

The Current Trends in Psychological Testing and Assessment

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What is Psychological Assessment?

Psychological assessment is a process of testing that uses a combination of techniques to help arrive at some hypotheses about a person and their behavior, personality and capabilities. Psychological assessment is nearly always performed by a licensed psychologist, or a psychology trainee. Psychologists are the only profession that is expertly trained to perform and interpret psychological tests. Psychologists seek to take the information gathered from psychological assessment and weave it into a comprehensive and complete picture of the person being tested. Recommendations are based on all the assessment results and from discussion with peers, family, and others who may shed light on the person's behavior in different settings. For instance, in children, information must be obtained from parents and teachers in order for psychological assessment to be considered complete and relevant to the child. Major discrepancies among the findings must be resolved before any diagnostic decisions or recommendations for treatment are made. Psychological assessment is never focused on a single test score or number. Every person has a range of competencies that can

be evaluated through a number of methods. A psychologist is there to evaluate the competencies as well as the limitations of the person, and report on them in an objective but helpful manner. A psychological assessment reports not only weaknesses found in testing, but also the individual's strengths.

Components of Psychological Assessment

Standardized psychological Tests

Interviews

Observations

Informal Assessment

A standardized psychological test is a task or set of tasks given under standard, set conditions. It is designed to assess some aspect of a person's knowledge, skill or personality. A psychological test provides a scale of measurement for consistent individual differences regarding some psychological concept and serves to line up people according to that concept.

Valuable information is gained through interviewing. When it's for a child, interviews are conducted not only with the child, but also with the parents, teachers and other individuals familiar with the child. Interviews are more open and less structured than formal testing and give those being interviewed an opportunity to convey information in their own words. A formal clinical interview is often conducted with the individual before the start of any psychological assessment or testing. This interview can last anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes, and includes questions about the individual's personal and childhood history,

recent life experiences, work and school history, and family background.

Observations of the person being referred in their natural setting especially if it's a child can provide additional valuable assessment information. In the case of a child, how do they behave in school settings, at home, and in the neighborhood? Does the teacher treat them differently than other children? How do their friends react to them? The answers to these and similar questions can give a better picture of a child and the settings in which they function. It can also help the professional conducting the assessment better formulate treatment recommended.

Standardized tests may at times need to be supplemented with more informal assessment procedures, as such as projective tests or even career-testing or teacher-made tests. For example, in the case of a child, it may be valuable to obtain language samples from the child, test the child's ability to profit from systematic cues, and evaluate the child's reading skills under various conditions. The realm of informal assessment is vast, but informal testing must be used more cautiously since the scientific validity of the assessment is less known.

Distinction between Psychological Testing and Assessment

Psychological testing is a relatively straightforward process wherein a particular scale is administered to obtain a specific score. Subsequently, a descriptive meaning can be applied to the score on the basis of normative, homothetic findings. In contrast, psychological assessment is concerned with the clinician who takes a variety of test scores

generally obtained from multiple test methods, and considers the data in the context of history, referral information and observed behavior to understand the person being evaluated, to answer the referral questions, and then to communicate findings to the patient, his or her significant others, and referral source.

The Current Trends of Psychological Assessment and Testing

The current trends of psychological assessment and testing can be discussed under two basic themes

Assessment and testing settings

Types of assessment and testing

Assessment and Testing Settings

Organizational Settings

One of the fastest-growing fields of assessment psychology involves the application of psychological assessment and testing in organizational settings or work place. This is specialized field of psychology is known as industrial/organizational (I/O) psychology. In this field psychological assessment and testing is used in two stages

Pre-employment phase

Performance appraisals

In Pre-employment phase psychological assessment and testing is used for the selection of employees. It is also known as personal selection. The requirements for a selection system are knowledge, skills, ability, and other characteristics, known as KSAOs Personnel selection

systems employ evidence-based practices to determine the most qualified candidates and involve both the newly hired and those individuals who can be promoted from within the organization. Common selection tools include ability tests (e.g., cognitive, physical, or psychomotor), knowledge tests, personality tests structured interviews

Performance appraisal or performance evaluation is the process of measuring an individual's work behaviors and outcomes against the expectations of the job. Performance appraisal is frequently used in promotion and compensation decisions, to help design and validate personnel selection procedures, and for performance management. Is the process of providing performance feedback relative to expectations and improvement information (e.g., coaching, mentoring). Performance management may also include documenting and tracking performance information in organization-level for evaluation purposes.

An I-O psychologist would typically use information from the job analysis to determine a job's performance dimensions, and then construct a rating scale to describe each level of performance for the job. Often, the I-O psychologist would be responsible for training organizational personnel how to use the performance appraisal instrument, including ways to minimize bias when using the rating scale, and how to provide effective performance feedback. Additionally, the I-O psychologist may consult with the organization on ways to use the performance appraisal information for broader performance management initiatives.

Clinical Settings

Today in clinical settings psychological tests and assessments are widely used. This sort of assessment has a long history in the field of clinical and mental health. The use of psychological testing and assessment in this field can be identified under three major models such as

Information gathering model

Therapeutic model

Differential treatment model

Information gathering model is used to collect information by using the assessment process for the diagnosis of mental problems. Neuropsychological tests, self-report questionnaires, and performance-based personality tests all have demonstrated the ability to identify, describe, and quantify important patient characteristics. Thus, these psychological tests are useful both for describing clinical symptoms and syndromes that may be targets for treatment and for facilitating accurate diagnosis toward cost-effective treatment in both mental health and medical settings.

In therapeutic model psychological assessment is used to provide new experiences and information to the client, which he can use for self-discovery, personal growth and development. This model basically acts as tools of intervention to bring about positive changes in the patient.

The assessment in the differential model is used the psychological tests for conducting research and evaluating the outcomes of the intervention programs.

Forensic Setting

In forensic setting psychologists have been asked by the court to assess individuals for a variety of reasons, including competency to proceed, sanity, violence risk, substance abuse, parental fitness, trauma due to a critical incident, child custody, and psychological effects of workplace discrimination. In general, psychological assessment for the court will involve standard interview techniques, such as a clinical interview, mental status examination and psychosocial history. However, depending upon the relevant legal questions to be answered in that assessment the extensiveness of those modes of information-gathering may vary considerably. The clinical interview portion of an evaluation usually consists of a question-and-answer format designed to elicit information concerning the defendant's history of symptoms, possible mental health or substance rehabilitation treatments, and family history of problem areas. Information obtained from the clinical interview may suggest the types of psychological tests that will be required and the appropriate sources of collateral information that will be necessary for review.

The mental status examination is both a structured interview and an observational technique designed to assess the individual's current mental functioning. This "snapshot" of the individual at the time of the evaluation includes an assessment of their orientation to time, place, person and situation, attention span, memory functions, thought processes, gross estimate of intellectual functioning, and mood (depressed, angry, anxious, happy). Information obtained from the mental status examination may be utilized in making a recommendation to the court that an

individual meets the legal criteria for involuntary psychiatric hospitalization or the more specialized forms of assessment (such as a neuropsychological or psychiatric evaluation) would be indicated.

Educational Setting

Psychological testing and assessment play an important role in educational setting. current educational environment demands a greater emphasis on the psychological aspects of the teaching learning process, the scientific understanding of behavior and mental process. Psychological assessment and testing process is applied to assessing the students and providing counseling and guidance. Types of assessment mostly occurs in this setting are Intelligent, aptitude, achievement, personality, career guidance and placement etc.

Types of Assessment and Testing

Psychological testing or assessment is not a single test or even a single type of test. It encompasses a whole body of dozens of research-backed tests and procedures of assessing specific aspects of a person's psychological makeup. Some tests are used to determine IQ, others are used for personality, and still others for something else. Based on these variations Psychological testing and assessment can be divided into four primary types:

Clinical Interview

Assessment of Intellectual Functioning (IQ)

Personality Assessment

Behavioral Assessment

Clinical Interview

The clinical interview is a core component of any psychological assessment. It is also known as an "intake interview", "admission interview" or "diagnostic interview" Clinical interviews typically last from 1 to 2 hours in length, and occur most often in a clinician's office. Many types of mental health professionals can conduct a clinical interview psychologists, psychiatrists, clinical social workers, psychiatric nurses.

The clinical interview is an opportunity for the professional to gather important background and family data about the person some components of the clinical interview have now become computerized. This is most often done for basic demographic information, but can also include structured diagnostic interview questions to help the clinicians formulate an initial diagnostic impression. Before any formal psychological testing is done, a clinical interview is nearly always conducted.

Assessment of Intellectual Functioning (IQ)

IQ intellectual quotient is a theoretical construct of a measure of general intelligence. It's important to note that IQ tests do not measure actual intelligence they measure what we believe might be important components of intelligence.

There are two primary measures used to test a person's intellectual functions intelligence tests and neuropsychological assessment. Intelligence tests are the more common type administered and include the Stanford-Binet and the Wechsler scales. Neuropsychological

assessment which can take up to 2 days to administer is a far more extensive form of assessment. It is focused not just on testing for intelligence, but also on determining all of the cognitive strengths and deficits of the person. Neuropsychological assessment is most usually done with people who have suffered some sort of brain damage, dysfunction or some kind of organic brain problem, just as having a brain hemorrhage.

The most commonly administered IQ test is called the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale—Fourth Edition (WAIS-IV). It generally takes anywhere from an hour and a half to administer, and is appropriate for any individual aged 16 or older to take. (Children can be administered an IQ test especially designed for them called the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – Fourth Edition, or the WISC-IV.)

The WAIS-IV is divided into four major scales to arrive at what's called a "full scale IQ." Each scale is further divided into a number of mandatory and optional (also called supplemental) subtests. The mandatory subtests are necessary to arrive at a person's full scale IQ. The supplemental subtests provide additional, valuable information about a person's cognitive abilities.

Personality Assessment

Personality assessment is designed to help a professional better understand an individual's personality. Personality is a complex combination of factors that has been developed over a person's entire childhood and young adulthood. There are genetic, environmental and social components to personality. Therefore tests that measure

personality takes into account this complexity and rich texture.

There are two primary types of personality tests — objective, by far the most commonly used today, and projective. Objective tests include things like the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI-2), the 16PF, and the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory-III (MCMI-III). Projective tests include the Rorschach Inkblot Test, the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), and the Draw-a-Person test.

Objective Tests

The most common objective personality test is the MMPI-2, a 567 true/false test that is a good measure of dysfunction within personality. It is less useful as a measure of healthy or positive personality traits because its design was based on helping a professional to find a psychiatric diagnostic label that best suited an individual. Originally developed in the 1940s, it was significantly revised in 1989 (and had another minor revision in 2001).

The MMPI-2 measures personality traits such as paranoia, hypomania, social introversion, masculinity/femininity, and psychopathology, among others. It does this by connecting an individual's responses to dozens of questions scattered throughout the test that are positively or negatively correlated with a particular personality trait. Because the questions are not always obviously related to the trait to which they are correlated, it is difficult to "fake" this test. The MMPI-2 is most often self-administered on a computer in a clinician's office.

The Million (MCMI-III) is specifically used to arrive at a DSM-IV personality disorder diagnosis. Because it takes only about a third of the time to take as the MMPI-2, it is often preferred when a simple assessment of an individual's personality disorder is needed.

Because the MMPI-2 is not an ideal measure for people with healthy personalities, other measures, such as the 16PF may be more appropriate. The 16PF measures 16 basic personality traits and can help a person better understand where their personality falls amongst those traits:

This type of assessment might be administered so that a person can better understand themselves, and it can also help a professional better understand what type of approach or strategy to employ in treatment to best help the person.

Projective Tests

The most famous projective test is the Rorschach Inkblot Test. The test is composed 5 black and white inkblot cards and 5 colored inkblot cards that an individual is shown and then asked to tell the professional what they see. The most popular scoring system for the Rorschach is the Exert system, developed in the 1970s. Responses are scored based the location described in the inkblot, and its determinants the things in the blot that prompted the person's response.

The Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) is comprised of 31 cards that depict people in a variety of situations. A few contain only objects and one card is completely blank. Often only a small subset of the cards is given (such as 10 or 20). The person viewing the card is asked to make up a

story about what they see. The TAT is not often formally scored; instead it's a test designed to try and distinguish recurring themes in the person's life. The pictures themselves have no inherent or "correct" story; therefore anything a person says about the picture may be an unconscious reflection into the person's life or inner turmoil.

Behavioral Assessment

Behavioral assessment is the process of observing or measuring a person's actual behavior to try and better understand the behavior and the thoughts behind it, and determine possible reinforcing components or triggers for the behavior. Through the process of behavioral assessment, a person and/or a professional can track behaviors and help change them.

After a clinical interview, the core of behavioral assessment is naturalistic observation that is, observing the person in a natural setting and taking notes. This can be done at home, at school, at work, or in a hospital or inpatient setting. Target negative and positive behaviors are observed, as well as their respective reinforcements. Then the therapist has a good idea of what needs to change in order to obtain new, healthier behaviors.

Self-monitoring is also a component of behavioral assessment. Inventories and checklists can also be a form of behavioral assessment. For instance, the Beck Depression Inventory is a popular depression behavioral assessment.

Conclusion

Psychological assessment encompasses a wide variety types of tests, procedures and techniques used to help a psychologist better understand a person. Mainly assessment is done using standard psychological tests, interviews, observation, and informal assessment techniques. Although some scientists use the psychological testing as a synonymous for the psychological assessment there is a distinction between these two terms. Assessment is a wider process than testing and psychological testing is one only one part of the psychological assessment. At present days psychological assessment is applied in verity of settings for various purposes such main domain settings are organizational in which psychological assessment is applied to the selection of employees and to measure perform of the employee, clinical setting for the diagnosis and treatment for the clients, forensic settings this sort of assessment is applied according to the requirements of the court and in educational settings assessment is used to evolution and direction of the students' behavior. When considering the types of assessment there can be seen for major types such as clinical interview which helps to gather more information about the client, IQ assessment is done by using intelligence tests and neuropsychological assessment which helps to understand person's intellectual functions based on the context and situation. Next important assessment type is personality assessment which helps to understand the uniqueness of the individual. This can be done by applying projective or objective personality tests. Behavioral assessment is another domain of the psychological assessment. This helps to measure person's actual behavior and better understanding of the thoughts and factors behind it.

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