



PSYCHOMETRIC ASSESSMENTS

Psychometric assessment is used to assess a person's ability, personality and behaviour to be able to arrive at a diagnosis and guide a treatment plan. There are four main reasons why psychometric assessment, or more generally called psychological testing, is performed. First, courts request it for a variety of reasons. For example, forensic work and custody battles. Second, it is used in cognitive rehabilitation. For example head injury and stroke victims. Third, parents or schools suspect learning or emotional problems. Parents and schools also enlist the skills of psychologists and psychometric assessment to assist in the determination of subject choices in school, degree choices for university as well as changes in career path. Lastly, to assist in guidance of socially-related challenges such as marital problems or family discord as well as in the assessment of major psychological disorders. In this article I will focus on the scholastic aspect of assessment as this is where assessment is most commonly used.

Psychometric assessment can be divided

into two main areas of inquiry: Cognitive strengths and weaknesses, and personality functioning.

The first, intellectual or cognitive strengths and weaknesses, is where your child is evaluated for possible learning disabilities, attention problems, or other obstacles to academic and social success. With regards to subject choices, the psychologist would make use of assessments such as an Aptitude assessment, Personality and Interest questionnaires to gain a fuller picture of a child's academic potential within the relevant school and university offered subjects/ fields. By including these three instruments into a battery, an informed decision regarding subject choices and university degree field choices may be made. Aptitude represents the learning potential a child possesses, thus their ability to learn. Within the school and tertiary environments the ability and potential to learn can outweigh the innate IQ of a child and/or teenager. Intellectual ability and learning potential can only get a child so far within the scholastic and tertiary environment, factors such as their

personality type and interests in many cases far outweigh intellectual or aptitude potential.

The second, a personality assessment is part of any psychological evaluation. If academic and intellectual factors do not seem to be the problem, then an evaluation into other areas of functioning such as personality and overall psychology wellness and functioning is in order. Personality assessment can be a very useful way in looking at a problem from a different perspective. It can give you a lot of new insight into your child, your behaviour and into the family that you can hopefully use to break problematic cycles.

If you are considering an assessment, whether for scholastic issues or personal challenges keep two things in mind.

- The resistance to testing results is often similar to that experienced in psychotherapy. You may experience resentment at the findings, anger at implications of inadequate parenting, automatic reactions to terms like learning disability, attention deficit, and

low self-esteem. Listen with an open mind to the test results before you reject them and ask many questions about what you have understood.

- Psychometric assessments are imperfect. Any psychological test is a sample of behaviour at a given punctuation in time. This is one reason test batteries, the use of multiple assessment questionnaires/instruments, and therefore are expensive. Psychologists make use of multiple tools to find correlation and consistency in findings across the instruments, before forming a conclusion. For example, before stating a person is an introvert, two or more instruments need to have introversion as a finding. A single test, in isolation, is of limited value.

There are several private practitioners, such as educational and counselling psychologists that offer scholastic psychometric services and these can be found on the web or via word of mouth. Schools may also provide this service, but there may be questions around the quality of assessments done to large numbers of children simultaneously as the findings offered may be to generalised to be useful to the individual. These bulk assessment situations also create unfavourable impressions of psychometric assessments as the generalised feedback provided does not match the context or the child. For example general codes given for career choices which are not really applicable within the modern SA context. The process may also be riddled with internal politics and hidden agendas. However being assessed within the school system is proven to be much more cost effective as the cost of having the psychologist present is divided amongst the number of children being assessed at a given time. Furthermore, if you are fortunate enough

to work with a functioning team in your school system, then you are getting the attention of many experts, all determined on understanding your child.

For therapeutic evaluations, such as personality challenges between family members, partners or spouses, many psychologists offer a range of assessments aimed at assisting and developing more functional relationship skills. Furthermore, within therapeutic evaluations, several instruments exist which assess mental status and can be useful in diagnosis of more serious psychological disorders, treatment plans and prognosis for the future. These types of assessments are more readily available across the registrations of counselling and clinical psychologists, whereas educational psychologists tend to primarily focus within the scholastic context.

Within our overlapping professions within the education context, people do not always agree about the definition of terms such as learning disability or attention deficit. Across professions, for example when you sit at a meeting of the education team at your child's school, with psychologists, social workers, teachers and other education specialists, there can be differences in opinion regarding these heavily laden terms. My advice is to avoid focusing on these labels as they can often not be useful in problem resolution. Instead, try to keep the focus on the following:

1. What are the child's strengths and weaknesses as uncovered in the testing?
2. How do they affect her/ his personality, self-esteem, and ability to function socially and academically?
3. What kind of remediation has been shown to help, such as smaller classes,

special teaching styles, psychotherapy, relaxation?

4. How can the child work around her/his problems?
5. Do you understand the test results and have you learned from them?

Psychometric assessment are just one of the tools available today to help guide students and parents in their school and career choices. No one assessment can provide a complete answer, these assessments should always be used in conjunction with the advice and guidance from a professional psychologist as well as other collateral information that may be available. Psychometric assessments are valuable as they provide consistent results when it comes to providing quality, independent and objective subject and career advice.

It is important to remember a test battery is only as good as the psychologist who interprets it and determines plausible findings from it. Therefore ask questions of the psychologist administering the assessments and request explanations as to the findings. Of vital importance is to view a test battery as an opportunity to gather more information to further unpack a challenging situation so as to reach a more informed plan of action.



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