

Chapter 8

The Development of Psychology in Papua New Guinea: A Brief Review

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During Australian colonial rule over the territory of Papua New Guinea (PNG), Australian psychologists were recruited to undertake the task of developing psychology within the country. They were given the job of providing basic psychological services to the indigenous peoples of PNG, indicating that the Australian administration regarded the development of psychology as important to our newly developing nation. After PNG's independence in 1975, we expected indigenous psychologists to continue that task. The primary aim of this paper is to provide a brief critical review of the extent to which our expectation has actually been met.

Cross-cultural testing

Historically, the main focus of psychology in the colonial era was organisational psychology, in particular the selection of indigenous labour into the civil service, statutory organisations, the military, and educational institutions. At that point in time before independence in 1975, formal education was novel to many Papua New Guineans. Some form of selection was therefore required, one that was reasonably sensitive to cultural and contextual factors, such as unfamiliarity with testing procedures.

Unfortunately however, most psychological tests even today remain Western in origin, and they continue to face many difficulties when applied cross-culturally in non-western societies (e.g., Helms, 1992; Scarr, 1989, Vernon, 1969). For example, a recent study conducted by MacLachlan, Mapundi, Zimba, and Carr (1995) examined the face validity, in Mala_i, of the Managerial and Professional Profiler (MAPP). This is a "state-of-the-art" personality test from Britain, and it was rated for its appropriateness by 31 Mala_ian managers. These indigenous managers were equivocal about the scale as a whole. Similarly in PNG, Marai (1991) administered Rotter's Internal-External locus of control scale, a Western personality test, to indigenous Papua New Guinea students. Marai's respondents found that this scale contained many words, sentences, and expressions, that were inappropriate to their culture and lifestyle.

During the early independence years however, Australian psychologists had focused substantially on constructing and modifying some psychological tests to suit indigenous populations (Price, 1984). In the military for example, the history of officer selection in the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) dates back to 1957. At that time, a feasibility study into the development of a psychometric selection system was conducted by the Australian Army, of which the Pacific Islands Regiment, the precursor to PNGDF, was then a part. This study resulted in the development of test specifications, and the appointment of personnel to develop the selection system. By 1965, a number of tests had already been modified for use in PNG, and a set of selection procedures, including demographic variables, hands-on performance tests, and interview impressions, was implemented (Ord, 1966). Just before PNG's independence in 1975, the tests that had been used by the Australian Army were replaced by locally developed psychological tests (Hicks, 1973; Ord, 1957, 1959, 1967a, 1967b, 1971; Preston, St. George, & St. George, 1974).

Since independence however, selection procedures have remained unchanged. Perhaps we should not be surprised then that a recent evaluation study of officer selection procedures in the PNGDF discovered certain problems (Bau & Dyck, 1992). A linear combination of selection variables, including psychometric measures, academic achievement, interview impressions, and hands-on performance, was not related to the level of performance reported among 195 officers. In fact there was evidence of a

negative correlation with the criterion. Bau and Dyck concluded that it might be necessary to develop new, more reliable criteria for evaluating officer performance in the PNGDF.

Teaching, research, and the influence of expatriates

Within the education system, numerous psychological services were recognised prior to, and immediately after, independence. For instance, the importance of psychology was recognised by the Government through being established as a Department at the University of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby. In common with other developing nations, this Department of Psychology emerged together with the discipline of Philosophy. Even though the department was small, it still managed to produce graduates for whom Psychology was their academic major.

There were two principal streams in psychology, namely clinical and organisational. Even today however, most graduates have majored in the organisational stream. In 1990 for example, four times as many students graduated with Bachelor of Arts (BA) degrees in industrial than clinical psychology. This is not particularly surprising, since there are more jobs in the country for industrial than clinical psychologists. At the postgraduate level though, there have been only a handful of Masters degrees, and to my knowledge no Doctorates.

The bifocal nature of the curriculum has recently sparked an academic “crisis” in the Department of Psychology at UPNG, concerning control of specialised courses. Since there are two main streams in psychology, it is expected that clinical courses will be taught by qualified clinical psychologists and industrial ones will be taught by organisational psychologists. Yet, due to a combination of scarcity and high turnover of qualified specialists, many non-specialist lecturers have been teaching such courses. In some cases, there were specialist lecturers available (mostly foreign academics), but local psychologists wanted to teach the specialised courses. Arguments thus arose between local and foreign academics, resulting in many foreign academics leaving UPNG to teach abroad.

A fully functioning association of psychologists might have been able to prevent this from happening, but the Papua New Guinea Psychological Society (PNGPS), formed in the late 1970's as an offshoot from the Australian Psychological Society, has never functioned effectively. Compounding this problem, the profession of psychology remains novel to many employers in PNG, especially Government Departments. Thus, local psychologists desperately need a professional body to guide the development of their profession in the country.

Expatriates have also had a negative influence in research. Although a significant number of studies has been produced in the past (see for example Vol. 2 of the *South Pacific Journal of Psychology*, 1987), many were conducted by foreign psychologists and eventually published overseas, in international books and journals. Very few expatriates managed to publish their findings in our local journal, the “South Pacific Journal of Psychology” (SPJP). Australian and New Zealand psychology journals apart, this is the only available forum for psychology within the South Pacific region.

Even here, although it is intended for indigenous psychologists to contribute articles, the majority of papers to-date have been published by foreign academics. As Dyck critically pointed out in his first and last editorial of volume 7, “... I must confess [my] disappointment at the low rate of manuscript submission by indigenous psychologists. Clearly this journal has not yet succeeded in presenting itself as a preferred ‘home’ for the work of indigenous psychologists” (Dyck, 1994, p.1). Indeed, Table 1 shows that, between 1984 and 1995, out of a total of 58 articles published in SPJP, 39 contributors were expatriates, whereas 13 were indigenous, while 6 were of joint contribution by local and expatriate academics. As we can see, Papua New Guinean authors have consistently been underrepresented compared to expatriates, and the comments made by Dyck should therefore be of concern to indigenous psychologists (Enriquez, 1989, Moghaddam, 1987).

Table 1
Contributors of Articles Published in South Pacific Journal of Psychology

<u>Year</u> *	<u>Origin of author(s)</u>		
	<u>Indigenous</u>	<u>Indigenous/Expatriate</u>	<u>Expatriate</u>
1984	-	-	6
1987	2	4	7
1990	1	-	3
1991	2	-	6
1992	3	2	3
1993	2	-	3
1994	2	-	4
1995	1	-	7
TOT	13	6	39

* There were no publications of SPJP in 1985, 1986, 1988, and 1989.

Political decisions

One of the major reasons why psychology has not developed since it was introduced in PNG is lack of political will. The Australian colonial administration recognised the importance of psychological services up to Papua New Guinea's first Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare's reign. However, when Sir Julius Chan became the Prime Minister, during the early 1980s, his Government abolished the Psychological Service Branch of the Public Service Commission (PSC). The argument used by the Government of the day was lack of funding. In the long run however, this decision may have contributed to the running down of government departments, which is partly attributable to inadequate testing and organisational assessment. We have seen for instance that the selection and appraisal system in the PNGDF has not been functioning well (Bau & Dyck, 1992).

Ironically however, the government continues to cut funding to education in general, and to psychology in particular. The most recent round of these cuts has reduced staffing and research severely. Thus, the UPNG's 1993 Arts Faculty Research Report and 1994 Science Faculty Research and Publication Report revealed a sharp decline in the number of research studies and publications relative to previous years.

Concluding recommendations

The field of psychology has evidently remained stagnant after independence, and has even deteriorated in some areas. This is largely attributable to cross-cultural and inappropriate testing procedures, the influence of expatriates, and ensuing political decisions. If the Government re-established the Psychological Service Branch of PSC, to coordinate selection of civil servants, that might introduce greater justice and productivity into our workplaces. To counter the negative influence of some expatriates, more local psychologists need to conduct research that is germane to indigenous Papua New Guineans. Some possibilities in that regard have recently been suggested, based on indigenous approaches to health and management in Mala_i (Carr, MacLachlan, & Schultz, 1995). In Australia, Davidson (1992) found that indigenous views of an appropriate psychology contrasted sharply with the western definition, and that this had actively deterred Aboriginal groups from becoming involved in the discipline. These examples suggest that Papua New Guineans might begin to articulate for themselves

the forms of psychology that best reflect their own experience and cultural traditions. Perhaps a good starting point would be to address this issue empirically, by asking our people to describe what *they* would define as indigenisation.

Summary

The development of psychology in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is briefly and critically reviewed in this paper. The primary foci in PNG, both in teaching and research, have been clinical psychology and selection testing. Despite significant developments during the colonial era, the period since independence has witnessed a stagnation, as reflected in outmoded selection procedures, low employer awareness of psychology, and a dearth of relevant, indigenous research. The primary causes of this stagnation are identified as cross-cultural psychology, the influence of expatriates, and political decisions. The paper concludes with some suggestions for regenerating psychology in PNG, including a project to assess what Papua New Guineans themselves would expect from any genuine indigenisation process.

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