

USING PROJECTIVE ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES IN CAREER COUNSELLING

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Abstract

It is the purpose of this article to explore ways in which projective assessment can be more effectively integrated into career counselling. The author introduces new types of career projective techniques and suggests that the emphasis should be on using these methods as a means of conducting structured counselling interviews. The adoption of this viewpoint has implications for the continued development of projective assessment and for the training of counsellors.

Résumé

Cet article veut explorer les façons d'intégrer plus efficacement l'évaluation projective à l'orientation professionnelle. L'auteur présente de nouvelles techniques projectives et souligne l'importance accrue qu'on devrait leur accorder dans le déroulement d'entrevues structurées. L'adoption d'une telle démarche comporte des conséquences tant pour la formation des conseillers que pour le développement à venir de l'évaluation projective.

Personnel psychologists became interested in projective techniques in the 1940's in their search for alternative assessment methods. They were concerned with the excessive quantification that characterized psychometric assessment and recognized the need to incorporate a more global, holistic framework (Taylor & Nevis, 1957). It was hoped that the use of both standardized techniques and projective methods would allow a more balanced assessment perspective.

Projective assessment methods were developing rapidly at this time, with most of the impetus coming from the psychiatric and clinical professions. This resulted in the emergence of instruments (Rorshach, Thematic Apperception Test, etc.), which showed great potential in the medical settings, but were not as well suited to more "normal" populations (Mandell, 1957). Although there were some attempts to construct methods appropriate to the different settings (Ammons, Butler & Herzig, 1949; Spencer & Worthington, 1952), most personnel psychologists relied on the methods that were developing in the psychiatric field. Understandably, it was not long before serious questions began to be raised about the applicability of projective techniques to vocational settings.

The use of assessment at this particular time was primarily for predictive purposes. Personnel psychologists were interested in using projective techniques to identify general personality patterns within occupations and to ascertain

whether successful workers could be differentiated from unsuccessful workers on the basis of specific personality characteristics revealed in test performances. The results of such predictive studies were not that promising and a general review of the literature by Kinslinger (1966) led him to the conclusion that the real worth of most of the projective methods for personnel psychology was questionable.

Negative research findings coupled with a decreased emphasis on diagnostic assessment led to a rapid and complete withdrawal from the projective domain. This negative evaluation of projectives has persisted despite changes in the career-vocational field and in projective procedures. The current emphasis is almost exclusively on standardized assessment, as a review by Betz (1977) of the vocational behavior and career development literature confirms.

It is the position of the author that career counsellors may have "thrown the baby out with the bath water" while retreating from the projective assessment area. There were certainly some real difficulties in the use of standard projective techniques as a predictive device with a traditional occupational model. However, with the emergence of a career development perspective (Ivey & Morill, 1968; Gysberg & Moore, 1975), an emphasis upon the use of projectives as a counselling interview technique (Amundson, 1978a) and the development of new types of career projective materials (Amundson, 1978b), it

may be possible to create a more compatible union. There certainly seems to be a need for new types of career assessment procedures as the following statement reflects:

Counsellors need to consider more than simply a decision about a specific school or a specific job, but they have so far had little in the way of data and instruments to help with their work. The methods available fit the occupational but not the career model. . . . (Super, 1974, p. 73).

Projective techniques seem to represent one possible solution to the difficulty that Super (1974) expresses and it is the purpose of this article to explore this further.

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A New Technique

If projective methods are to be incorporated into career counselling there is a real need to move beyond traditional clinical measures and develop techniques which are more appropriate. As one step in this direction, the author has prepared five projective assessment activities (story endings, picture stories, incomplete sentence blanks, drawings and a questionnaire) which comprise a career development package for use with junior and senior secondary students and adults (Amundson, 1978b). These activities are based on some traditional projective measures, but have been revised to reflect current career development issues. For instance, story endings are based on Sargent's (1944) Paper-Pencil-Projective-Method and include items such as the following:

(Adult) Imagine that you love drawing and are quite good at it. You would like to try your hand at being an artist, but realize that this is rather risky. You are also considering an attractive offer to become a commercial artist.

- (a) What would you do and why?
- (b) How would you feel?

(Student) Imagine that you have tried out for an athletic team and have gained a regular position. After a few games the coach decides to replace you with a player from the 'B' team.

- (a) What would you do and why?
- (b) How would you feel?

The picture stories are based on Murray's (1971) Thematic Apperception Test and include photographs such as two persons (one in a suit and the other in overalls) discussing something in a factory setting, a person looking at a map of the world, someone reading in the classified section of the newspaper, a picture of someone studying, and so on. The incomplete sentence blanks are based on a wide variety of sentence completion methods (Goldberg, 1965). There are

fifty-five sentence stems in both adult and student forms and items such as the following are included:

(Adult) Working with others getting promoted, being successful, developing my potential, I could be excited about a job like that.

(Student) Getting high grades, a summer job, homework, my family, in the future.

In the drawing section there is a connection between some of the tasks and the figure drawing tests outlined by Goodenough (1926, 1928) and Machover (1948). Clients are asked to draw themselves working alone, in their 'ideal' work setting, in a group project and in their leisure time. They are then required to describe what is happening and how they are feeling about it. There are also other types of drawing tasks such as devising an environmental map that includes significant people and places and the drawing of a life line that reflects past, present and future events. The final career activity, the exploration questionnaire, is based on transactional analysis and some of work by Berne (1961) and Steiner (1974) on the life script. This method focuses on how clients perceive that they are viewed by significant others (parents, spouse, friends) and how this affects their future performance. There is also a self-assessment of vocational strengths, weaknesses and occupational goals.

These projective career assessment activities are designed to supplement standardized interest and aptitude inventories in much the same way as the Hall Occupational Orientation Inventory (Hall and Tarrier, 1976). For instance, a fifteen year old adolescent boy of average intelligence whose scores on the Kuder General Interest Survey (Kuder, 1976) indicated 'major interests in the Persuasive and Social Science domains and on the Self Directed Search (Holland, 1977) a preference for Enterprising, Social and Investigative occupations, had responses on the projective tasks which were consistent with the above findings, but also which provided additional information. The client seemed to have some difficulty establishing close relationships despite his social skills. He had feelings of inadequacy and tried to cover these up by being the center of attention. He had a real need to attain some type of status and also demonstrated a very traditional value system with a high regard for discipline. His vocational interest centered on flying helicopters and in view of the above information it seemed that if he continued to pursue this occupation he might be well suited to a military or quasi-military career.

The Counselling Interview

In order to make projective assessment relevant to career counselling it is necessary to

move from the traditional medical model and adopt a perspective which views projective techniques as methods of conducting a structured counselling interview. This change allows increased flexibility and provides an emphasis upon self-exploration and development.

With the counselling interview approach it is recognized that the client needs to be included in all decisions regarding the testing situation. As Dana and Leech (1974) have suggested, open discussion of the assessment process and the development of a contractual agreement in terms of goals, structures and outcomes takes place. The inclusion of the client in the decision-making helps to clarify expectations and to establish a more ideal assessment relationship.

It also becomes clear that assessment can be used at various stages of the counselling process (Bordin, 1968). Projective tasks can be used in the beginning to establish a focus and to help build a relationship, but also may be used in later stages to stimulate additional discussion. The standard sequence of events as defined by the medical model (diagnosis followed by treatment) is no longer applicable within this framework.

In accordance with the increased flexibility reflected by the interviewing approach, there is now less reliance upon standard procedures in test administration. The client is allowed considerable freedom in choosing the tasks that seem appropriate. For instance, with the story completion task, clients are asked to review the various situations and respond to those that seem relevant and indicate on what basis they have made their choices. If it seems appropriate, the counsellor can also add additional situations which more closely reflect the particular issues that concern the client. While working with the client mentioned in the previous section there was a major emphasis upon the fact that he planned to become a helicopter pilot and go into business with his parents after grade twelve. He was going to be the pilot, his father the mechanic and his mother the secretary and accountant. There was very little chance of this happening and I was interested to see how committed he was to the idea. The additional situation that I posed to him plus his response is listed below:

You have counted on getting into the helicopter business with your Mom and Dad. After grade twelve this no longer seems possible.

- (a) Give reasons why it might not be possible?

—not enough money, no business, another job (me), death (rare).

- (b) What would you do if you couldn't get into this business with your Mom and Dad?

—I would find another job flying helicopters.

- (c) How would you feel?

—probably wouldn't feel too bad.

In this instance the additional story ending helped to provide some perspective on his career choice. The primary factor seemed to be the role of flying a helicopter rather than a continued reliance upon his parents. This fact was confirmed in subsequent sessions through a more extensive discussion of his relationships within the family. The opportunity to vary administrative procedures can help to provide additional insights and more meaningful results.

The interpretation of the results differs markedly from traditional projective assessment procedures as well. Rather than assigning a testing expert sole responsibility for interpreting the data, the counsellor and client work together in a collaborative effort. The counsellor may conduct a preliminary analysis, but this is always followed by a collaborative analysis where the client and counsellor work together in interpreting the information. Thus, the client is actively involved in the process and has the opportunity to provide an interpretation and to respond to any hypotheses that have been formulated.

In the initial stages of the collaborative analysis the counsellor is nondirective and encourages the client to discuss the stories, drawings, questionnaire and sentences by considering how they relate to things they have done in the past and how they show what they are like as persons (Luborsky, 1965, used a similar method in analyzing TAT stories). Following this initial exploration and clarification process, the counsellor becomes more directive and brings to the attention of the client aspects of the material that seem particularly relevant. For example, one person drew herself in fishing gear when asked to construct a self portrait. Further discussion revealed that she was really interested in fishing and had just returned from a fishing trip prior to doing the drawing task. This information helped to put into perspective the reasons for the fishing gear and downplayed some of the preliminary hypotheses that I had made about her choice of dress. Another aspect of the self drawing that she did not comment upon was the fact that she had only drawn half of the mouth. When this was mentioned she was quite amazed and wondered if there was any significance to it. I suggested that it might be related to her communication with others and she carried this theme further by disclosing that she was really pretty guarded in her relationships. This was analyzed further and provided a significant issue for subsequent discussions.

The major focus up to this point has been on the use of career projective materials in individual cases. Most of the techniques can also be used in a group setting by applying many of the same principles. Grade twelve pre-employment girls were asked to complete several of the drawing tasks and respond to some of the photographs and situations that reflected their particular concerns. This information was used as a basis for small group discussions and led to a consideration of differences in life style, values and methods of relating with others. As a result of this discussion it was possible to do some role playing and address issues such as a lack of assertiveness with supervisors and other co-workers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

Several years ago I proposed to a senior federal government employment official the idea of using projectives in career counselling. His response was that the idea was interesting, but was unlikely to meet with much success because of the lack of appropriate training among counsellors in the career counselling field. This is certainly a concern, but it has been my experience that counsellors are able to acquire the necessary experience to begin using these methods through workshops or a one semester graduate course. It is certainly the case that extended training is required if one stresses diagnosis within a medical model. If, however, the focus is shifted so that there is less emphasis upon deriving an exact diagnosis and more emphasis on the interviewing process, the use of projectives becomes more readily accessible.

The advantage of acquiring this type of training is that one is better able to offer clients a more balanced career assessment experience. The career projective methods are designed to supplement standardized interest and aptitude inventories and provide information on the following dimensions: A. Relationships—methods of dealing with others (peers and authority figures), ability to work with others, ability and preference for working alone. B. Self Concept. C. Motivation—money, status, job satisfaction, security. D. Work Habits and Attitudes—industry and initiative, drive and energy, persistence and follow through, cooperation and friendliness, objectivity, creativity, attention to detail. E. Aspirations—minor role, leadership. F. Working Conditions—safety on the job, hours of work, holidays. G. Mobility—rural, urban. H. Level of Commitment—temporary, long term. I. Training—time and energy which the person is prepared to devote for training purposes, desire for academic or vocational training.

The possibilities for further development seem encouraging at the present time, but a great deal of work remains to be done. Although some progress has been made in the development of new types of career projective methods, there are undoubtedly many more types of techniques that could be devised. The projective literature provides a fertile ground for exploration. Some of the existing information needs to be translated in order to meet current career counselling needs. There is also a need to gather further data on how these methods can be applied in individual and group situations. It appears that considerable information can be gleaned from the projective assessment literature in terms of the preliminary analysis, but it is necessary to move beyond this when considering collaboration between client and counsellor. The collaborative analysis closely parallels the counselling interviewing process and it is this framework that needs to be utilized when bridging the gap between projective diagnosis and career counselling.

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