-class values and attitudes (Nell, 1999). Against the background of increased demand for nondiscriminatory assessment procedures, both locally and internationally, dynamic assessment has been proposed as a fairer assessment methodology that views intelligence as changeable and grants the testee the opportunity to demonstrate how effectively she or he can take up instruction. The chapter by Amod and Seabi on dynamic assessment presents some of the ways in which this approach may be beneficial to South African assessment practice. De Beer takes this issue further in her chapter on the Learning Potential Computerised Adaptive Test (LPCAT), which she has developed as a formal measure of learning potential that evaluates not only an individual’s present level of performance, but also their potential levels of performance if relevant learning opportunities can be provided. Similarly, the chapter by T. Taylor on the (Conceptual) Ability, Processing of Information and Learning (APIL) test and Transfer, Automatisation and Memory tests (TRAM-1 and TRAM-2) shows how these learning potential tests can be employed to assess how a person copes with novel problems under standardised conditions. Given the unequal educational and employment conditions available to many South Africans, these tests represent a much fairer approach to making occupational decisions about individuals.

In addition to dynamic assessment, criticisms of traditional intelligence tests and their theoretical bases have resulted in several additional conceptualisations of intelligence. Among them are the Planning, Attention, Simultaneous and Successive (PASS) cognitive processing model proposed by Naglieri and Das (1988). This section includes a chapter on the Cognitive Assessment System (CAS) (discussed by Amod in chapter 8) which developed from this theory. The CAS differs from traditional measures in that it was designed to evaluate the cognitive processes underlying general intellectual functioning and is purportedly less influenced by verbal abilities and acquired knowledge. As such, it is likely to be a vital tool in ensuring equitable assessment procedures.

One of the most influential and more recent models of intelligence is that of Cattell-Horn-Carroll (CHC), which emphasises several broad classes of abilities at the higher level (for example, fluid ability (Gf), crystallised intelligence (Gc), short-term memory, long-term storage and retrieval, and processing speed) as well as a number of primary factors at the lower level. The CHC framework is the preferred interpretation model to be used when assessing functioning on the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (K-ABC), and is discussed by Greenop, Rice and De Sousa in chapter 7. Like the CAS, the K-ABC was designed to measure how children receive and process information, and to outline their cognitive strengths and weaknesses, and thus represents a deviation from the traditional IQ approach.
The reader may notice that this section does not include any chapter specifically addressing the assessment of nonverbal intelligence. It is important to acknowledge the value of such measures, particularly in cross-cultural contexts, where language may be a barrier to optimal cognitive performance. Considerable research has been conducted using the Raven’s Progressive Matrices in South Africa (see Cockcroft and Israel, 2011 for a brief review). These are useful for individuals whose test performance may be confounded by language, hearing or motor impairments, or educational disadvantage. While not culture-free, they are more culture-fair than traditional IQ tests.

It would have been remiss not to include discussion of some measures of developmental assessment in this section. The chapter by Jacklin and Cockcroft on the Griffiths Mental Development Scales (GMDS), one of the most popular developmental tests used locally, is a valuable compendium of the local, and often unpublished, research done on these scales. Of the 135 million infants born throughout the world each year, more than 90 per cent live in low-income or developing countries such as South Africa. Despite this, only a small percentage of published research addresses children who come from such backgrounds (Tomlinson, 2003). It is therefore important that such research becomes available through publication. This will ensure that the different circumstances of infants and young children be carefully considered as part of psychological assessments, since social factors, notably maternal education level, are among the strongest predictors of poor developmental outcome in infants (Brooks-Gunn, 1990).

Finally, the assessment of brain-behaviour relationships draws primarily on cognitive measures, and so this section concludes with a chapter on neuropsychological assessment. Neuropsychological assessment is at last coming into its own in South Africa, with the opening of the registration category and the promulgation of a scope of practice for neuropsychologists. The chapter by Lucas outlines the current status of neuropsychological assessment in South Africa, as well as the major challenges facing this field of assessment. The latter include the complexity and diversity of the country’s population, varying levels and qualities of education, socio-economic status discrepancies and rapid acculturation. The chapter presents some of the local research that has been done to address these challenges.

Section Two: Personality and projective tests: conceptual and practical applications

Aside from cognitive tests, personality tests make up the next broad domain within the field of psychological assessment. Personality is a multifaceted construct and its definition varies depending on the epistemological framework that one subscribes to. An examination of textbooks on personality theory and general introductory psychology texts reveals that most theories of personality fall into one of eight theoretical categories – namely, the psychodynamic, lifespan, cognitive, social learning, humanistic/existential, behaviourist, biological/behavioural genetics, or dispositional/trait theoretical approach (see Ellis, Abrams & Abrams, 2009;
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Friedman & Schustack, 2009; Larsen & Buss, 2008; Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2003; Naidoo, Townsend & Carolissen, 2008; Ryckman, 2008; Schultz & Schultz, 2009; Weiten, 2009). However, when it comes to the assessment of personality, instruments generally fall into one of two categories: either the objective, self-report personality inventories, which have their roots in the dispositional and, to a lesser extent, humanistic approaches, or the projective inventories, which originated primarily within the psychodynamic tradition. Section Two includes chapters on the objective and projective measures. The arguments that projective tests do not solely measure personality and are capable of assessing broader domains of the self and identity are noted. However, these tests do fit in well with the rubric and arguments presented in other chapters in this section. As in Section One, the chapters included in this section do not focus solely on the instruments.

Chapters on the objective personality tests are presented first. These chapters cover the 16PF, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), the Fifteen Factor Questionnaire Plus (15FQ+), the NEO Personality Inventory (Revised) (NEO-PI-R), the Occupational Personality Profile (OPPro), the Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ), the Basic Traits Inventory (BTI) and the Millon family of instruments, particularly the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory – III (MCMI-III). It is evident from these chapters that aside from the BTI, there are no emic self-report personality questionnaires in South Africa. However, each of these chapters provides information on the particular test’s applicability in South Africa. Van Eeden, Taylor and Prinsloo, for example, discuss the adaptation of the 16PF, particularly the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire – South African 1992 version (16PF-SA92), from its entry and early adaptations to date with the 16PF5, in chapter 14. Laher discusses the NEO-PI-R in chapter 18, and uses contemporary research to demonstrate the limited utility of the inventory in South Africa.

The inclusion of these chapters is useful, not only in terms of the description and research provided for each instrument, but also because of the various challenges identified for personality testing in South Africa. All of the chapters make reference to test adaptation within the South African context. They also highlight issues of language proficiency, response bias and social desirability, amongst others. Tredoux provides the necessary background to, as well as current findings on, the 15FQ+ in chapter 15. This chapter is particularly useful in terms of its frank consideration of issues of language proficiency. Taylor and De Bruin’s chapter on the BTI (chapter 16) makes reference to research conducted on response bias.

Personality traits are different to personality types, where a personality type is defined as a ‘unique constellation of traits and states that is similar in pattern to one identified category of personality within a taxonomy of personalities’ (Cohen & Swerdlik, 2004, p.126). A personality trait is also different to personality states, which are generally emotional reactions that vary from one situation to another (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2008). The chapter by Knott, Taylor, Oosthuizen and Bhabha on the MBTI (chapter 17) provides research on the use of a type inventory in South Africa and in so doing critically examines the strengths and limitations of this inventory in South Africa.
Chapters 19 and 20 on the OPPro and the OPQ provide information and research on tests used primarily in organisational settings. The inclusion of these two chapters also highlights the tension between tests used in research and those used in practice, in terms of subscription to theoretical positions. With the 16PF, the MBTI, the NEO-PI-R and the Millon instruments, for example, the epistemological underpinnings are clear. However, with both the OPQ and the OPPro, the research presented is testament to their utility, but their theoretical underpinnings are not clear. This leads to a broader debate around the validity and utility of such instruments. It is hoped that this book will allow the reader access to all the necessary information to make an informed judgement on these issues.

Patel and Laher present a chapter on the Millon family of instruments (chapter 21). The chapter provides a brief introduction to the instruments and then focuses on the MCMI-III. Aside from the information presented on the MCMI-III, the chapter also highlights interesting debates that transcend the boundaries of psychological assessment and link to the cognate fields of psychopathology and clinical psychology. The cross-cultural debates around mental illness are briefly addressed, thereby providing the reader with a stimulating opportunity to view assessment within the context of the broader debates taking place in the field of psychology.

These issues are addressed further in the chapters by Edwards and Young (chapters 22 and 23), who discuss the principles of psychological assessment as they apply to clinical and counselling settings. In chapter 22 they show how, in a multicultural society such as South Africa, the principles of assessment should be flexibly adapted to working with clients from different backgrounds and in different settings. Following on from this, in chapter 23 the same authors present a chapter on assessment and monitoring of symptoms in the treatment of psychological problems. They discuss the particular difficulties inherent in using self-report scales in cultural contexts different from those in which they were developed and validated. The authors recommend that practitioners first evaluate such scales within carefully conducted systematic case studies, as outlined in the chapter. Where such an evaluation provides evidence for the clinical utility of a scale, the scale can then be used to serve many valuable functions which include highlighting symptoms relevant for diagnosis, case formulation and treatment planning, as well as providing practitioners with continuous feedback about the effectiveness of their intervention strategies, thereby allowing for therapeutic adjustments that ultimately benefit the client.

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, projective tests are a special kind of personality test. They are based on the assumption that, when presented with ambiguous or unstructured stimuli, people tend to project onto these stimuli their own needs, experiences and unique ways of interacting with the world (Lezak, Howieson & Loring, 2004). As such, they provide the practitioner with a glimpse into the client’s inner world that would be difficult to obtain by other methods. The general chapter on projective techniques by Bain, Amod and Gericke (chapter 24) shows how projective responses tend to differ depending on gender and cultural group, among other factors. These findings are extended in the final three chapters in Section Two (chapters 25, 26 and 27), which focus
on specific projective tests – namely, the Thematic Apperception Test, the Draw-A-Person Test and the Rorschach Inkblot Test.

From Sections One and Two it is evident that psychological assessment in South Africa is still dominated by formal testing in both research and practice, but that those working in the field have been quite innovative in researching and adapting tests to our specific needs. The manner in which the authors of Sections One and Two engage with assessment issues in their field indicates their awareness of the benefits and limitations of relying solely on psychological testing to make informed decisions about individuals. Furthermore, these chapters highlight the need for alternative forms of psychological assessment in South Africa. This need is explicitly addressed in the chapters in Section Three, which reflect some of the future trends (both actual and suggested) in psychological assessment in South Africa.

Section Three: Assessment approaches and methodologies

Again and again in the chapters in Sections One and Two, the caution is raised about the need to use Western-developed (etic) tests in a manner that is sensitive to contextual and cultural differences. Many invaluable suggestions are made by the authors in Section Three about how test results can be interpreted in fair and ethical ways that are culturally appropriate. It is thus appropriate to commence the section with Coetzee’s chapter, ‘Ethical perspectives in assessment’ (chapter 28). This chapter identifies key ethical considerations for research and practice in psychological assessment, and puts forward the valuable argument for the development of an ‘ethical consciousness’ (Bricklin, 2001, p.202).

Chapter 29 by Tredoux provides an excellent introduction to the field of computerised testing in South Africa, and presents contemporary debates in the area. In chapter 30, Shuttleworth-Edwards and colleagues show specifically how some of this methodology can be used for medical management in the sports concussion arena, using the Immediate Postconcussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing (ImPACT) approach. The authors show how this computerised neurocognitive approach has potential for wide application beyond the sports concussion field.

This section also presents some of the conceptual approaches that have much potential for addressing the diverse needs of the range of groups that we assess in South Africa. In chapter 31, Amod discusses the Initial Assessment Consultation (IAC) approach, a shared problem-solving approach to child assessment, focusing on collaboration with parents, caregivers and significant others such as teachers, with the aim of facilitating learning and empowering clients and their families.

Chapter 34 by Osman on RPL may at first glance appear out of place in a book on psychological assessment, as RPL’s application has generally been focused on higher education practice. However, in this chapter the application of RPL is extended to the psychological assessment domain, as it is proposed as a complementary procedure that can give insight into an individual’s acquired knowledge and experience.
It is quite evident that thus far the book has presented no chapter on vocational or organisational assessment. As indicated earlier, there are some very good local texts that provide these. De Bruin and De Bruin (2008) provide a very useful chapter on vocational assessment, while Moerdyk’s (2009) book provides a useful introduction to psychological assessment in the organisational context. In Section Three, we have included two chapters that attempt to take these issues further.

Watson and McMahon present a chapter on vocational assessment (chapter 32). They briefly discuss the traditional approaches to vocational assessment and identify the limitations inherent within these. This provides the basis for the introduction of more qualitative approaches to career assessment and counselling. The main tenets of this more narrative approach are introduced, and the My System of Career Influences (MSCI) technique is presented by way of example. Chapter 33 by Milner, Donald and Thatcher provides an interesting perspective on psychological assessment in the workplace by linking it to issues of transformation. The authors draw on organisational justice theory to address concerns regarding psychological assessment and organisational transformation.

In keeping with the theme of exploring the broader domain of psychological assessment, chapter 35 by Kanjee presents some large-scale assessment studies conducted in South Africa. This chapter highlights the fact that assessment extends beyond the traditional individual and group settings. It also proposes that if psychological assessment is to be transformed, large-scale studies are a necessity. As the psychological assessment fraternity, we need to think more creatively about ways to achieve this.

In the concluding chapter 36, we consider the information presented in this book and attempt to amalgamate it into suggested directions for psychological assessment practitioners in South Africa to take. It is hoped that this collaborative volume will provide the reader with a solid understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing psychological assessment in South Africa, as well as an awareness of the considerable research that has already been undertaken in this regard.

References


