

Code of Practice for Psychological and Other Similar Assessment in the Workplace



SOCIETY FOR INDUSTRIAL & ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY of SA

Published in 2006

in association with People Assessment in Industry (PAI)

**CODE OF PRACTICE FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL AND OTHER
SIMILAR ASSESSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE**

**Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology of South Africa
(SIOPSA)**

In association with People Assessment in Industry (PAI)

© Copyright 2006

The Code of Practice is compiled by People Assessment in Industry (PAI), an interest group of the Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology of South Africa (SIOPSA). It provides practitioners with guidelines for ethical assessment practices for the workplace in South Africa. Originally published in 1998, this revised edition of the Code of Practice was published in 2006.

For further information regarding SIOPSA or PAI and permission to quote from this document please contact the Secretary of SIOPSA:

Judith Williamson

Fax: (012) 998 1055

Cell: 083 304 6068

e-mail: siopsa@worldonline.co.za

SIOPSA

PO Box 1067

GARSFONTEIN

0042

For further information and comments on the Code, contact:

Prof Hennie J Kriek

PAI Chairperson and Taskforce Chair of the Code,

e-mail: Hennie@shl.co.za

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Following PAI becoming an interest group of SIOPSA, the decision was made in 2005 to revisit the Code of Practice to ensure it reflected the most up-to-date thinking in assessment practices in South Africa. The first round of revision updated the Code of Practice in terms of relevant legislation and included feedback from PAI's Executive Committee. This draft version was distributed to 100 members of PAI and other interested parties together with a request for feedback. A total of 13 formal responses were received to this second round of consultation:

Abed Moola, University of KwaZulu-Natal

Aletta Odendaal, Independent

Anne Bucket, Precision HR

Claire Whitford, SHL

Hennie Kriek, SHL/UNISA

Hilda Havran, Telkom

Huma van Rensburg, South African Board of Personnel Practitioners

Jon Taylor, Independent

Kim Dowdeswell, SHL

Nanette Tredoux, Psytech SA

Simon Shane, Independent

Tina van Schalkwyk, Lonmin Group

Wikus Ehlers, Sasol

The inputs received from these members were integrated and reviewed by the PAI Executive Committee, and a final version of the Code was formulated that, it was felt, addressed all concerns. Additionally, the South African Board of Personnel Practitioners once again reviewed and endorsed the Code of Practice, as was done during the first publication of the Code. The revised Code of Practice was then launched at the annual SIOPSA conference on 8 June 2006.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Purpose of this Code.....	1
2	To whom does the Code apply.....	2
3	Knowledge, understanding and skills.....	3
4	The purpose of psychological and similar assessment.....	4
5	Good assessment practices.....	5
6	Ethical interpretation and communication of results.....	7
7	Issues of bias and fairness.....	8
8	Improving the professional and ethical use of assessment procedures.....	9
	Appendix A: Guidelines for developing a policy on testing.....	11
	Appendix B: Definitions.....	12
	Appendix C: Useful resources.....	13

1 PURPOSE OF THIS CODE

The primary object of this code is to ensure that psychological assessments are conducted appropriately, professionally and ethically, with due regard to the needs and rights of those involved in the assessment process, the reasons for the assessment and the broader context in which the assessment takes place. To achieve these outcomes it is assumed that the practitioner or consultant has the necessary competence including knowledge and understanding of psychological tests and other assessment procedures that inform and underpin this.

In this regard the purpose of this Code is:

- 1.1 To provide clear guidelines for ethical assessment practices for the workplace in South Africa, so as to help psychologists, assessment practitioners, human resource practitioners, employers and employees to practise assessment in a fair and unbiased way and to prevent abuses.
- 1.2 To promote the use of psychological assessment methods as a means of identifying talent and promoting effective human resource development and personal growth. This reflects the intention to align psychological assessment with the drive to create opportunities for those previously denied access to development; to enhance South Africa's global competitiveness by promoting effective human resource development; and to prevent the use of testing for negative and unfair discriminatory purposes.
- 1.3 To provide a set of practical guidelines for assessment practice agreed to by the various stakeholders, including psychologists, human resource practitioners, assessment practitioners, employees, employers and government, which will be considered fair should disputes about assessment practice arise.

The Code complements the professional codes and laws regulating test use and employment conditions, and it assumes that tests being used are compliant with them. The primary South African legislation governing occupational assessment is the Employment Equity Act (no. 55 of 1998), which has the dual objective of

ensuring that only valid and reliable assessments are used and that assessments are used in a fair manner that is free from bias. The Act specifically states:

“Psychological testing and other similar assessments of an employee 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.”

According to the Health Professions Act (no. 56 of 1974), Section 37 (2) (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e), a psychological act with respect to assessment is defined as being:

“the use of measures to assess mental, cognitive, or behavioural processes and functioning, intellectual or cognitive ability or functioning, aptitude, interest, emotions, personality, psychophysiological functioning, or psychopathology (abnormal functioning)”

In terms of this Act, instruments that measure psychological constructs must be used, interpreted and controlled by psychologists: only individuals registered with the Professional Board of Psychology may use psychological tests and instruments that are classified with the Board. For additional detail refer to the Health Professions Council of South Africa’s (HPCSA) website^[1] for Form 207 (List of tests classified as being psychological tests) and Form 208 (Policy on the classification of psychometric measuring devices, instruments, methods and techniques).

Additional information on the use of assessments in South Africa can be obtained from the websites of the HPCSA, the Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology of South Africa (SIOPSA)^[2], and PAI^[3].

2 TO WHOM DOES THE CODE APPLY?

All assessment practitioners employing psychological and other similar assessment procedures in the workplace should adhere to this Code. It should also be made available to managers and employee representatives to guide

^[1] www.hpcsa.co.za

^[2] www.siopsa.org.za

^[3] www.pai.org.za

policies and practices. This Code complements the professional codes and laws regulating test use and employment conditions.

In terms of South African legislation, it is the duty of the psychologist to ensure that psychological tests as defined in the Act are applied ethically by assessment practitioners working under his or her supervision. It is the responsibility of management to ensure that all assessment measures are applied fairly. This Code is designed to provide guidance to professional users of psychological and other similar assessments.

3 KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND SKILLS

People who use psychological or other similar assessment methods in the workplace are expected to ensure they meet the competency requirements for assessment practice. In addition they should monitor the extent of their competence and not offer services that lie beyond this.

Competence in the following is required by those using assessment methods:

- 3.1 Knowledge of the technical aspects of assessment (e.g. reliability, validity, standardisation, selection decision-making strategies, and current approaches to bias and fairness)
- 3.2 Appropriate knowledge of theories of ability, personality and other constructs necessary to choose assessment instruments and interpret results
- 3.3 Knowledge of the range of assessment procedures available for the purpose in question, and criteria for selecting the appropriate assessment method
- 3.4 Current legislation and ethical standards relating to assessment and employment
- 3.5 Current published research findings on the specific assessment instruments used
- 3.6 The context in which the assessment is being conducted, including an understanding of any social, political, educational, institutional, linguistic,

gender, cultural, business and industrial relations influences on ethical assessment practice, and the consequences thereof

3.7 Ethical standards of test administration and communication of results

To ensure the above, assessment practitioners should take steps to keep abreast of scientific, legal and professional developments in the field, and to comply with any requirements laid down by their profession for continuing professional education. They should also ensure that any assessment practitioners and trainees under their supervision are suitably qualified, and have sufficient understanding of the above areas to perform their duties ethically.

For a detailed discussion on the competencies (knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics) needed by test users, see the ITC *International Guidelines for Test Use*.

4 THE PURPOSE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SIMILAR ASSESSMENT

The purpose of psychological and other similar assessment is to learn about another person in order to inform others of how they function now or to predict how they are likely to perform or function in the future. Broadly defined, occupational assessments are psychological instruments and similar procedures developed and used by professionals in organisations for the purposes of making inferences about people in the workplace.

Assessment practitioners should:

- 4.1 Accept reasonable responsibility for the eventual purposes for which assessment results might be used. This includes actively avoiding unethical use of assessment results even after these have been issued to the client, and being alert to possible negative unintended consequences of testing.
- 4.2 Conduct a thorough analysis of the client's needs and context, and ensure that the assessment methods selected are suitable for the purpose.
- 4.3 Conduct a job analysis in cases where candidates are being assessed for a particular job or cluster of positions.

4.4 Distinguish clearly between psychological testing and performance assessment, and not use test results for performance appraisal or as a sole reason for retrenching employees.

4.5 Not use assessment results that were obtained for one purpose, for another, inappropriate, purpose.

5 GOOD ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Psychologists and assessment practitioners must ensure that assessment procedures are chosen, administered and interpreted appropriately and accurately.

5.1 Assessment practitioners should:

5.1.1 Actively promote a climate of trust within the organisation and between assessment practitioners and those being assessed, treating assessees with courtesy, respect and impartiality regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, or other personal characteristics.

5.1.2 Promote and maintain high professional and ethical standards for themselves and for those using assessment instruments under their supervision by following ethical practices in preparing for and administering assessment procedures. This includes

- a. making any preparations as required in the manuals of the assessment instruments being used, and ensuring that there are sufficient assessment instrument materials available and that they are not marked
- b. ensuring that the assessment location is accessible, safe, free of disturbances and fit for the purpose
- c. ensuring that anyone who is involved in the administration is competent, and familiar with the assessment instruments and the relevant manuals
- d. making appropriate arrangements for assessing those with disabilities as and when necessary

- e. ensuring that those being assessed are not subjected to undue demands from an assessment procedure designed at a level too far removed from their level of competence
 - f. establishing rapport with the candidates and minimising their anxiety
 - g. removing potential sources of distraction, such as cell phones
 - h. administering the assessment instruments and responding to queries strictly within the requirements of the manuals
- 5.1.3 Specifying where results should be stored, their duration on file, who may have access to them, and the purposes for which they may be used.
- 5.1.4 Ensure secure storage of and controlled access to assessment material and results.
- 5.1.5 Provide relevant parties with clear information concerning the purpose of the assessment and what to expect and, if appropriate, how those being assessed might prepare themselves.
- 5.1.6 Clearly explain to candidates their rights and responsibilities before assessment commences to ensure that candidates have both the information and the opportunity required to make an informed decision as to whether or not to be assessed. Informed consent is implied by a candidate's participation in a selection process.
- 5.1.7 Take steps to avoid any destructive impact on those being assessed. This includes sensitively briefing and debriefing candidates.
- 5.1.8 Ensure that assessment results and reports are treated confidentially. This includes limiting access to documents containing assessment results within an organisation.
- 5.1.9 Use only assessment instruments for which supporting technical information – including validity and reliability data appropriate to the target group – is adequate. See SIOPSA's *Guidelines for the Validation and Use of Assessment Procedures for the Workplace*

(published in 2005, hereafter referred to as the *Guidelines*) for specifications in this regard.

5.1.10 Use only assessment methods in which they are competent.

5.1.11 Ensure that computer- and Internet-based assessments, whether psychological or non-psychological, is performed in accordance with best practice guidelines and legal requirements. See the ITC Guidelines on Computer-based and Internet-based testing for more details.

5.1.12 Maintain the integrity and security of instruments. This includes ensuring confidentiality of test results and test security.

5.2 Organisations should:

5.2.1 Adopt an explicit policy on psychological assessment consistent with this Code and relevant legislation (Appendix A provides guidelines for developing a policy on testing).

6 ETHICAL INTERPRETATION AND COMMUNICATION OF RESULTS

It is the ethical responsibility of the psychologist and assessment practitioner to communicate to assessees what the limits on confidentiality are in the assessment situation. Assessment practitioners should not be required to divulge personal information about the candidate that is not relevant to the purpose of the assessment.

Assessment practitioners should:

6.1 Report on assessment results in clear and non-technical terminology, avoiding over-generalisation, value-laden comments and derogatory terminology.

6.2 In all dealings with the person being assessed, present results accurately and in such a way as to avoid negative labels and discouragement to the candidate. Where possible the implications of the results should be expressed in terms of opportunities rather than restrictions, and be conveyed with due consideration to the margin of error associated with any assessment method.

- 6.3 Ensure that other relevant information is considered when decisions are made on the basis of assessment results.
- 6.4 Wherever possible, provide those assessed with feedback on the results of their assessment.
- 6.5 Report only those results that are relevant to the purpose of the assessment and, where relevant, the job specification.
- 6.6 Explain the significance of the results, rather than supplying unexplained scores that could lead to an uninformed or inaccurate interpretation. This explanation should include, where appropriate, a clear indication of how the results might inform decisions, should take into account the error of measurement of the assessment instrument(s) and avoid attaching too much meaning to non-significant differences in scores.
- 6.7 Not make final decisions on the basis of test results alone, except where this is clearly defensible.
- 6.8 Avoid putting pressure on an individual who has been assessed to reveal his or her results.
- 6.9 Take into account variations from standard procedures in assessment administration and special circumstances experienced by a candidate.

7 ISSUES OF BIAS AND FAIRNESS

Organisations using assessments must consider the ethical and legal obligations of using assessment procedures and instruments and must ensure that they are not only valid and reliable, but also fair and free from bias.

Issues of bias and fairness are of particular importance in the socio-political and business environment of South Africa and therefore demand special attention from assessment practitioners. See SIOPSA's *Guidelines* for technical information required to deal with this section in more detail.

- 7.1 Assessment practitioners should ensure that assessment methods are not used on people for whom the method is not appropriate.

- 7.2 Assessment practitioners should be aware of the impact on assessment of any possible aspects of disadvantage, including cultural, linguistic and disability factors.
- 7.3 Wherever possible, the potential impact of bias should be reduced by using a range of methods that varies in terms of constructs, format and time pressure.
- 7.4 It is professionally responsible to conduct research or make data available for research on the bias and validity of assessment methods, and to make the results available beyond the assessment practitioners' organisations.
- 7.5 Organisations should draw on the models of fairness provided in SIOPSA's *Guidelines* and input from stakeholders to inform their assessment policy and, in particular, specify their agreed procedures for achieving fairness in assessment.
- 7.6 Assessment practitioners, and psychologists in particular, should have a thorough understanding of the various fairness models and should advise stakeholders of their advantages and disadvantages.
- 7.7 These models apply to all assessment methodologies, as all methods (including those not recognised as psychological tests) are subject to bias.

8 IMPROVING THE PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL USE OF ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

Assessment practitioners have an ethical responsibility insofar as it is practicable to ensure that the individual is not treated unfairly or affected negatively by the assessment or assessment procedure. This responsibility may in practice, however, be constrained by the control that the assessment practitioner has over the user of the assessment and emphasises the importance of the individual granting of informed consent.

Those professions whose members are involved in assessment for the workplace should contribute to improved standards of ethical assessment by committing themselves to the following actions. It is understood that the profession of psychology has a special obligation in this regard:

- 8.1 Ensuring that information about assessment methods is distributed to all users as it becomes available.
- 8.2 Encouraging the ethical use of assessment procedures and actively discouraging unethical use.
- 8.3 Publishing information for distribution to members of the public, and especially stakeholders in assessment for the workplace, which explains the use of assessment methods, their advantages, and the key provisions of this Code.
- 8.4 Encouraging and facilitating reporting of abuses.
- 8.5 Encouraging research into the cross-cultural validity of all assessment methods.
- 8.6 Encouraging and facilitating the release of data from such research.
- 8.7 Encouraging the inclusion of topics covered in this Code in the initial training and continuing professional education of assessment practitioners.
- 8.8 Encouraging the provision of information and training to people who make decisions about the use of assessment methods, or who make decisions on the basis of results from such methods.

APPENDIX A: GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING A POLICY ON TESTING

In the *International Guidelines for Test Use* the International Test Commission (ITC) provides organisations with guidelines on establishing policy on testing. All organisations should take note of testing policy in the same manner as they do to health and safety, equal opportunities, disability and other areas relating to good practice in the management of treatment and care of personnel.

A policy on testing is produced in order to

- ensure personal and organisational aims are met
- ensure that potential misuse is avoided
- demonstrate commitment to good practice
- ensure test use is appropriate for its purpose
- ensure tests do not discriminate unfairly
- ensure evaluations are based on comprehensive, relevant information
- ensure tests are only used by qualified staff.

A policy on testing will need to cover most if not all the following issues:

- proper test use
- security of materials and scores
- who can administer tests, score and interpret tests
- test user training
- test taker preparation
- access to materials and security
- access to test results and test score confidentiality
- feedback of results to test takers
- responsibility to test takers before, during and after test sessions
- responsibilities and accountability of each individual user.

Any policy needs to be reviewed regularly and updated as advances in testing or changes in practice occur. Relevant parties need to have access to and be informed about the policy on testing. Responsibility for any organisation's testing policy should reside with a qualified test user who has the authority to ensure implantation of and adherence to the policy.

APPENDIX B: DEFINITIONS

The following working definitions inform the Code. As all types of psychological assessment conducted for work are subject to similar challenges, it was specifically decided not to limit the Code only to psychologists and registered assessment practitioners working under their supervision.

Psychological assessment Psychological assessment includes psychometric testing as well as any other procedure used to assess human performance or potential.

Assessment instrument An assessment instrument is a measure based on a sample of behaviour or attributes used for making decisions about people in the workplace.

Assessment practitioner Assessment practitioners include psychologists, registered test administrators, non-registered users of assessment instruments, those making decisions about the use or acquisition of assessment instruments, and organisations using assessment instruments.

Bias and fairness These terms are defined in SIOPSA's *Guidelines*. It is recognised that bias is a technical issue relating to how assessment instruments are developed and researched, while fairness is a political or social issue pertaining to how assessment instruments are used.

Validity Also discussed in detail in SIOPSA's *Guidelines*, validity refers to "the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretations of test scores entailed by proposed uses of tests"¹.

¹ American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association & National Council on Measurement Education. (1999). *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. USA: American Educational Research Association.

APPENDIX C: USEFUL RESOURCES

Useful documents

The American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education's *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, ordering information available from www.apa.org/science/standards.html.

The Health Professions Council of South Africa's *Ethical Code for Professional Conduct*, available from www.hpcsa.co.za.

The Health Professions Council of South Africa's *List of tests classified as being psychological tests*, available from www.hpcsa.co.za.

The Health Professions Council of South Africa's *Policy on the classification of psychometric measuring devices, instruments, methods and techniques*, available from www.hpcsa.co.za.

The International Test Commission's *International Guidelines for Test Use*, available from www.intestcom.org.

The International Test Commission's *International Guidelines on Computer-Based and Internet Delivered Testing*, available from www.intestcom.org.

The Republic of South Africa's *Employment Equity Act (no. 55 of 1998)*, available from www.gov.za.

The Republic of South Africa's *Health Professions Act (no. 56 of 1974)*, available from www.hpcsa.co.za.

The Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology of South Africa's *Guidelines for the Validation and Use of Assessment Procedures for the Workplace*, ordering information available from www.siopsa.org.za.

Useful web addresses

The Association of Test Publishers: www.testpublishers.org.

The Health Professions Council of South Africa: www.hpcsa.co.za.

The International Test Commission: www.intestcom.org.

People Assessment in Industry: www.pai.org.za.

The Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology of South Africa: www.siopsa.org.za.

The South African Board for Personnel Practice (SABPP): www.sabpp.co.za.

