



MAPIEN RADAR WHITEPAPER SERIES #6

# Ethics in the use of Psychometric Assessments

# Ethics in the Use of Psychometric Assessments

Psychometric assessments are very powerful tools for gathering insights into individuals and predicting critical outcomes, behaviours, and potential in selection, development, and other decision-making contexts. Testing in this manner has become popular, and widely accepted, and for good reason. With this popularity and ubiquitous use comes the potential for us to lose perspective on just how powerful and impactful the outcomes of these tests can be, for our test takers in particular.

Psychometric assessments offer deep insight into people's cognitive abilities, behavioural preferences, personality, and cultural fit within a specific role, team, and/or organisation. They can, therefore, provide a valuable basis on which organisations can reach objective decisions in contexts such as recruitment, selection & development.

The positive impact that these tests can have therefore on our test takers cannot be understated. They can open up a job and career opportunity that changes a candidate's life and even the life of their family, or provide the insight necessary to unlock new personal insight and developmental pathways that significantly improve the trajectory of their career. Psychometric testing for decision making can also allow for safer workplaces & more engaging environments, removing the friction and potential danger in some roles.

While the power and potential for good is strong in testing, we must also be aware of the vulnerabilities that these tests expose our test-takers to.

The power of psychometric assessments understandably places those who complete them in a vulnerable position, whereby:

- personal capabilities and attributes become visible to others, which people may not have otherwise chosen to share;
- this information is used as a means of passing some form of judgement, which can influence life-changing decisions about career trajectory and progression;
- this information can be misconstrued or misinterpreted, which can contribute to stigmatisation; and
- this information may be used by people who are not adequately trained in psychometric assessments.





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**ALMOST ONE-THIRD OF ORGANISATIONS DO NOT REQUIRE INDIVIDUALS TO HAVE TRAINING BEFORE THEY FACILITATE A PSYCHOMETRIC TEST.**

PERSONNEL TODAY [1]

In essence, while psychometric assessments offer valuable insights, they concurrently ask individuals to place significant trust in organisations, trusting that these insights will be handled with discretion, respect, and fairness. With this in mind, it is Mapien's view that the candidate, or test-taker, is the most important stakeholder in any psychometric testing process, any individual assessment process overall, or any survey-based assessment or diagnostic.

It is for this reason that, at Mapien, ethical principles shape everything we do with psychometrics. This ranges from the way that we develop our psychometric assessments, to determining how and when they should be administered, to interpreting and communicating results to organisations. Our team of psychologists are guided by the 'Code of Ethics' and the 'Ethical Guidelines for Psychological Assessment and the Use of Psychological Tests' published by the Australian Psychological Society to ensure that we are able to provide appropriate care and respect to those undertaking assessments.

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**PSYCHOLOGISTS WHO CONDUCT PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING OR WHO READ AND INTERPRET PSYCHOLOGICAL REPORTS DESCRIBING PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING TAKE ALL NECESSARY STEPS, INCLUDING ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, TO ENSURE THAT THEY MAINTAIN AN UP-TO-DATE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL BASE, INCLUDING IN THE ADMINISTRATION, SCORING AND INTERPRETATION OF NEW TESTS OR NEW EDITIONS THAT ARE OF RELEVANCE TO THEIR AREA OF PRACTICE.**

AUSTRALIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY [2]

The Code of Ethics, and the Ethical Guidelines, inform and shape everything that we do, say, think, and decide when it comes to psychometric assessments and protecting our candidates and participants from potential harm.

[1] <https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/one-third-using-psychometrics-training-finds-survey/>

[2] <https://psychology.org.au/about-us/position-statements/psychological-tests-and-testing>



## What Guiding Principles are Important?

**It is Mapien's view that psychometric assessments should be administered and interpreted, whether by a psychologist or otherwise, in alignment with and keeping in mind at all times the entirety of the Code of Ethics and other guidelines specified by the Australian Psychological Society.**



### SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS INCLUDE:



#### Informed Consent

The intent and purposes of psychometric assessments should be fully explained to those completing them, in plain language and in a way that is able to be understood. It is critical that the participant is fully aware of the test/s that they are being asked to complete, what it measures, how long it will take them, for what purpose they are sitting the test, and what kinds of things it tells us.

The information that these tests gather can be deeply personal and considered private by many people, including things like cognitive ability, emotional intelligence, or outside of the business or employment realm things like mental illness indicators. A full account of what the test will show and exactly how it is to be used is critical, and gives the participant control of their information.

The need for informed consent protects the participant from being assigned tests that are not relevant for their purposes, or having personal or sensitive data collated with no valid reason, or having their data subsequently used for processes or purposes that are not relevant or beneficial.



# Guiding principles



## Confidentiality

The results of psychometric assessments, and participation in the process, should remain appropriately confidential.

This is a core tenet of how we manage psychological information in all realms of our practice as psychologists, regardless of where or for whom we are employed. The data can only be used for the purposes that are outlined while seeking informed consent, and must be stored safely.

While reports or summaries that are produced based on the assessment data belong to the client or testing organisation, the test-taker maintains control over the core data that they provided, and can request to have it deleted or otherwise removed.

Further to this, the test-takers' participation in that process is also to be kept completely confidential and only discussed by the key stakeholders, namely the client representative that requested the testing, the test supplier, and the test-taker. In line with confidentiality and also informed consent, candidates and participants have the right to request feedback on the outcomes of their testing, to which they can be provided a 'candidate-friendly' version of the report, or verbal feedback.

Adhering to confidentiality ensures that the test-taker does not have their data taken, or subsequently used for other purposes, or exposed publicly. Beyond this, confidentiality of participation in the process itself (unless consent is provided) ensures that, for example, a candidate's job application or interest is not shared with other candidates, with close contacts, or with their existing employer.



# Guiding principles



## Justice & Fairness

Psychometric assessments should be administered and interpreted in a standardised, consistent, and non-discriminatory manner.

The primary purpose of psychometric assessments is to apply an objective and standardised assessment to a decision making process, and so taking the example of testing in recruitment and selection, it is critical for the validity of the process that where possible exactly the same test questions, experience, reporting, and any comparison groups are consistent and identical across all participants.

With the above said, if reasonable adjustments are appropriate to be made to the testing process for a candidate (e.g. when assessing a person with a disability), this can allow the candidate to be assessed in such a way that their true ability and preference is accurately represented. This allows all candidates to be assessed on their own merit, avoiding Adverse Impact on the candidate.

Fairness and justice flows across to all candidates within a testing process, and in particular in a selection context, it is critical that all candidates are given only a single attempt to complete the assessments if they are ability/skill based and have correct or incorrect responses.

Sitting the same test multiple times opens up the very real probability of 'practise effects' having an impact on test scores, artificially bolstering scores and providing a disadvantage to all other candidates.

Ensuring justice and fairness is maintained ensures that the purpose of the tests is maintained and respected, but most importantly that all candidates are given an equal and fair go, regardless of other candidates or circumstances. Psychometric assessments should be administered with a clear consideration of the wellbeing of those completing them, and the process should respect their legal and moral rights.





# Guiding principles



## Integrity

Psychometric assessments should be valid and reliable (with sound psychometric properties), and the assessments selected for use should be appropriate for the purposes for which they are being used. This comes down also to the way in which the intellectual property of the test is managed, ensuring that the test is well documented, is valid, reliable, and measures & predicts what it says it measures and predicts.

Further and in line with the 'practise effects' mentioned above, test materials, content, and importantly questions, should not publicised or disseminated.

As mentioned, these tests can have significant outcomes, positive or negative, for test-takers. Compromised test information can provide candidates with a significant and unfair leg-up on the competition, so integrity in this context very much covers the responsible handling of test materials. This also extends to the maintenance of the assessments, with work being done to document all information about the test in a technical manual, test questions regularly analysed to ensure continued quality and validity, and comparison groups appropriately maintained.



\*Please note this is not an exhaustive list of considerations

**Ultimately, ethics in the context of psychometric assessments goes beyond compliance and recognises the rights, dignities, and complexities of the individuals which such assessments impact.**

It is about understanding that behind the results there are individuals with aspirations, feelings, and personal experiences, and ensuring that the benefit which psychometric assessments provides to organisations does not come at the expense of those who complete them.

## Connect with us!

We look forward to discussing how psychometric assessments, may benefit you &/or your workplace!  
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