Psychological Assessment in South Africa

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In the last 20 years, with the advent of a new democratic political dispensation, the field of psychological assessment in South Africa has developed in many ways. Most notable have been the influx of international tests and the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998). This Act was specifically promulgated to recognise that as a result of apartheid and other discriminatory laws and practices, there are disparities in employment, occupation and income in the labour market which have created such pronounced disadvantages for certain categories of people that they cannot be addressed by simply repealing discriminatory laws. Hence, the Employment Equity Act proposes a number of actions, the most prominent being that of affirmative action, to address the broader inequalities that exist in the workplace in South Africa. The Act also states that all psychological instruments used on South Africans should be reliable, valid, unbiased and fair for all groups in the country. This is a novel approach to legislation, since internationally the governance of psychological testing generally falls under the auspices of the psychological registration bodies. The promulgation of this legislation has led to increased ‘conscientisation’ of researchers, practitioners and the public. As a consequence, validation studies of the types discussed by Milner, Donald and Thatcher in chapter 33 of this volume have been undertaken. A number of private companies and institutions have also started using only those tests that are supported by a solid body of empirical research. However, a number of challenges remain. Rather than viewing each as an insurmountable obstacle, we attempt in this chapter to present them as challenges to be overcome, each giving rise to a unique set of opportunities.

Policy implications of the Employment Equity Act

Although the majority of practitioners are using tests ethically and responsibly, there is no active control mechanism to manage this effectively. The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) has a Psychometrics Committee under the Professional Board for Psychology. The Psychometrics Committee has a mandate to evaluate tests to determine whether they are reliable, valid and fair before registering them for use in the country. However, there is currently
no legislation indicating that only HPCSA-registered tests may be used. This has been proposed in the most recent amendments to the Employment Equity Act, but the contentious nature of this proposal, and objection from the Association of Test Publishers amongst others, have led to the promulgation of the amendments being postponed. These disagreements have delayed progress in psychological assessment development and practice in South Africa.

Arising from this are several more challenges and associated opportunities, particularly if the amendments to the Employment Equity Act are eventually promulgated. These amendments propose that only psychologists and psychometrists be permitted to utilise psychological tests and assessments. They also propose that only registered psychometric instruments may be used in the country, thus intensifying the stringency of the legislation on psychological testing in South Africa. This is potentially advantageous in that, if regulated and managed correctly, it will ensure that psychological assessment is practised ethically and appropriately, allowing no opportunity to repeat the abuses of the past. There will be an increased opportunity to promote and instil the development of an ‘ethical consciousness’, as was identified by Coetzee in chapter 28. While in principle this proposal is seductive, practically it raises a host of additional challenges. Primary among these are that the body responsible for registering psychological tests is currently not managing this task. In order to manage the influx of tests to be registered should the Employment Equity Act amendments be promulgated, the Psychometrics Committee of the HPCSA’s Professional Board for Psychology will have to be expanded. It will have to consider the creation of an extended group of people willing to review tests, as proposed by Foxcroft (2004), with regard to developing suitable tests for the multicultural South African context. However, obtaining funding for this purpose will be a considerable challenge.

The need for skilled personnel

In addition to the abovementioned concern, a further concern is that there is a limited number of individuals with the requisite specialist measurement skills and knowledge of assessment in South Africa. Foxcroft (2004) points out that there has been limited transfer of test development skills to a new generation of researchers, since postgraduate psychology programmes tend to focus on developing psychology practitioners, and states that ‘it remains unfortunate that at this critical moment, when psychological test development stands at the threshold of a new era in which new tests should be developed from a multicultural rather than a monocultural perspective, there is a critical shortage of experienced test developers in South Africa’ (p.8). Despite the importance of psychological assessment both locally and globally, it is marginalised in South African academic curricula. South Africa has registration categories for psychologists specialising in clinical, counselling, educational and industrial psychology, and most recently in forensic and neuropsychology, but a specialisation in psychometrics falls into the category of a psychometrist or
a psychological counsellor – a level that is academically lower than that of a psychologist. The HPCSA and academic institutions need to consider the introduction of a specialist area devoted to psychological assessment that ranks equal in stature to registration as a psychologist, with its own scope of practice.

The need for a specialisation in psychological assessment would also address the potential increase in demand for these skills, should the amendments to the Employment Equity Act be promulgated. If only psychologists and psychometrists are authorised to use psychological tests, as proposed in the amendments, this is likely to place a heightened demand on a small pool of practitioners. This opportunity is countered by the fact that there will in all likelihood not be sufficient numbers of qualified practitioners to meet the demand.

This raises both a challenge and an opportunity for psychology departments across the country. Students are increasingly realising the potential for pursuing careers in psychological assessment. As such, the demand for psychometric programmes is increasing. However, using Gauteng as an example, there are only three training institutions in this province which offer this option. Two of them require the students to locate and organise their own internship sites, and one of them organises the internship site but charges a premium fee. There is little standardisation across the programmes, although all conform to the Guidelines for Psychometrists document provided by the HPCSA (2010). It is recommended that academic institutions take cognisance of these developments and develop and strengthen psychometric programmes.

The current Employment Equity Act requires that psychological tests be scientifically reliable, valid and fair, and that imported, etic tests be explored for utility in South Africa only if they can be appropriately adapted and translated. It also requires that more local, emic instruments be developed. The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) had a unit devoted to test development and adaptation which was dissolved following the governmental transformation in 1994, and all test material was subsequently sold to local test publishers. Research from this unit of the HSRC, unless published in academic journals, is not easily accessible. The current test publishers conduct some research on the ex-HSRC and other instruments that they market, but this is minimal and not widely available. Most test publishers tend to focus only on their marketable instruments, the majority of which are etic in nature, as is evidenced in some of the chapters in this book. Thus, the challenge is to meet the increasing demand for practitioners with test development and adaptation skills, and the opportunity arising from this is clear – the creation of a new academic specialisation to develop these scarce skills in the country.

Aside from the role of academic institutions in providing training, a possibility is that the government consider setting up a body similar to that of the HSRC unit – that is, one that receives partial funding from government and partial funding from private donors and corporate businesses. One of the reasons for suggesting that government contribute only partially to funding such an initiative stems from the history associated with psychological assessment. Comprehensive government control of the use and distribution of tests might repeat the problems experienced under the previous dispensation, where a relatively small number of instruments
received official sanctioning and support. According to Heuchert (personal communication, March 9, 2012), in the past ‘this led to groupthink, an insular approach and premature foreclosing on the very complex issue of trying to evaluate and assess the human psyche in all its intricacies’. This needs to be avoided in future planning for the field of psychological assessment in South Africa.

Practical constraints

This proposal may be idealistic, given the lack of resources in South Africa, both human and financial. Consequently, there may not be funds available to finance assessment projects, which battle for a priority position against the background of HIV/AIDS, poverty, crime and corruption. Funding for psychological assessment (and other psychological services) is also a problem on a practical level, since the majority of the population relies on public health care. In these settings there are very few adequate environments for testing; test material is often old, incomplete and/or unavailable; and there is a very limited or nonexistent budget to purchase and upgrade test materials. Hence, practitioners in these situations are faced with the ethical dilemma of committing copyright infringements by using photocopied materials or denying individuals much-needed services. This challenge can be translated into an opportunity for government to improve service delivery in these settings, firstly by identifying and acknowledging this as a concern, and then by allocating a budget to cover the costs of such materials. Assessment practitioners and researchers also need to consider developing local or emic tests in order to address the challenge of the exorbitant fees charged for purchasing etic instruments.

Etic versus emic tests

The use of imported instruments (an etic approach), adapted versions of imported instruments (a pseudo-etic approach) or locally developed instruments (emic instruments) is highly debated. Many argue that the use of etic instruments is both necessary and justified since most companies that use assessment instruments are multinational. As such, South Africa needs to be represented globally on an equal footing with other countries. In contrast, many clinicians argue that for various reasons, most notably those of culture and language, more emic instruments are necessary. Anderson (2001, p.33), for example, makes a strong argument for the collection of local neuropsychological normative data by pointing out that ‘the injudicious use of imported normative data could result in an unacceptably high diagnostic rate of neuropsychological impairment in otherwise healthy South Africans’. In 1996, Shuttleworth-Jordan argued for adaptation and standardisation of well-researched international tests, rather than ‘reinventing the wheel’ by developing completely new tests.

This issue is best illustrated in the area of personality testing. The Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality and the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-
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PI-R) are currently regarded as the ‘gold standard’ in personality assessment against which all other objective tests are compared (see Laher, chapter 18, this volume). Laher’s chapter provides evidence for the utility, albeit limited, of the NEO-PI-R in South Africa. The NEO-PI-R has not been adapted or standardised for the South African context and therefore represents an etic test. More recent findings support the utility of the instrument but are limited to student samples. Taylor and De Bruin (chapter 16, this volume) have developed the Basic Traits Inventory (BTI) for use in South Africa. As indicated in their chapter, the BTI was constructed based on the FFM. Thus, it represents more of a pseudo-etic approach than an emic one.

More recently, work has been under way on a truly emic personality instrument, the South African Personality Inventory (SAPI) (Laher, 2010; Meiring, 2006). The project aims at developing a single, unified personality inventory for South Africa that incorporates both universal (etic) and unique (emic) personality factors found across the diversity of cultures in this country. The first stage of this project explored indigenous perceptions of personality, primarily through the work of Nel (2008). He explored personality structure in each of the 11 language groups in South Africa. Structured interviews were conducted in the native languages of 1 308 South Africans to gather information about personality-descriptive terms. This resulted in 50 000 personality-descriptive terms, which were reduced to 190 personality dimensions via the use of cluster analysis. The 190 dimensions were further clustered and finally resulted in 9 clusters – namely, Extraversion, Soft-heartedness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Intellect, Openness, Integrity, Relationship Harmony and Facilitating, with the first 6 labels being more closely related to the FFM and the last 3 being more indigenous personality constructs (Nel, 2008). The quantitative phase of this project is currently under way and involves administering 2 500 items to 4 language groupings in South Africa. Results have not yet been published for this (Meiring, 2010). As is evident from this example, the process of test development is lengthy and complicated, and while emic instruments are useful, they come with their own challenges. Aside from the practical problems associated with test development – that is, lack of skilled personnel and funding – there is also the challenge that if South Africa is to establish and maintain its position internationally in the discipline, we need to employ and adapt etic instruments.

Quite often test developers argue forcibly for the universal applicability of their instruments. South Africa, with its multilingual and culturally diverse population, provides a perfect environment for such claims to be empirically tested. The issue of cultural diversity encompasses current understandings of both culture as well as acculturation, and this leads to another set of challenges and opportunities.

Defining culture

Internationally and locally, the cross-cultural applicability of psychological instruments is often pronounced on, but the term ‘culture’ is seldom defined. In many international studies ‘culture’ refers to either nationality or ethnicity, while
locally ‘culture’ is often a euphemism for race. Consequently, ‘culture’ in South African research and practice is often represented by the racial categories black, coloured, white and Indian, or language groupings based on ethnicity such as isiZulu, Sesotho, Tshivenda, and so on. It can be argued that this type of classification represents a perpetuation of the apartheid classification systems. However, this way of grouping individuals is endorsed by the Employment Equity Act.

In order to ‘promote the constitutional right of equality and the exercise of true democracy; eliminate unfair discrimination in employment; ensure the implementation of employment equity to redress the effects of discrimination; [and] achieve a diverse workforce broadly representative of the South African people’ amongst other things (Preamble to the Employment Equity Act), the Act proposes affirmative action in Chapter 3. According to Section 15(1), ‘[a]ffirmative action measures are measures designed to ensure that suitably qualified people from designated groups have equal employment opportunities and are equitably represented in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce of a designated employer’. Designated groups are defined in the Act as ‘black people, women and people with disabilities’, where ‘“black people” is a generic term which means Africans, Coloureds and Indians’ (Chapter 1, Definitions). This suggests that psychometric studies should be considering differences across gender and racial groupings.

The issue is complex, as there is no doubt that culture affects behaviour and the psychological constructs being measured (Bedell, Van Eeden & Van Staden, 1999), and the extent of cultural diversity in South Africa makes the development of tests that are valid, unbiased and fair for all groups in the country extremely difficult. It is necessary for individuals working in this field to actively engage in this debate, since it is becoming increasingly evident that race groupings are no longer valid indicators for differences amongst South Africans. The concept of culture is also more complex than merely being reduced to race, language and/or ethnicity. Many have argued that issues of acculturation are becoming more salient in the South African context. This argument is addressed in the next section.

Acculturation

Some practitioners in the field of psychological assessment argue that ‘degree of acculturation’ should be considered a key variable in contemporary research and practice in this field. For example, McCrae, Costa and Martin (2005) suggest that in a number of studies ancestry and culture are confounded, thus increasing the necessity for studies on acculturation. This is particularly the case in the African and South African contexts, where ‘politically liberated Africans are now challenged by the opportunities and risks of modern technology and, above all, by the fast pace of worldwide transformation and change’ (Okeke, Draguns, Sheku & Allen, 1999, p.240). Acculturation has been defined as ‘those phenomena which result in individuals having different cultures coming into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups’ (Redfield, Linton & Herskovits, 1936 quoted
in Van de Vijver & Phalet, 2004, p.216). The difficulty in terms of psychological assessment is that different groups in South Africa are in various stages of acculturation (Shuttleworth-Jordan, 1996).

The general perception tends to be that in South Africa, African individuals are acculturated into the white, Western, usually individualist, culture. However, since 1994, it has become increasingly evident from daily interactions that acculturation is occurring in both directions. White South Africans are absorbing aspects of African culture possibly as much as African people are absorbing aspects of Western culture. Most of us have experience of this, with a clear example being the recent FIFA World Cup event where, for the first time, South Africans were presented as a cohesive nation and not as separate race groups. The varying levels of acculturation present a challenge to research and practice in psychological assessment, while simultaneously providing unique opportunities for South Africa to contribute meaningfully to the international arena. Many scales have recently been developed to measure acculturation. A constructive suggestion would be for these scales to be explored. The opportunity exists for either the creation or the adaptation of an acculturation scale that can routinely be employed in research to better understand the acculturation construct and its role in the South African context. Looking beyond the traditional variables of language, race and ethnic group, it might be interesting to explore the stage of identity development that the individual is at. This could be used to provide a context for the interpretation of other test data. The qualitative approach to career assessment, as described by Watson and McMahon (see chapter 32, this volume), is indicative of assessment within this tradition.

The economic divide

‘Acculturation’ may also be a more academic or socially acceptable way of describing the broader and more pervasive economic divide that exists in South Africa. Although South Africa is now part of a digitised, globalised society, it remains a very unequal society, with the majority of the population still not having access to basic resources, opportunities, employment and education. This divided access is frequently described in the literature and is said to pervade all aspects of South African life, from politics and economics through to education (see Devey, Skinner & Valodia, 2006; Skinner & Valodia, 2006). In the psychological literature, reference in this regard is often made to urban versus rural samples (Foxcroft, 2002; Foxcroft & Davies, 2008). Whilst we acknowledge that the urban–rural distinction is important, and has made and will continue to make important contributions to our understanding of the challenges facing psychological assessment in South Africa, we do believe that the divide is much deeper than geographical location.

South Africa has a ‘second economy’, which parallels the ‘first economy’ and functions independently of formal market and banking systems (Mbeki, 2003; The Presidency, 2007). Furthermore, the ‘first economy’ operates in such a way that it often undermines the growth of the ‘second economy’, leaving little
The quality of education

Linked in part to socio-economic status, as well as to the debate on the utility of race as an indicator, is quality of education. Equal access to education and opportunity are proposed for all, and there has been a segment of the population across the various race and language groups that has been the recipient of these opportunities. In this context, the use of race and language variables is regarded as no longer valid. In this regard, Shuttleworth-Edwards, Van der Merwe, Van Tonder and Radloff (chapter 3, this volume) suggest that quality of education is a more discriminating variable than race when considering performance on intelligence tests. By quality of education, Shuttleworth-Edwards et al. are referring to the distinction between relatively advantaged education within the historically white private and/or former Model C educational institutions (Private/Model C schooling), and relatively disadvantaged education within the black and coloured township educational institutions (Township schooling). Their research has revealed considerable lowering of Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (Fourth Edition) (WISC-IV) IQ test scores (of 20 to 30 IQ points) in association with relatively disadvantaged education, when compared to the British standardised norms. This is particularly salient in light of recent proposed government policies on both school readiness and vocational counselling. Some provincial departments of education have imposed an informal moratorium on school readiness testing within their schools. School readiness assessment is a highly contentious issue in South Africa, as discussed by Amod and Heafield in chapter 6 of this volume. With the historical misuse of assessment measures, which perpetuated exclusionary practices and an inequitable education system, still vivid in South African society’s collective memory, school readiness assessment is understandably still viewed with suspicion. In addition, some of the psychological tools used to assess readiness either do not have local norms
or these are outdated (Foxcroft, Paterson, Le Roux & Herbst, 2004). Some attempts are made to address this; for example, Theron (chapter 5, this volume) demonstrates how one such test, the Junior South African Individual Scales (JSAIS), can be interpreted in a multicultural (and crime-ridden) context. She urges practitioners not to limit the JSAIS to a measure of intelligence, but to use it to comment qualitatively on children’s level of resilience and readiness for formal learning.

Unfortunately, such useful information only takes us part of the way towards addressing the challenge of school readiness assessment, as the negative perception of such assessment persists. Further, socio-economic divisions that persist in South Africa exacerbate developmental and emotional differences between children. The purpose of school readiness assessment, as indicated by Amod and Heafield (chapter 6), is not only to determine readiness for formal school entry, but also to identify preschool children who could benefit from additional stimulation programmes, learning support or retention in order to develop and consolidate skills which are absent. By denying children this opportunity we thwart their prospects for learning and achievement in a Western education system.

Language and literacy

South Africa has 11 official languages and the Language-in-Education Policy (Department of Education, 1997) promotes multilingualism in our schools through use of more than one language of learning and teaching, and/or by offering additional languages as fully fledged subjects, and/or by applying special immersion or language maintenance programmes, or through other means approved by the head of the provincial education department. In addition, many employers require that future employees be fluent in another South African language as well as English in order to be able to better assist clients. These are all reasonable suggestions, given that the majority of South Africans (91.8 per cent of the population) speak English as their second language (Statistics South Africa, 2001).

Research has consistently demonstrated how taking a test in a language that is not one’s first language can impact on test results (see Abrahams, 2002; Foxcroft, 2004; Franklin-Ross, 2009; Heuchert, Parker, Stumpf & Myburgh, 2000; Horn, 2000; Meiring, Van de Vijver & Rothmann, 2006; Nel, 2008; Taylor, 2000; 2004; Van de Vijver & Rothmann, 2004; Van Eeden & Mantsha, 2007; Vogt & Laher, 2009). Nell (1994) has argued that language is the most important variable that influences test performance. If an individual takes a test in a language in which she or he is not proficient, it is exceedingly difficult to determine whether poor performance is a result of language difficulties or difficulty in terms of the construct being measured. Thus, it is salient that home language issues also be examined as a challenge to psychological assessment in South Africa.

Another commonly held assumption is that home language is representative of an individual’s language proficiency. This is flawed since, as with culture, an
individual’s home language indicates nothing about his or her proficiency in English, which is usually what questions about home language are intended to uncover. Medium of instruction at school is probably a better indicator than home language of an individual’s language proficiency in English.

Discussions of language and assessment raise further challenges. According to Project Literacy (2010), a non-governmental organisation that delivers adult basic education and training in South Africa, there are 4.7 million South Africans who have not attended school and are completely illiterate. There are a further 4.9 million adult South Africans who are functionally illiterate – that is, they left school before Grade 7. The majority of existing psychological assessment procedures require some degree of literacy. Both the challenge and the opportunity inherent in this would be the development of assessment methods to service this group. Since this problem is not unique to South Africa, solutions in this regard have the potential to be of international relevance.

Test translation

A further, related challenge is that of using test material in English and administering it to individuals whose proficiency in English may be limited. Notwithstanding the dynamic interplay between language, culture and thought, on a practical level translation of test materials presents a myriad of challenges, foregrounded by the fact that South Africa has 11 official languages. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that some indigenous South African languages do not have equivalent words or idiomatic expressions to those used in English (Horn, 2000). For example, ‘green’ and ‘blue’ are expressed by the same word in isiXhosa, while Afrikaans has no words for ‘sexy’ or ‘weird’; there are no single words in isiXhosa for ‘manipulation’, ‘morality’, ‘intentions’, ‘roller-coaster’, or ‘jittery’, and only one word in this language for the English terms ‘vision’, ‘dream’, ‘fantasy’ and ‘imagination’ (Horn, 2000). In this context, translation difficulties are aggravated when working with clinical instruments such as the Beck Depression Inventory or the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory – III, which require the translation of clinical terms. When no translated instruments are available, practitioners often rely on the services of an interpreter. In a clinical setting, this is most likely to be a nurse, an intern or a student, while in schools this is usually undertaken by teachers and/or cleaning staff, usually on an ad hoc basis. The limitations and dangers inherent in this practice are self-evident. Again, this points to the need to train more skilled individuals, both in psychological assessment and in allied professions such as interpretation.

Response bias

An aspect that is linked to both culture and language, and that is currently receiving much research interest in the field of psychological assessment, is response bias. In personality psychology, for example, it is quite common to
find response biases operational in non-Western cultures. Taylor and De Bruin (see chapter 16, this volume) have considered this with regard to the BTI. Other researchers have argued that any personality differences observed between cultures may not necessarily be true differences, but may occur due to differences in response styles and response biases in African samples (see Piedmont, Bain, McCrae & Costa, 2002). Allik and McCrae (2004) argue that acquiescent response biases, as well as a tendency to avoid extreme responses, are more prominent in collectivistic cultures. Hamamura, Heine and Paulhus (2008) also argue that extreme response styles are more characteristic in those of European heritage, while moderate response styles are more characteristic in those of East Asian heritage. They also cite literature which suggests that North Americans of European heritage have higher levels of extreme responding as compared to African-Americans and Latino Americans. They conclude that this may be due to a tendency towards dialectical thinking (a tolerance of contradictory beliefs) that is more prominent in East Asian cultures, and/or to social desirability.

These findings are in contradiction to the findings of Bernardi (2006), who reports that social desirability response bias decreases as a country’s level of individualism increases. Furthermore women, according to Bernardi, are more likely to exhibit social desirability response bias. Bernardi’s study was conducted with samples from 12 countries – namely, Australia, Canada, China, Colombia, Ecuador, Hong Kong, Ireland, Japan, Nepal, South Africa, Spain and the USA. Bernardi does not provide the demographic breakdown of each of the samples. Rather, he divides them up into cultural areas defined as More Developed Latin, Less Developed Latin, More Developed Asian, Asian Colonial, and Anglo. He includes South Africa in the Anglo group along with Australia, Canada, Ireland and the USA. Without the demographic breakdown it is difficult to decide whether this was appropriate or not, but in Bernardi’s study South Africa was clustered closer to the individualism dimension, and given the arguments presented in this book and in this chapter specifically, this may have been erroneous. Either way, this highlights the need for more research on response biases, whether they be extreme or acquiescent responding or social desirability responding.

Qualitative approaches

To address issues such as varying levels of literacy and test-wiseness, psychological assessment is moving away from the more traditional testing approach to more of an assessment focus. Hence, practitioners are consistently encouraged to use a battery of tests, to take an appropriate history and to explore collateral information before making decisions and recommendations (Foxcroft, 2004). In an organisational setting, testing forms only one part of the selection procedure. Interviews, in-basket tasks, role plays and group activity are frequently employed in addition to traditional testing (Moerdyk, 2009). Watson and McMahon (chapter 32, this volume) provide a comprehensive description of the manner in which qualitative information and techniques can be used effectively in career assessment. The reader is also referred to Maree (2007) and
Stead and Watson (2006) for further information on narrative approaches to career counselling. Osman (chapter 34, this volume) issues the challenge to assessment practitioners to equalise opportunities between people rather than differentiating opportunities based on race. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) provides an opportunity for individuals to present their gained life experiences to be meaningfully considered in occupational and aptitude assessment situations.

In addition, given the educational disparities in South Africa, learning potential approaches hold promise in identifying those who have the potential for development and who could benefit from further training (Amod & Seabi, chapter 9, this volume; De Beer, chapter 10, this volume). Proponents of this approach hold that intellectual ability is not static but can be modified. The development of the appropriate cognitive processes to function optimally in the world is dependent upon the individual’s opportunity to benefit from appropriate mediation experiences (Feuerstein, 1980). The nature and extent of the mediation would provide an indication of the learning potential of the testee, and provide guidance for further educational intervention. This approach could be used in conjunction with Howard Gardner’s (1993) theory of multiple intelligences. He suggests that it is far more fruitful to describe cognitive ability in terms of a profile of relative strengths and weaknesses, rather than focusing on a single general intelligence score. Unfortunately, no standardised and normed test of multiple intelligences exists yet. Those that can be found on the internet are based to varying degrees on Gardner’s ideas, and have not been psychometrically validated.

Development of indigenous knowledge systems

None of the challenges presented here are new. Many have already been taken up as opportunities. Etic instruments have been developed. Pseudo-etic efforts are continuously undertaken with adaptations of intelligence, personality, interest and aptitude instruments. Emic approaches are also undertaken. Some of these, such as the Jung Personality Questionnaire and Self-Directed Search, represent work undertaken before 1994 by the HSRC. The work on the Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF) began with the HSRC, but is now being continued by local test distributors. Instruments such as the BTI and recent developments with the SAPI represent more recent emic approaches which hold promise. Work has been done to explore the possibilities of assessing intelligence and aptitude dynamically (see, in this volume, Amod & Seabi, chapter 9; De Beer, chapter 10; Taylor, chapter 11), thus addressing some of the challenges posed by language and education, although factors related to socio-economic status remain. In the area of career assessment there has also been substantial progress, with the use of qualitative, lifestyle narratives (see Watson & McMahon, chapter 32, this volume). However, none of these have yet addressed an important challenge – namely, the general acceptance of and subscription to Western, Eurocentric theoretical models and paradigms.

Earlier in the chapter we alluded to the FFM and the NEO-PI-R being the gold standard against which all personality instruments are evaluated. However, the FFM has been found to be lacking, particularly when used in Asian and African cultures.
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(see Cheung, Cheung, Howard & Lim, 2006; Cheung, Leung, Fan, Song, Zhang & Zhang, 1996; Laher, 2008; 2011; Laungani, 1999; McCrae, Terracciano et al., 2005a; 2005b; Nel, 2008; Okeke et al., 1999; Pervin, 1999; Rossier, Dahourou & McCrae, 2005; Van Eeden & Mantsha, 2007). This finding prompted Cheung and colleagues to conduct research with the Chinese lexicon, resulting in the development of the Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory (CPAI) (Cheung et al., 1996) and subsequently the Cross-Cultural Personality Assessment Inventory – 2 (CPAI-2) (Cheung, 2004; Cheung, Cheung, Zhang, Leung, Leong & Yeh, 2008).

The BTI is a personality inventory developed in the South African context in accordance with the FFM (Taylor, 2004; Taylor & De Bruin, 2006). It measures the five factors of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, but unlike the NEO-PI-R, the BTI has five facets within each factor. The nomenclature and flavour of some of the facets are similar to those of the NEO-PI-R, but others have a slightly different focus. For example, Extraversion in the BTI consists of Gregariousness, Positive Affectivity, Ascendance, Excitement-Seeking and Liveliness (Taylor, 2004; Taylor & De Bruin, 2006). Although not as clear as the SAPI example given earlier, this nonetheless draws attention to the differences in the construct meanings and operationalisations across cultures.

Another locally developed instrument, the SAPI, reveals some new facets, as well as slightly different facets, to express traditional domains (Laher, 2010; Meiring, 2006; Nel, 2008). For example, the scale of Relationship Harmony is seen as one of the dimensions indigenous to South Africans and consists of the subscales of Approachability, Conflict-Seeking, Interpersonal Relatedness (also a factor on the CPAI-2) and Meddlesome. These scales, particularly those of Interpersonal Relatedness and Meddlesome, are not covered by the FFM. Extraversion is a universal scale, but in the South African context using the SAPI, it has subscales of Dominance, Expressiveness, Positive Emotionality and Sociability (Nel, 2008). Thus, Extraversion is different in a South African sample to that typically described by the FFM, with Dominance being included here, whereas Assertiveness is included in the Neuroticism factor in the NEO-PI-R. Expressiveness is defined as the inclination to share one’s feelings or problems with others, and can be seen as a combination of Warmth (E) and Feelings (O) on the NEO-PI-R. Positive Emotionality can be seen as a combination of the Extraversion Positive Emotions facet, as well as the Extraversion facet of Gregariousness. However, the facets of Excitement-Seeking and Activity do not appear in the SAPI operationalisation of Extraversion, indicating the different flavour of some of the domains in other cultures.

It is evident from the research and arguments presented above that the opportunity exists within the psychological assessment research community to develop emic theoretical approaches to accompany emic instruments. South Africa provides a unique context for the development of indigenous knowledge within the field of psychological assessment. Such knowledge needs to be incorporated into theory and introduced into international mainstream research. Dialogue and discussion around this topic have been largely neglected, and must be invited if South African research in this field is to develop to maturity.
South Africa’s global position

Often we argue that South African psychology, much like psychology in most other developing countries, operates on the periphery of international psychology, with the USA and Europe being at the centre. This argument is no longer sufficient. South Africa has both the talent and the context to become a more dominant player in the field. The proposal that South Africa provide international leadership in psychological assessment is based on several reasons. The first, as already stated, is the practical one that multinational companies would advocate. However, there are other reasons of greater value. South Africa is a developing nation that has proven that it has the capacity to be progressive in a number of fields. Our Constitution, a peaceful transition to democracy, the Truth and Reconciliation hearings, the work on HIV/AIDS, and attempts to eliminate racism are amongst a few areas in which South Africa leads. By virtue of the country’s history, as well as its cultural diversity, South Africa provides an excellent environment for research on both etic and emic instruments.

Conclusion

The compilation of chapters in this book was intended to address some of the challenges raised here. Test development and use have been occurring in a ‘haphazard, uncoordinated manner’ (Foxcroft, 1997, p.234) and the purpose of this text has been to collate these data. A further aim was to force practitioners to evaluate the utility of South African and international tests that are commonly used. Most practitioners have embraced a multi-method assessment approach, in which practitioners are aware that test results are only one part of the larger process. As Claassen (1997, p.306) states, ‘[n]ever can a test score be interpreted without taking note of and understanding the context in which the score was obtained’. However, as is evident from the chapters in the book and the arguments presented in this chapter, we need to go further. Psychological assessment has come of age in South Africa, and the active pool of researchers and practitioners involved in the writing and reviewing of aspects of this book is evidence enough of the diverse talent present in our country to meet these challenges constructively.

References


