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PERSONNEL SELECTION PRACTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA: WHICH TOOLS ARE HUMAN RESOURCES PRACTITIONERS USING AND WHY?

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Masters of Industrial and Organisational Psychology

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February 2025

COMPULSORY DECLARATION:

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without my partner's endless patience, my mother's endless checking in, and my supervisor's endless support. I want to express gratitude to everyone who kept me going when I did not think it was possible.

ABSTRACT

Personnel selection is a critical organisational process with significant implications for worker performance and organisational outcomes. However, existing research reveals a persistent science-practitioner gap, where Human Resources (HR) professionals often select personnel assessment tools based on factors other than predictive validity. This study investigates personnel selection practices in South Africa, a context with limited existing research, to understand current trends and the factors influencing HR practitioners' selection tool choices. Employing institutional theory as a theoretical framework, the research addresses two primary research questions: (1) What personnel selection practices are currently being used by HR practitioners in South Africa, and how do these compare to North American samples? and (2) To what extent do perceptual factors such as assessment tool diffusion, legality, applicant reactions, organisational self-promotion, predictive validity, and costs (i.e., utility) influence selection procedure choices? Quantitative survey data were obtained from HR professionals ($N = 62$) in South Africa to shed light upon the selection procedures being used in practice and why practitioners prefer certain methods over others. Analysis found markedly higher usage rates of selection procedures in South Africa in comparison to other samples, specifically regarding psychometric assessments. Factors relating to the extent to which a procedure is perceived as highly diffused and legally defensible were most salient to South African HR practitioners. Findings offer insights into the current state of assessment practices and potential areas for improvement.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Personnel selection is a critical process in organisations, directly impacting outcomes such as worker task performance, turnover predictions, organisational citizenship behaviour, and financial performance (Ryan & Ployhart, 2014). Despite the importance of personnel selection processes, research has shown that when choosing a selection procedure, Human Resource (HR) practitioners pay little attention to research-based recommendations (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2021). Choosing a procedure is more informed by applicant reactions, costs, and its diffusion in the field rather than its predictive validity (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2021). This may leave researchers wondering whether HR practitioners are divorced from evidence-based practices and procedures and the effects thereof (Lawler & Benson, 2022), whether there is a lack of practitioner insight being used to guide research (Pietersen, 2018), or whether research has the real-world impact that some believe it should (König et al., 2010)

This 'divorce' between practice and theory is indicative of the science-practitioner gap, which refers to the disconnect between what academics research and what practitioners do (Lawler & Benson, 2022). The gap is of particular concern in personnel selection practice, as the choices practitioners make in selection procedures and their resultant hiring decisions can significantly influence organisational outcomes. While the body of research in this field is growing, literature is typically limited to survey reports of selection tools used by practitioners (e.g., Ryan et al., 2015) with few studies exploring the beliefs informing these choices (Risavy et al., 2021). Understanding why HR practitioners favour certain selection tools provides insight into personnel selection practices and informs evidence-based improvements in the field. Therefore, this study aims to investigate both the usage patterns and decision factors in South African personnel selection, thereby contributing to the alignment of research and practice in this critical field.

Selection Procedure Choices in Practice

Despite extensive research supporting the importance of using predictively valid selection procedures, HR practitioners often opt for selection procedures on bases secondary to predictive validity (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2021). Selection procedures, which encompass any process used to appoint candidates to roles, directly impact organisational success through the quality of hired employees (Kim & Ployhart, 2018; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014). While research emphasises that organisations should prioritise selection methods with the highest predictive validity, studies consistently reveal a science-practitioner gap where

HR professionals base their choices on other factors (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2021; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014).

This gap is evidenced by research concluding that practitioners' decisions to use certain selection procedures are primarily driven by perceived applicant reactions, costs, and tool diffusion rather than the predictive validity and legal defensibility emphasised in academic literature (König et al., 2010; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014). Recent mixed-methods research has further demonstrated this disconnect, revealing that HR practitioners in Canadian Tech companies prioritise person-organisation fit in when choosing to use a procedure, despite the weak relationship between person-organisation fit and job performance (Risavy et al., 2021). As selection research is an applied field, practitioner buy-in is required for research to be meaningful. Therefore, understanding the factors that drive practitioners' decisions is essential in directing research to address practice needs, as well as developing strategies that allow better selection procedure decisions to be made (Lawler & Benson, 2022).

Trends in Selection and Assessment Procedures

Over the past few decades, personnel selection practices have undergone significant changes globally. Digitisation and globalisation have led to the increasing adoption of technology-enabled selection processes, such as internet-based testing and asynchronous video interviews, alongside greater use of psychometric testing (Ryan & Ployhart, 2014; Ryan et al., 2015). Research across different regions reveals both patterns and variations in selection practices. Surveys in North America consistently show that résumé reviews, application form analysis, interviews, job knowledge tests, and reference or background checks are the most used methods (Risavy et al., 2019; Risavy et al., 2021). Similar patterns are demonstrated in German and Swiss studies, where résumé analyses and interviews also dominate selection processes (Diekmann & König, 2015; König et al., 2010). Interviewing remains one of the most widely used selection methods across all surveyed regions (Anderson et al., 2010; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014).

However, important regional differences exist. Canadian Tech companies, for instance, show significantly higher use of work samples compared to other North American industries (see Figure 1). Reference checking practices also vary substantially, with 89.1% adoption in Swiss organisations (König et al., 2010) compared to a range from 53% to 70.6% in North American samples (Risavy et al., 2019; Risavy et al., 2021). Furthermore, the use of graphological assessments has been reported at various usage rates from no reported usage in the Canadian Tech industry (Risavy et al., 2021), to a usage rate of 15.8% in a Swiss sample

(König et al., 2010). Given these variations in selection practices, this study aims to develop a better understanding of South African selection practice trends.

The South African Context

Despite South Africa's robust legislative framework for psychometric testing (Employment Equity Act, No 55, 1998) and numerous professional HR bodies (e.g., the Society for or Industrial and Organisational Psychology in South Africa, the South African Board for People Practices, the Institute of People Management, the Human Resources Development Council), there is limited information about current selection practices used by HR practitioners. This knowledge gap is particularly striking given the country's history of discriminatory labour practices during apartheid, which specifically affected recruitment and selection processes (Myors et al., 2008).

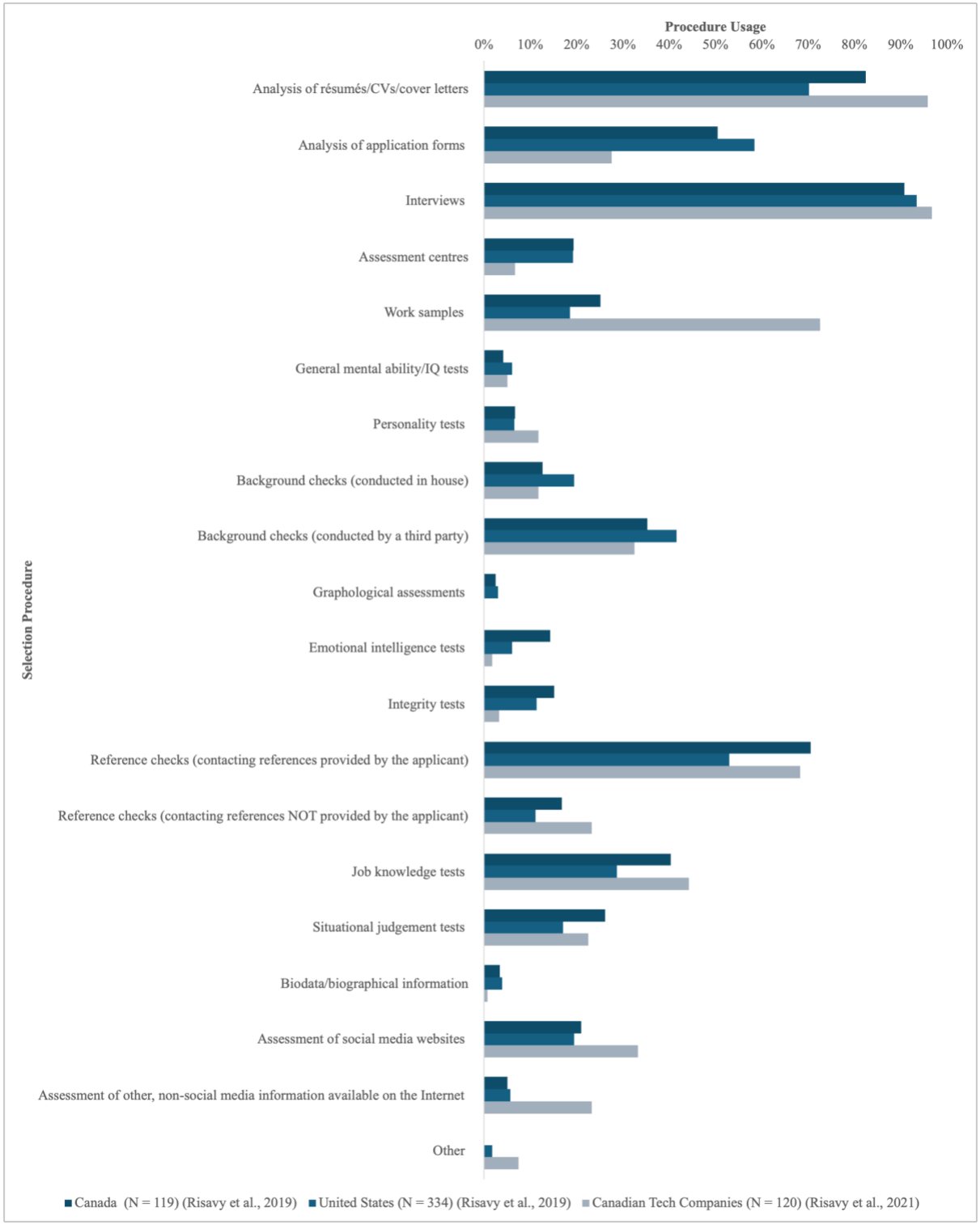
Given this historical context and South Africa's well-established HR infrastructure, one might expect a more developed body of literature on recruitment and selection. However, a review of 289 articles published in the South African Journal of Human Resource Management between 2003 and 2015 revealed that most research (56%) focused on theory verification rather than practical applications (Pietersen, 2018). Based on these findings, Pietersen (2018) cautions against a preoccupation with advancing academic knowledge at the expense of addressing practitioner needs and engaging those outside of the academic project. Further, the review concludes that bridging the gap between research and practice relies on more empirical, qualitative and action-based research (Pietersen, 2018).

This study responds to this need by investigating current personnel selection practices among South African HR practitioners. By comparing these findings with established North American data (Risavy et al., 2019; see Table 2 and Figure 1) and research-supported selection best-practice (Sackett et al., 2022; see Table 1), this research aims to establish a baseline understanding of South African selection practices. This understanding represents a crucial first step in developing literature that better serves practitioners' needs.

Current literature on South African selection practices primarily focuses on regulated assessment tools, creating a knowledge gap regarding general HR practices. For example, while Foxcroft and Roodt (2019) document popular selection instruments in South Africa, this is limited to tests restricted to psychology professionals by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2021).

Figure 1

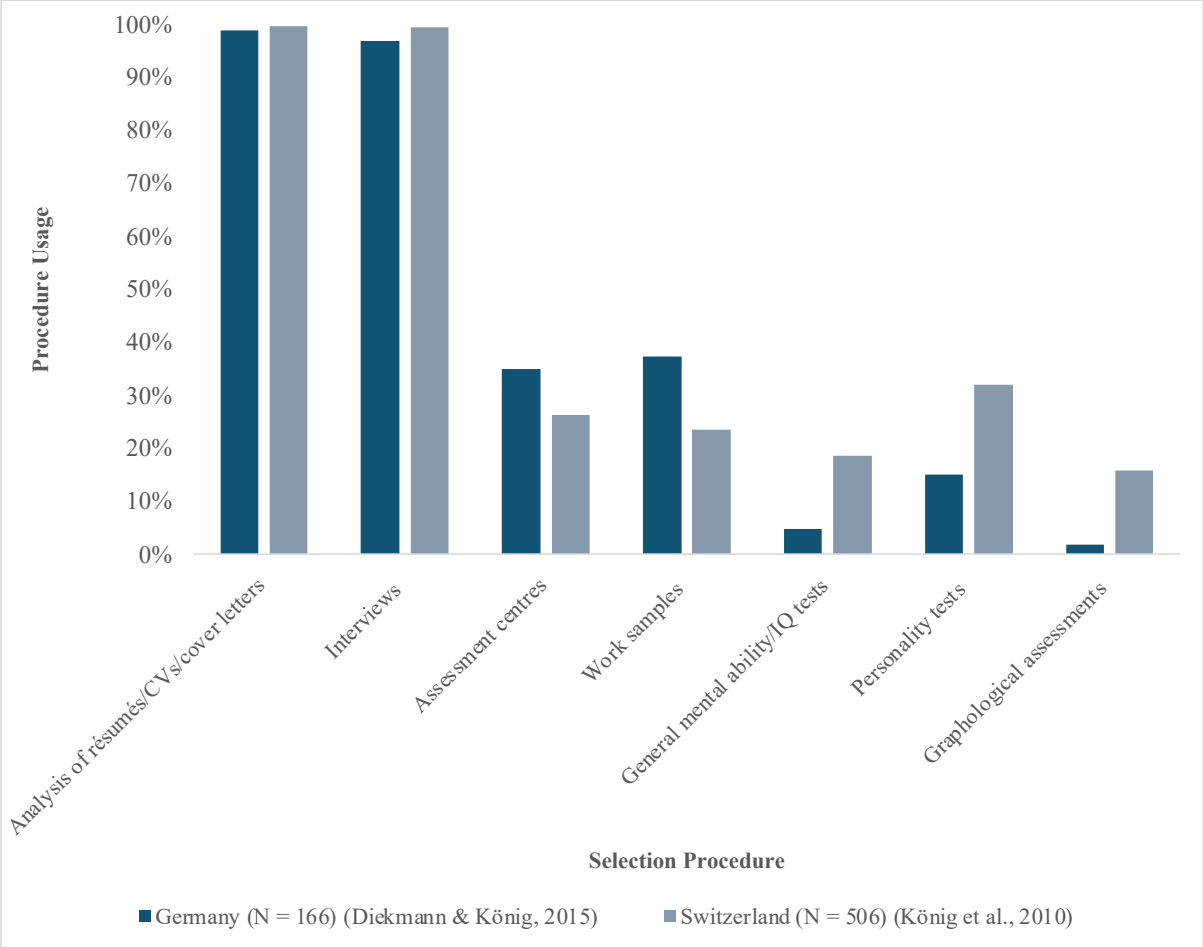
Selection Procedure Usage Across Samples in North America between 2019 and 2021



Note. Adapted from "Selection tool use in Canadian Tech companies: Assessing and explaining the research–practice gap", by Risavy, S. D., Fisher, P. A., Robie, C., Komar, J., & Perossa, A., 2021, *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, *53*(4), p. 448 & "Selection tool use: A focus on personality testing in Canada, the United States, and Germany", by Risavy, S. D., Fisher, P. A., Robie, C., & König, C. J., 2019, *Personnel Assessment and Decisions, 5*(1), p. 66

Figure 2

Selection Tool Usage Across Samples in Germany and Switzerland between 2010 and 2015



Note. Adapted from "Personality testing in personnel selection: Love it? Leave it? Understand it!", by Diekmann, J. & König, C., 2015, In I. Nikolaou & J. K. Oostrom (Eds.), *Employee recruitment, selection, and assessment: Contemporary issues for theory and practice*, p. 121 & "Reasons for being selective when choosing personnel selection procedures", by König, C.J., Klehe, U.C., Berchtold, M., & Kleinmann, M., 2010, *International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 18*(1), p. 22

This regulated focus may not reflect broader HR practices, particularly as psychology professionals typically have more advanced training in personnel selection and stronger ties to academic research (Negt & Haunschild, 2024). Similar limitations appear in the People Assessments in Industry (PAI) study, conducted by the Society for Industrial and Organisational Psychology in South Africa (SIOPSA). Though aimed at understanding selection procedure usage, it was limited in scope to registered psychology practitioners within South Africa (PAI, 2017).

Due to the limited information regarding these trends in South Africa, there is a limited understanding of which selection tools are currently in use, why they are in use, or if

the science-practitioner gap observed in previous studies (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2021) is as pronounced. Such information would be valuable for both guiding practice and addressing the divide between research and practical implementation.

Theoretical Basis

This research employs institutional theory to understand the organisational motives behind the use of specific selection procedures. Institutional theory proposes that organisational behaviour is shaped by broader institutional contexts (Oliver, 1991), with organisations primarily seeking to establish organisational legitimacy and stability through their practices (Klehe, 2004). Using Klehe's (2004) framework provides a lens through which to understand why organisations can make selection procedure decisions that deviate from best practices (Ryan et al., 2015). Further, this theoretical approach has been employed successfully in understanding selection trends in both Switzerland and Canada (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2021).

To date, there is no similar understanding of factors driving South African HR practitioners in their choice of selection procedures, although there are marked contextual differences between South Africa and previously researched countries. These differences include higher unemployment rates (Statistics South Africa, 2024), differences in legal frameworks regarding employee selection (Myors et al., 2008), and different attitudes towards psychometric testing in the workplace (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2019). As such, this research seeks to investigate how perceptual factors derived from institutional theory influence HR practitioners' behaviours towards using certain personnel selection practices, as well as which procedures are being used.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review examines four key areas: personnel selection practices, the scientist-practitioner gap in selection, the South African context, and institutional theory as a framework for understanding selection practice decisions. The review begins by defining personnel selection practices and their organisational impact, with a focus on semi-structured interviews, general mental ability tests, personality assessments, assessment centres, and social media screening. It then explores the scientist-practitioner gap in personnel selection, noting international trends. The third section contains an analysis of the South African selection context, including labour market conditions and current practice trends. Finally, institutional theory as a framework for understanding organisational selection practice decisions is explored.

Personnel Selection

Personnel selection is a critical organisational function that identifies candidates best equipped to perform specific roles, directly impacting organisational performance (Kim & Ployhart, 2018). Within Human Resource Management (HRM), selection can be understood at three levels: as an individual practice, as part of the broader staffing function, or as a strategic component of an organisation's human capital strategy alongside other HRM practices (Lievens et al., 2021). This review examines both the significance of selection practices and their implementation in organisations.

The Impact of Personnel Selection

Personnel selection directly influences organisational performance through the identification of candidates with strong job-related knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs). Well-matched employees typically demonstrate better performance, retention, and organisational fit, which enhances both unit- and organisational-level performance and productivity (Kim & Ployhart, 2018; Lievens et al., 2021; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014). While traditional research has focused on individual performance predictions and their implications, contemporary studies examine how strategic selection practices directly influence organisational performance (Lievens et al., 2021; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014).

For example, research has found that organisations using more selection procedures demonstrate higher firm productivity (Kim & Ployhart, 2018), whilst those employing more valid selection processes achieve better training effectiveness and financial performance (Ryan & Ployhart, 2014). These findings underscore how robust selection practices

contribute to building high-performing human capital functions and improving organisational performance outcomes. As such, the understanding of the impact of selection has evolved significantly. This broader perspective recognises selection not just as a tool for individual job fit, but as a strategic driver of key organisational outcomes.

Impact at the Individual Level

At the individual level, personnel selection has an impact on job performance, whereby individual differences in predictor variables relate to differing performance outcomes, thus affecting organisations (Lievens et al., 2021). For example, a candidate who scores highly on a cognitive ability test might demonstrate stronger training performance, leading to enhanced job performance, thus ultimately benefitting the organisation. Meta-analytic research on relationships between selection measures and job performance demonstrates a significant link between individual differences in predictor scores and job performance (Lievens et al., 2021; Sackett et al., 2022; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Furthermore, individual differences have been found to predict turnover, organisational citizenship and counterproductive work behaviours, attrition, absence, and customer service outcomes (Lievens et al., 2021; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014).

This demonstrates the importance of selection in contributing to organisational outcomes. However, research at the individual level introduces the "criterion problem" (Ryan & Ployhart, 2014; Lievens et al., 2021). This refers to the difficulty in being able to accurately predict outcomes from individual differences in testing due to variations in how job performance is defined and measured. Poor quality performance measures, contaminated criteria, or incomplete performance specifications can limit the ability to understand the effect that a predictor might have (Ryan & Ployhart, 2014). Further, individual test scores may vary based on testing conditions or applicant mood states. Despite these methodological challenges, research has consistently established robust correlations between selection measures and future job performance, confirming the value of systematic selection practices for organisational success.

Impact at the Unit and Organisational Level

As described above, the impact of selection at the individual level is related to organisational performance, whereby better selection decisions result in a higher quality workforce. Methodological issues resulting from individual-level performance to predict organisational outcomes are detailed above. This has prompted investigations into understanding organisational outcomes from staffing as a function, which supports the effects of personnel selection on organisational performance and productivity (Lievens et al., 2021).

Research at the unit and organisational levels can be categorised as viewing selection as a singular practice or as a component of an overarching HR system (Lievens et al., 2021).

When evaluated as a singular practice, selection can be isolated as an individual HR process or combined with other staffing activities (Lievens et al., 2021). For example, Kim and Ployhart (2018) use contingency theory to examine how selection practices influence organisational performance and productivity. This theoretical approach considers the internal and external environmental factors that shape selection practices, isolating selection practices from broader HR systems. In their study, longitudinal data was collected from 413 South Korean firms employing over 100 individuals, where survey data on each firm's selection practices was compared to publicly available annual financial performance data. It was found that using more selection practices related to greater firm productivity, which was moderated by industry dynamism and collective turnover rates. This supports previous research where a positive relationship was found between the number of distinct staffing practices and higher annual profit and profit growth, with the relationship moderated by both industry and firm size (Terpstra & Rozell, 1993). This demonstrates the distinct effects that selection practices have on an organisation's productivity and performance when environmentally aligned.

As part of a larger HRM system, selection practices are grouped with practices thought to increase organisationally available KSAOs (Combs et al., 2006; Lievens et al., 2021). These practices include employee compensation, training and job design, which can be leveraged alongside selection to increase organisational productivity and performance. In this approach, high-performance work systems (HPWS) are most studied, consisting of combinations of effective HR practices (Lievens et al., 2021). The effects of HPWS on organisational performance have been demonstrated through several studies. A meta-analysis of 92 studies found that 20% of the variation in organisational performance could be attributed to the presence of HPWS (Combs et al., 2006). More recently, 156 studies were analysed across 29 countries, demonstrating that HPWS had a positive effect on organisational performance regardless of country-level moderators (Rabl et al., 2014).

This emphasises the impact of personnel selection on organisational performance and productivity, as well as its relationship to strategic HRM decisions. Furthermore, the impact of environmental alignment is highlighted as a moderating factor. For example, practices that substitute or work against each other could result in wasted costs or produce outcomes contrary to an objective, respectively (Combs et al., 2006). Personnel selection is a highly impactful practice, and organisations ought to consider their approach. At a primary level, it is related to selecting an employee with requisite KSAOs, further affecting job performance,

turnover, organisational citizenship and counterproductive work behaviours, attrition, absence, and customer service outcomes (Lievens et al., 2021; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014; Sackett et al., 2022). At a broader level, it is related to the overall effectiveness of HRM systems and resultant organisational performance and productivity outcomes (Combs et al., 2006; Kim & Ployhart, 2018; Rabl et al., 2014; Terpstra & Rozell, 1993).

Personnel Selection Practice

Personnel selection follows a three-stage process: information input (collecting candidate data), information evaluation (interpreting the data), and information output (making recommendations) (Morris et al., 2015). During the input stage, organisations gather candidate information through various selection tools such as interviews, ability tests, and personality assessments. This information is then evaluated and integrated to assess candidate suitability, ultimately producing recommendations in the output stage. This study specifically focuses on the information input stage, examining the various selection tools organisations use to collect candidate data.

This study focuses on five key selection methods: semi-structured interviews, general mental ability tests, personality tests, assessment centres, and social media screening. Selection tools are typically evaluated through their criterion-related validity, which primarily refers to their ability to predict future job performance (Ryan & Ployhart, 2014; Sackett et al., 2022). Research indicates that using multiple selection methods improves this predictive accuracy (Sackett et al., 2022). Given the multifaceted nature of job performance and its various measurement approaches, the following section examines each of these five selection practices, reviewing both their implementation and their relationship to job performance outcomes.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Employment interviews are both the most widely used selection method and the most favourably perceived by applicants (Anderson et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2019; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014). Interview structure is the key factor differentiating interview approaches, where structure concerns the degree of standardisation in content, questions, and response options (Lievens & De Paepe, 2004). While completely unstructured interviews are rare, most organisations opt for a low-structure approach where one or more interviewers ask predetermined questions and evaluate responses against established criteria. The interview structure impacts its predictive validity, wherein highly structured interviews demonstrate strong predictive validity for job performance, and low-structure interviews show variable and generally poor predictive validity (Morris et al., 2015; Sackett et al., 2022).

Employment interviews illustrate a key tension between research and practice in personnel selection. While applicants view interviews as more valid than other selection methods (Anderson et al., 2010), both applicants and organisations prefer low-structure formats (Lievens & De Paepe, 2004; Morris et al., 2015), despite clear research evidence showing that lower structure reduces predictive validity. Low-structure interviews offer several advantages in that they enable better assessment of interpersonal and communication skills through personal contact, allow for probing questions, give interviewers more control over questions and scoring, and require less preparation (Morris et al., 2015; Lievens & De Paepe, 2004). The informal environment of low-structure interviews also helps put candidates at ease and better conveys organisational culture, while applicants appreciate the more personal, organic nature of these interviews (Lievens & De Paepe, 2004).

However, research on interview preferences and effectiveness faces a significant limitation as many studies fail to specify the level of structure in the interviews they examine (Morris et al., 2015; Risavy et al., 2019; Risavy et al., 2021). This lack of differentiation between interview structures makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about applicant preferences or interview effectiveness (Anderson et al., 2010).

General Mental Ability Tests

General mental ability (GMA) tests measure individuals' verbal, quantitative, and analytical abilities, focusing on language comprehension, problem-solving, and logical reasoning skills (Hausknecht et al., 2007). Historically, GMA has been considered one of the strongest predictors of job performance, leading many researchers to argue that it should be the primary focus of selection testing (Nye et al., 2022). However, recent research challenges this traditional view, particularly as the understanding of job performance has evolved.

Modern conceptualisations of job performance extend beyond traditional task and training metrics to include more holistic metrics, such as interpersonal skills, organisational citizenship, and counterproductive work behaviours (Nye et al., 2022). This broader definition has prompted a re-examination of GMA's predictive validity. Recent meta-analyses suggest that the relationship between GMA and job performance may be weaker than previously thought, with validity estimates closer to .31 or even .25, rather than the traditionally cited .51 (Sackett et al., 2023). Therefore, the relationship between GMA and job performance is more nuanced than earlier research suggested. Task complexity and training requirements can moderate this relationship, with GMA showing stronger predictive validity in roles requiring extensive training or complex task completion (Morris et al., 2015;

Sackett et al., 2023). These findings suggest that while GMA remains a valuable selection tool, its effectiveness varies based on specific job contexts and performance criteria.

Personality Tests

Personality testing in personnel selection primarily relies on the five-factor model, measuring personality along continuums of Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, Extraversion, and Openness to Experience (Sackett & Walmsley, 2014). These cross-culturally replicable groupings of traits are expressed as an individual's personality, with specific factors thought to be more aligned with different aspects of job performance. Conscientiousness and Agreeableness are most predictive of workforce readiness, while Extraversion relates to task performance and organisational citizenship behaviours (Sackett & Walmsley, 2014). Recently, the HEXACO model has emerged as an alternative, adding Honesty-Humility to create a six-factor model that accounts for variance in workplace deviance (Pletzer et al., 2019).

The validity of personality testing in selection has faced increased research scrutiny post-2004, when a critical review of published and unpublished literature by a panel of journal editors revealed substantial validity concerns (Morgeson et al., 2007; Sackett et al., 2017a). This critique refocused personality testing research towards finding solutions to validity issues, expanding personality models, and refining conceptualisations of personality (Sackett et al., 2017a). However, the low to moderate validity estimates in the relationship between personality and job performance persist, with estimates ranging from .05 to .25 (Sackett et al., 2022). This suggests personality testing should be used alongside other selection tools rather than in isolation.

Validity estimates might otherwise be improved through using contextualised personality scales, which specifically reference work situations rather than general personality traits (Fisher et al., 2017). Research indicates that non-contextualised measures may lead test-takers to adopt non-related frames of reference when answering questions, reducing validity. Contextualised scales, which ask about personality "at work", show improved validity over traditional measures.

Assessment Centres

An assessment centre (AC) is a comprehensive selection method involving multiple assessors who evaluate candidates performing several job-relevant simulations, such as in-basket exercises, leaderless group discussions, and one-on-one roleplays (Kuncel & Sackett, 2014). These simulations assess candidates' ability to manage situational demands, a significant predictor of job performance not always assessed by traditional selection tools

(Ryan & Ployhart, 2014). Assessors rate performance across multiple dimensions, with ratings to either be compiled post each exercise, or when all exercises are complete (Kuncel & Sackett, 2014). Performance dimensions commonly assessed include influence, drive, consideration, organisation, and communication, which reflect broader job performance components such as team facilitation, leadership, and administration (Sackett et al., 2017b).

The complexity of ACs has prompted research into their validity and reliability. While their structure and functioning vary considerably, raising concerns about construct and criterion validity (Breil et al., 2023; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014), ACs demonstrate distinct advantages in predicting job performance. For example, although GMA tests show higher validity estimates and are more cost-effective, ACs excel in assessing broader constructs and predicting wider performance criteria (Sackett et al., 2017b). However, the effectiveness of ACs should be weighed against their significant financial and time investments, which prompt questions regarding their practicality (Sackett et al., 2017b). Notwithstanding, their ability to assess multiple performance dimensions simultaneously through realistic job simulations provides unique predictive value that might justify these practical constraints.

Assessment of Social Media Platforms

Social media screening has emerged in research as a novel selection tool, where organisations evaluate candidates' online presence to assess their job suitability (Iddekinge et al., 2016). These platforms range from personal networks like Facebook to professional platforms like LinkedIn, each providing different types of candidate information (Ryan & Ployhart, 2014; Roulin & Levashina, 2019). Through social media screening, employers attempt to make inferences about a candidate's personality, skills, cognitive ability, potential job performance, and turnover intentions (Iddekinge et al., 2016; Roulin & Levashina, 2019).

Research has found significant differences in the validity of professional versus personal social media platforms for selection purposes. For example, certain applicant characteristics may be reliably assessed to make valid inferences using data from LinkedIn, such as extraversion, planning or communication skills, and cognitive abilities (Roulin & Levashina, 2019). However, Facebook-based evaluations have demonstrated poor predictive validity for job performance and turnover intentions (Iddekinge et al., 2016). More concerning, personal social media screening has shown evidence of bias, with Facebook assessments revealing significant subgroup differences disadvantaging minority groups, though LinkedIn evaluations show fewer gender and ethnicity biases (Iddekinge et al., 2016; Roulin & Levashina, 2019).

Given the limited research and significant legal and ethical concerns, social media screening requires careful consideration as a selection tool. Current evidence suggests that if organisations choose to implement social media screening, they should restrict their focus to professional platforms like LinkedIn rather than personal ones (Roulin & Levashina, 2019). However, the overall lack of established reliability, validity, and legal defensibility makes social media screening a contentious addition to selection processes (Risavy et al., 2021).

The Scientist-Practitioner Gap in Personnel Selection

While research has extensively documented the importance and best practices of personnel selection, a significant gap exists between academic recommendations and real-world implementation (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2021). This section examines this scientist-practitioner gap both within personnel selection specifically and the broader field of HRM. Additionally, current industry practices and divergences from research-based recommendations will be explored.

Causes and Outcomes

The scientist-practitioner gap refers to the disconnect between what academics research and what practitioners do (Lawler & Benson, 2022). This gap is pronounced in applied fields such as personnel selection, where the choices practitioners make affect organisational outcomes (Kim & Ployhart, 2014, 2018; Lievens et al., 2021). While understanding the origins of this disconnect is critical, research has primarily focused on identifying its causes rather than examining its practical implications. A recent meta-analysis of 42 peer-reviewed articles published between 1998 and 2023 by Negt and Haunschild (2024) examined both the causes and consequences of this research-practice divide.

The research-practice divide stems from several interconnected barriers at the interface between HRM practice and research. These relate to communication barriers, methodological issues, and the presentation of research results. Communication between researchers and practitioners is overwhelmed by hurdles that prevent straightforward knowledge sharing. Academic writing and publishing styles tend toward complexity, with HRM research disproportionately focused on internal dimensions rooted in psychology and organisational behaviour. The lengthy nature of research processes further compounds this problem, as HR practitioners require quick solutions to day-to-day challenges that research rarely addresses directly. Beyond communication issues, methodological challenges arise from the inherent dynamism and complexity of organisations that HRM studies struggle to replicate. A fundamental tension exists between research and practice goals, wherein

researchers pursue generalisability while practitioners seek specific solutions to unique organisational problems. This creates an unavoidable trade-off between research rigour and practical relevance, often compromising the transferability of findings to real-world settings. Furthermore, research results often fail to impact practice as intended due to problems with visibility, accessibility, and dissemination. The presentation of research findings typically lacks the practical framework needed for effective implementation in organisational settings.

Regarding consequences, the scientist-practitioner gap in personnel selection leads to significant human capital losses by preventing organisations from leveraging evidence-based practices (Negt & Haunschild, 2024). Research demonstrates this gap through studies of selection tool usage amongst HR professionals. For instance, a 2010 Swiss study of 506 HR Managers found that 15.8% used graphology for selection, nearly matching the usage of ability tests at 18.6%, despite graphology having a validity estimate of .02 (König et al., 2010; Sackett et al., 2022). The study further asserted that HR managers' decisions to use particular tools were not influenced by their perceived predictive validity, contrasting sharply with evidence-based recommendations emphasising predictive validity as a crucial selection tool criterion (Ryan & Ployhart, 2014). More recent research suggests this misalignment endures, with a study of Canadian Tech companies finding that 33.3% of HR professionals sampled employ social media screening, despite its limited predictive power and questionable legal defensibility regarding validity, reliability, and adverse impact (Risavy et al., 2021; Roulin & Levashina, 2019). Additionally, participants in the Canadian study did not report that predictive validity would inform selection procedure choices either (Risavy et al., 2021).

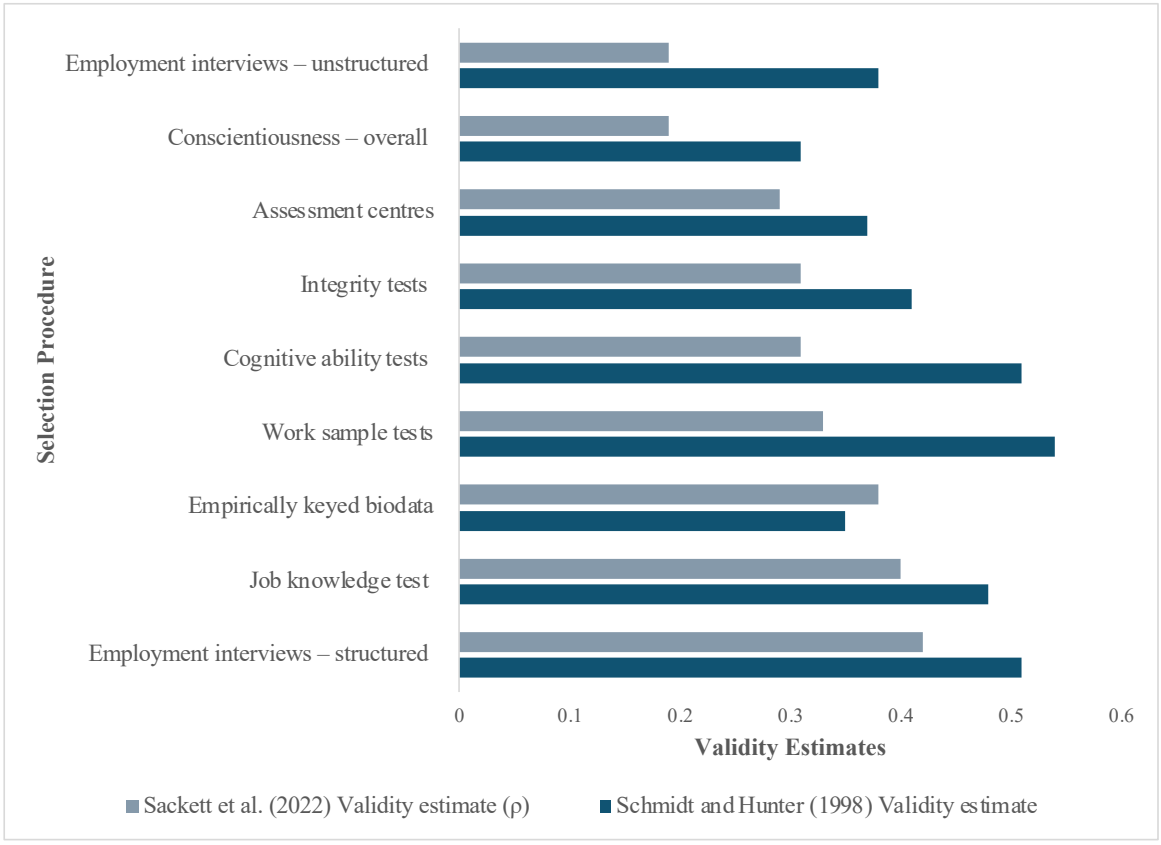
Suboptimal selection practices significantly impair organisational effectiveness through their impact on human capital functioning. When organisations employ selection tools with poor predictive validity, they diminish their ability to identify candidates with the requisite KSAOs. This limitation carries substantial implications, as effective selection practices have been linked to enhanced job performance, organisational outcomes, HRM system effectiveness, and overall organisational productivity (Lievens et al., 2021; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014; Sackett et al., 2022; Combs et al., 2006; Kim & Ployhart, 2018; Rabl et al., 2014; Terpstra & Rozell, 1993). Whilst practitioners may consider various factors when choosing selection tools, such as job fit, fairness, candidate experience, cost, or historical effectiveness, these considerations become largely irrelevant when the chosen tool is not predictively valid (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2021).

The Global Context

Research evidence and practitioner behaviour demonstrate a significant misalignment in personnel selection procedure choices, with practitioners often diverging from evidence-based recommendations. A recent revision of Schmidt and Hunter's (1998) seminal work by Sackett et al. (2022) identifies structured interviews, job knowledge tests, biodata, work sample tests, and cognitive ability tests as the most effective predictors of job performance (outlined further in Table 1 and Figure 3 below). However, current practice reveals different priorities. In North America, HR practitioners predominantly rely on interviews, résumé analyses, reference checks, application form analyses, and job knowledge tests in Canada, while their US counterparts favour similar methods, replacing job knowledge tests with third-party background checks (Risavy et al., 2019) (see Table 2).

Figure 3

Comparison of Validity Estimates of Selection Procedures



Note. Adapted from "Revisiting meta-analytic estimates of validity in personnel selection: Addressing systematic overcorrection for restriction of range", by Sackett, P. R., Zhang, C., Berry, C.M., & Lievens, F., 2022, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *107*(11), p. 2054.

Table 1

Comparison of Schmidt and Hunter's (1998) Validity Estimates with Sackett et al.'s (2022) Validity Estimates

Selection procedure	Schmidt and Hunter (1998) Validity estimate	Sackett et al. (2022) Validity estimate (ρ)
Employment interviews – structured	0.51	0.42
Job knowledge test	0.48	0.40
Empirically keyed biodata	0.35	0.38
Work sample tests	0.54	0.33
Cognitive ability tests	0.51	0.31
Integrity tests	0.41	0.31
Personality-based EI		0.30
Assessment centres	0.37	0.29
Conscientiousness – contextualised		0.25
Emotional stability – contextualised		0.23
Extraversion – contextualised		0.21
Conscientiousness – overall	0.31	0.19
Employment interviews – unstructured	0.38	0.19
Agreeableness – contextualised		0.19
Openness to experience—contextualised		0.12
Extraversion—overall		0.10
Agreeableness—overall		0.10
Emotional stability—overall		0.09
Openness to experience—overall		0.05

Note. Adapted from "Revisiting meta-analytic estimates of validity in personnel selection: Addressing systematic overcorrection for restriction of range", by Sackett, P. R., Zhang, C., Berry, C.M., & Lievens, F., 2022, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *107*(11), p. 2054.

European practices show some variation, as evidenced by Swiss and German studies. Application form and résumé analyses, interviews, reference checks, personality tests, and ACs were most prevalent in a Swiss sample of 506 HR managers (König et al., 2010). In Germany, HR practitioners reported relying most on application form and résumé analyses, interviews, work samples, ACs, and personality tests (Diekmann & König, 2015). These methods demonstrate closer alignment with research recommendations, particularly in the use of personality tests, assessment centres, and structured interviews (71.3% being semi-structured in the Swiss sample). However, the effectiveness of personality testing remains uncertain due to validity fluctuations across different personality scales. A broader perspective emerges from a global survey of 1,197 HR professionals across 25 countries,

which found that psychometric testing was primarily used to assess personality, general mental ability, leadership competencies, social skills, and motivation (Ryan et al., 2015).

Table 2
Selection Procedures Being Used in Employee Selection in Canada, the United States, and Germany

Selection tools	Canada (N = 119)	United States (N = 334)	Germany (N = 166)
Analysis of résumés/CVs/cover letters	82.4%	70.1%	98.8%
Analysis of application forms	50.4%	58.4%	N/A
Interviews	90.8%	93.4%	97.0%
Assessment centres	19.3%	19.2%	34.9%
Work samples	25.2%	18.6%	37.3%
General mental ability/IQ tests	4.2%	6.0%	4.8%
Personality tests	6.7%	6.6%	15.1%
Background checks (conducted in house)	12.6%	19.5%	N/A
Background checks (conducted by a third party)	35.3%	41.6%	N/A
Graphological assessments	2.5%	3.0%	1.8%
Emotional intelligence tests	14.3%	6.0%	N/A
Integrity tests	15.1%	11.4%	N/A
Reference checks (contacting references provided by the applicant)	70.6%	53.0%	N/A
Reference checks (contacting references NOT provided by the applicant)	16.8%	11.1%	N/A
Job knowledge tests	40.3%	28.7%	N/A
Situational judgement tests	26.1%	17.1%	N/A
Biodata/biographical information	3.4%	3.9%	N/A
Assessment of social media websites	21.0%	19.5%	N/A
Assessment of other, non-social media information available on the Internet	5.0%	5.7%	N/A
Other	0%	1.8%	19.3%

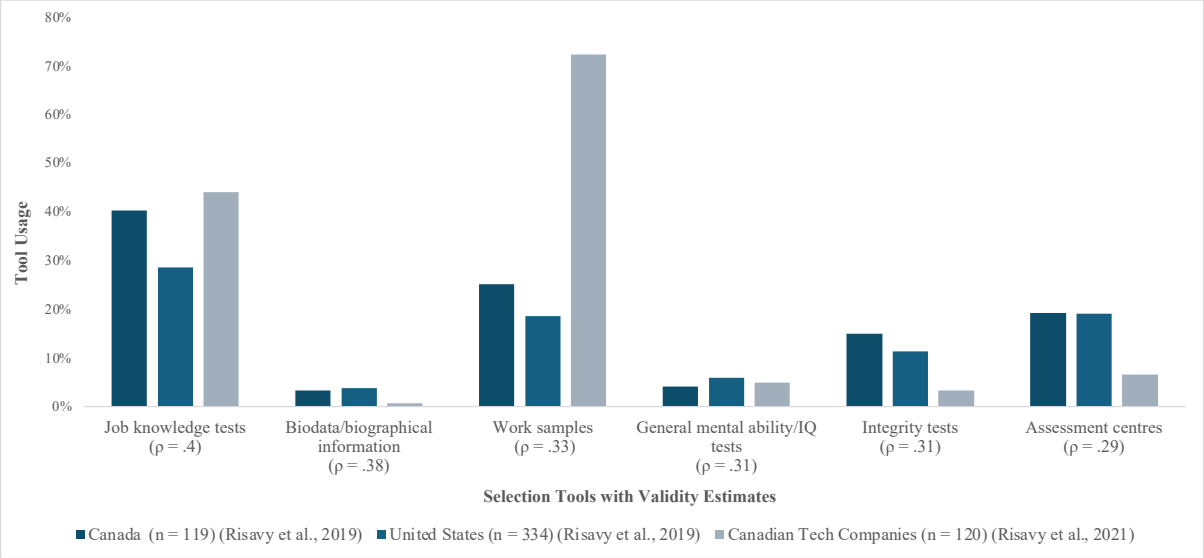
Note. Reprinted from "Selection tool use: A focus on personality testing in Canada, the United States, and Germany", by Risavy, S. D., Fisher, P. A., Robie, C., & König, C. J., 2019, *Personnel Assessment and Decisions, 5*(1), p. 66

The widespread use of personality testing in selection raises particular concerns, given its low to moderate predictive validity (Sackett et al., 2022). This practice appears paradoxical, as HR professionals in the global survey cited predictive validity as their primary criterion for test selection (Ryan et al., 2015), despite ongoing research concerns about personality testing in selection contexts since 2004 (Morgeson et al., 2007). This

contradiction is especially noteworthy given that the survey respondents were senior HR professionals, from whom greater alignment with research might be expected. The persistent gap between research recommendations and practitioner behaviour suggests that selection tool choices are more influenced by organisational context than by evidence-based best practices (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2021), as illustrated by the disparity between Sackett et al.'s (2022) recommended procedures and common North American practices (Risavy et al., 2021; Risavy et al., 2019). This is demonstrated in Figure 4 below, where North American selection procedure usage is compared against corresponding validity estimates (Sackett et al., 2022).

Figure 4

Selection Procedure Usage in North American Samples with Corresponding Validity Estimates (ρ)



Note. Adapted from "Revisiting meta-analytic estimates of validity in personnel selection: Addressing systematic overcorrection for restriction of range", by Sackett, P. R., Zhang, C., Berry, C.M., & Lievens, F., 2022, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *107*(11), p. 2054 & "Selection tool use: A focus on personality testing in Canada, the United States, and Germany", by Risavy, S. D., Fisher, P. A., Robie, C., & König, C. J., 2019, *Personnel Assessment and Decisions, 5*(1), p. 66 & "Selection tool use in Canadian Tech companies: Assessing and explaining the research–practice gap", by Risavy, S. D., Fisher, P. A., Robie, C., Komar, J., & Perossa, A., 2021, *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, *53*(4), p. 448

The South African Context

While the preceding discussion examined selection practices and research from a global perspective, this research is situated within the unique context of South Africa. This

section explores the distinctive characteristics of South Africa's labour market and documented trends in selection practices within the country.

Labour Availability and Regulation in South Africa

South Africa presents a unique case study in personnel selection, where recruitment and selection strategies are particularly crucial for organisational success amidst complex workforce challenges. The country faces a distinctive "talent paradox", referring to a simultaneous shortage of skilled workers and high unemployment, resulting from limited access to education, formal training deficits, and skilled worker emigration (Wolfswinkel & Enslin, 2020; Myors et al., 2008). This situation is further complicated by labour legislation mandating the advancement of previously disadvantaged groups, which adds additional qualifiers to talent identification and selection processes (Wolfswinkel & Enslin, 2020). Given these circumstances, the impact of effective personnel selection becomes particularly significant for driving organisational success and innovation (Negt & Haunschild, 2024).

South Africa's legislative framework for selection practices stands apart from global norms in several aspects. Unlike most countries, where employers maintain a presumed right to use selection methods until legally challenged, South African employers must proactively justify any psychometric instruments used in selection, demonstrating their scientific validity, reliability, fairness, and absence of bias (Myors et al., 2008). Additionally, the country's legal framework explicitly addresses psychometric testing. The Employment Equity Act (Republic of South Africa, 1998) governs psychometric assessment in the workplace, requiring tests to demonstrate scientific validity and reliability, as well as fair and non-biased application to any employee or group. Further, the administration, scoring, and reporting of such tests are restricted to registered psychologists only (HPCSA, 2021). This encompasses all selection tools measuring psychological attributes, including personality assessments, aptitude tests, ability measurements, and interest inventories.

These stringent regulatory requirements, combined with the involvement of qualified psychology professionals, may serve to narrow the scientist-practitioner gap in South African selection practices. Research suggests that higher levels of professional qualification correlate with greater knowledge of evidence-based selection procedures (Negt & Haunschild, 2024). Furthermore, unlike other countries where selection practices are primarily influenced by multinational corporations or consulting firms, South African practices are more directly shaped by legal requirements (Myors et al., 2008). This regulatory environment, coupled with the pressing need for effective selection procedures in a skills-scarce market, suggests that

South African selection practices may demonstrate better alignment with research recommendations than those in less regulated contexts.

Selection Practice Usage and Choices in South Africa

Research into South African selection practices remains significantly limited, with existing data predominantly focused on psychometric testing conducted by registered psychology professionals (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2019). The People Assessments in Industry (PAI, 2017) study of HPCSA-registered psychologists clarified certain patterns, revealing prevalent use of cognitive ability and personality assessments alongside evidence-based practices such as semi-structured interviews, ACs, and work samples. However, the study's insights into selection rationales were constrained, with only 11% of respondents indicating selection purposes and 22% citing development purposes. The majority (79%) of respondents did not respond to questions about their reasons for psychometric tool choice, highlighting a critical gap in understanding the institutional factors driving selection decisions.

The broader landscape of selection practices emerges through several sector-specific studies. AC research demonstrated practitioners' tendency to incorporate personality and ability tests as supplementary diagnostic methods (Krause et al., 2011), while research on selection trends in the Eastern Cape found that the most used selection methods were application banks, interviews, reference checking, psychometric assessments, and ACs (Louw, 2013). Although these choices partially align with recommended practices, particularly regarding application banks, interviews, and assessment centres (Sackett et al., 2022), the broad category of psychometric assessments encompasses tools with varying predictive validity. A detailed case study of a South African automotive firm's apprentice selection process demonstrated closer alignment with evidence-based recommendations, implementing a four-phase process including application analysis, GMA testing, technical aptitude assessment, teamwork competency assessment, and structured interviews (Puchert et al., 2022). This alignment was attributed partly to automotive industry selection trends and involving an external firm specialising in psychometric testing (Puchert et al., 2022).

However, these findings primarily reflect practices within large private sector organisations, potentially offering an incomplete picture of nationwide selection practices. Research on the Public Protector's selection process found recruitment and selection practices to be largely divorced from evidence-based recommendations, relying on undisclosed questionnaires and unstructured interviews without basic competency framework evaluation (Bazana & Reddy, 2021). While this may not represent the public sector as a whole, it demonstrates large variation in documented practices. When coupled with the acknowledged

importance of personnel research directly impacting practice (Lawler & Benson, 2022), this underscores the critical need for comprehensive exploration of selection procedures among South African HR practitioners, particularly in comparison to well-documented North American practices (Risavy et al., 2019). Such research would provide critical insights into the alignment between selection practices and evidence-based recommendations within South Africa's unique context. Therefore, the first research question is as follows:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Which personnel selection practices and assessments are currently being used by HR practitioners in South Africa, and how do these compare to previous findings in North American samples?

Institutional Theory

The scientist-practitioner gap in South African personnel selection requires exploration due to limited research availability, despite substantial evidence of such gaps globally. While research has established the existence and implications of this gap in various contexts, the unique characteristics of the South African environment remain underexplored. This knowledge deficit is particularly significant as research relevance to practitioners has been identified as a key mechanism for bridging the scientist-practitioner divide (Negt & Haunschild, 2024). Understanding the decision-making processes of South African HR practitioners regarding selection tool choices could therefore provide essential insights into both contextualising and potentially narrowing this gap within the local context.

Institutional theory provides an established theoretical framework for analysing organisations' selection practice choices, as initially proposed by Klehe (2004). This theoretical approach asserts that organisations strategically adapt their selection practices in response to external institutional pressures to maintain legitimacy and stability within their operating environments. König et al. (2010) empirically validated this framework through the operationalisation of key external pressures, namely the diffusion of procedures within a field, legal considerations surrounding procedure use, applicant reactions to procedures, organisational self-promotion opportunities, predictive validity of procedures, and associated cost implications. These findings have been further substantiated and developed through subsequent research, with Risavy et al. (2021) expanding the framework by identifying person-organisation and person-job fit as additional considerations informing selection procedure choices through a thematic analysis.

A global survey of HR professionals' testing practices offers additional insights into selection tool choice motivations (Ryan et al., 2015). In this survey, 1197 practitioners emphasised validity, fairness, perceived value, and ease of use for both applicants and organisations as key considerations when choosing selection tools, while also weighing prior positive experiences. Interestingly, legal and political considerations were perceived as less critical in the decision-making process, though cost emerged as a significant barrier to tool adoption. This body of research collectively suggests that selection tool choices are influenced by a complex interplay of practical, theoretical, and institutional factors. However, the specific manifestation of these factors within the South African context, with a unique regulatory environment and labour market characteristics, remains poorly understood, highlighting the need for targeted investigation within this specific setting to understand how these various influences shape local selection practices.

Diffusion of Procedures

The diffusion of a selection tool across a field represents a critical institutional mechanism for establishing legitimacy through mimetic processes. According to institutional theory, organisations tend to adopt widely used selection procedures to maintain legitimacy and reduce uncertainty, as non-adoption might signal organisational deviance or incompetence (Klehe, 2004; König et al., 2010). König et al. (2010) empirically validated this diffusion effect as a significant predictor of selection procedure adoption, though interestingly, subsequent research by Ryan et al. (2015) and Risavy et al. (2021) did not identify tool diffusion as a primary consideration in practitioners' decision-making. In South Africa's unique regulatory environment, where psychometric testing is explicitly governed by legislation and professional bodies, the diffusion of selection tools may follow distinct patterns influenced by both legal requirements and professional networks of registered psychologists.

Legal Considerations Surrounding Procedure Use

Legal considerations in selection tool choice play a significant role in South Africa's institutional environment due to the legislative factors discussed. According to institutional theory, organisations seek legitimacy through legally defensible selection procedures, as tools linked to discriminatory hiring outcomes can severely damage organisational credibility and stability (Klehe, 2004; König et al., 2010). This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant in South Africa, where the HPCSA (2021) strictly regulates psychometric testing and where employers must proactively justify their selection tools' validity, reliability, and fairness (Myors et al., 2008. Additionally, previously discriminatory selection practices under the

Apartheid regime (Myors et al., 2008) and the influence of trade unions within the country (Uys & Holtzhausen, 2016) necessitate legally defensible hiring.

Research findings on the influence of legal considerations in selection tool choice are varied. König et al.'s (2010) study found that legal considerations played a minimal role in tool selection decisions in Switzerland, a finding supported by Ryan et al.'s (2015) global survey. However, in Canada, Risavy et al. (2021) identified legal compliance as a prominent theme in HR practitioners' decision-making considerations. This variance could be significant in the South African context, where legal pressures primarily drive selection practices (Myors et al., 2008). Furthermore, emphasis on advancing previously disadvantaged groups through labour legislation adds another layer of legal complexity to selection tool choice.

These regulatory requirements, coupled with South Africa's "talent paradox", suggest that legal considerations might play a more pronounced role in selection procedure adoption than indicated in international research. The South African legal context creates an institutional environment where legal compliance may be inextricably linked to organisational legitimacy in ways not observed in other contexts.

Applicant Reactions to Procedures

Applicant reactions to selection procedures represent a critical determinant of organisational legitimacy, particularly within South Africa's complex socio-historical context. The field of applicant reactions has gained significant research traction in recent decades, focusing on how job applicants respond to selection tools during their application experience (McCarthy et al., 2017). These reactions have been empirically linked to key outcomes, including attitudes towards organisations and intentions to pursue, accept, or recommend employment opportunities (McCarthy et al., 2018).

Research consistently demonstrates the importance of applicant reactions in selection tool choice. Multiple studies have identified applicant reactions as a prominent factor in selection procedure decisions (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2021), while other research has highlighted related considerations such as applicant ease of use and time efficiency (Ryan et al., 2015). Institutional theory suggests that negative applicant reactions can significantly undermine organisational legitimacy, as unfavourable reactions typically lead to negative intentions regarding job pursuit and organisational recommendations (Klehe, 2004). Applicant reactions should be specifically considered in South Africa as psychological testing carries historical baggage due to its past misuse in legitimising segregation (Laher & Cockroft, 2014). This historical context, combined with current legislative requirements,

creates an environment where applicant reactions may carry greater weight in selection tool decisions.

Organisational Self-Promotion Opportunities

Organisational self-promotion through selection procedures serves as a strategic mechanism for establishing institutional legitimacy. Companies may leverage their selection processes to present positive organisational information, regardless of the procedure's actual effectiveness (König et al., 2010). This institutional pressure manifests in selection tool choices, with research demonstrating that opportunities for organisational self-promotion significantly influence selection procedure decisions (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2021).

Several studies have highlighted the importance of organisational self-promotion in selection tool choice. Research has found that HR practitioners commonly choose selection procedures based on their ability to inform candidates about the company (Risavy et al., 2021), while a significant proportion of HR professionals (24.8%) cite employer brand reinforcement as a key factor in tool selection decisions (Ryan et al., 2015). In South Africa's competitive talent market, self-promotion through selection processes may take on additional significance. This is particularly relevant for organisations seeking to attract skilled workers while simultaneously demonstrating compliance with legislation and testing standards.

Predictive Validity of Procedures

The predictive validity of a selection tool should be a key consideration in South Africa's selection environment. While predictive validity directly influences job performance outcomes (Sackett et al., 2022) and organisational performance, research indicates that practitioners often choose tools with limited predictive power and rarely cite validity as a primary selection procedure choice criterion (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2019, 2021). In the context of institutional theory, the perceived predictive validity of a selection practice can affect an organisation’s stability due to the impact of predictive validity on successful candidate selection and therefore, long-term economic outcomes (König et al., 2010).

South Africa is the only country where the onus is on employers to prove that the selection procedures used are scientifically valid and reliable (Myors et al., 2008). It is therefore anticipated that the South African context will conflict with previous findings for this factor through a greater practitioner consideration of validity. While tools are mandated to demonstrate predictive validity in South Africa, practitioners in samples without such mandates did not report prioritising predictive validity. Some research has found that a tool’s predictive validity is the most important factor influencing HR Professionals to use a certain

selection tool. For example, Ryan et al. (2015) reported that 82.9% of their sample listed a tool's validity as impacting their decision to use it.

Associated Cost/Utility Implications

Cost considerations in selection tool choice represent a mechanism through which organisations attempt to maintain short-term financial stability. While predictive validity influences long-term economic outcomes, the immediate costs of administering selection procedures can significantly impact an organisation's financial position (König et al., 2010). Through an institutional theory lens, cost-based selection decisions reflect organisations' strategic efforts to manage institutional pressures while maintaining operational stability.

Research consistently demonstrates the significance of cost considerations in selection tool decisions, with multiple studies identifying financial factors as primary determinants in HR practitioners' choices (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2021). This cost sensitivity is further evidenced by survey data showing that 37.7% of HR professionals cite excessive expense as a reason for avoiding certain testing procedures (Ryan et al., 2015). In South Africa's context, where organisations must balance regulations with resource constraints, cost considerations may be particularly acute. This is especially relevant for smaller organisations facing the additional expense of engaging registered psychologists for test administration while simultaneously navigating the country's skills shortage. Furthermore, this challenge is particularly salient given the country's economic disparities and the need to implement sophisticated selection procedures while maintaining financial sustainability.

Theoretical Considerations

The application of institutional theory to selection practices demonstrates gaps in the understanding of how South African organisations navigate unique institutional pressures in their selection decisions. While global research has established how diffusion, legal considerations, applicant reactions, self-promotion, predictive validity, and cost influence selection tool choices (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2021), South Africa's distinctive institutional environment requires focused exploration.

Several factors make the South African context suited for institutional theory research. The regulatory framework (Myors et al., 2008) creates unique institutional pressures, which are made more complex due to critical skills shortages (Wolfswinkel & Enslin, 2020). Additionally, the historical context of psychological testing in South Africa (Laher & Cockroft, 2014) adds more complexity to understanding how organisations maintain legitimacy through their selection practices. The limited available research on South African selection practices (Louw, 2013; Puchert et al., 2022) suggests varying approaches

across sectors and organisation sizes but fails to explain the institutional forces driving these differences. Understanding how South African organisations navigate institutional pressures in their selection decisions is necessary for both theoretical advancement and practical improvement of selection practices. This research gap presents an opportunity to extend institutional theory while providing valuable insights for practitioners operating within South Africa's selection landscape. Such research could help bridge the scientist-practitioner gap by demonstrating how institutional pressures specifically shape South African selection practices, ultimately contributing to more effective talent identification and selection. To this end, the second research question is as follows:

Research Question 2 (RQ2): To what extent do HR practitioners in South Africa choose to use or not use a selection practice or assessment due to their perceptions of its diffusion in the field, legality, associated applicant reactions, associated organisational self-promotion, predictive validity, and costs?

Hypothesis 1: Selection procedure diffusion is positively related to HR practitioner use, such that as a selection procedure becomes more diffused in a field, its use will increase.

Hypothesis 2: Perceptions of legal defensibility are positively related to HR practitioner use, such that as a selection procedure is perceived as more legally defensible, its use will increase.

Hypothesis 3: Perceptions of positive applicant reactions are positively related to HR practitioner use, such that as applicant reactions to a selection procedure are perceived to be more positive, the use of it will increase.

Hypothesis 4: Perceptions of ability to self-promote the organisation are positively related to HR practitioner use, such that as a selection procedure allows for greater organisational self-promotion, the use of it will increase.

Hypothesis 5: Perceived predictive validity is positively related to HR practitioner use, such that as a selection tool is perceived as more valid, the use of it will increase.

Hypothesis 6: Administration costs of a selection procedure is negatively related to HR practitioner use, such that as costs involved with the administration of a selection procedure increase, the use of it will decrease.

Chapter 3: Method

The method that was employed in this study is discussed in this chapter, encompassing research design and procedure, participant characteristics, measures used, and the data analysis techniques utilised.

Research Design and Procedure

This study followed a cross-sectional quantitative descriptive design using self-report surveys. Concurrent with cross-sectional designs, variables will only be measured at one point in time because the research aims to provide a snapshot of the current trends in personnel selection in South Africa (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). A descriptive research design seeks to describe a phenomenon (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012) and thus is congruent with the aims of the research questions. A survey with four sections was constructed on Qualtrics. Participants were first presented with a list of selection procedures and asked to select the selection procedures currently used in their organisation. They were then asked to rate the extent to which perceptions about certain characteristics (or factors) inform their preference for the procedures. Lastly, demographic data was collected. Mostly quantitative data was collected, with some qualitative data being obtained from open-ended questions included in the final section of the survey.

UCT's Commerce Faculty Ethics Committee approved the study, allowing for the distribution of electronic self-report surveys via anonymous links. The survey was created and distributed on Qualtrics, as surveys distributed online allow for greater participant reach. Due to the participation inclusion criteria specifying that any HR Professional within South Africa would qualify for inclusion, it was important that the survey could be disseminated throughout the country. This necessitated the use of electronic surveys rather than hard copy surveys.

To ensure participants had direct expertise in HR selection practices, this study employed non-probability sampling, specifically a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). The approach allows for recruiting HR practitioners across diverse industries and tenures, creating a representative sample of HR practices in South Africa. Participants were recruited via mass email through the South African Board for Personnel Practice and by posting anonymous survey links on LinkedIn and in WhatsApp groups for Industrial/Organisational Psychologists. Shortly after posting the anonymous survey link on LinkedIn, 155 initial responses were received. However, these

entries were predominantly invalid, likely from bots. Disqualification criteria included geolocation data showing responses originated from outside South Africa, often from a single geographic point (such as 50 entries from a lake in North America), and survey completion times of only seconds. Consequently, these responses were eliminated, and data collection strategies were revised to ensure data integrity.

Following this, an alternative strategy on LinkedIn was employed wherein individual messages were sent to LinkedIn users who met participation inclusion criteria through using LinkedIn Premium InMails. This insured that the anonymous link was not largely accessible by parties not meeting inclusion criteria. Furthermore, additional membership boards for HR Professionals were contacted. This included the Assessment Centre Study Group, and the Society for Industrial/Organisational Psychologists in South Africa (SIOPSA). SIOPSA directed the survey towards their People in Assessment Interest Group, who were able to disseminate the survey among their members. Several psychometric providers were contacted, including Psytech, M&M Initiatives, JVR, and Top Talent Solutions (TTS). M&M Initiatives and JVR were able to send through the survey link to several individuals, but were unable to distribute it to their databases for various reasons, and there was no response from Psytech. TTS were able to include survey information and the survey link within one of their monthly newsletters. Lastly, the UCT HR Department was contacted for distribution amongst their HR staff. Snowball sampling was used as a supplementary approach where participants were asked to reach out within their networks to identify further participants that meet the inclusion criteria (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012).

Participants

In total, the survey was distributed to 285 people. After disqualifying the LinkedIn bots, this number was reduced to 130, which was further reduced after filtering out respondents who had not completed the survey, did not consent to the survey, or did not confirm meeting inclusion criteria. This resulted in a sample size of 74. Upon further examination, an additional 12 participants were disqualified. The third section of the survey required participants to rate four out of five selection procedures, selecting two that they preferred to use, and two that they preferred not to use. These 12 participants had either rated too many or too few selection procedures, and as such their responses would not be comparable to the rest of the sample. This resulted in a final sample size of 62.

The sample was largely female (72.6%), with only 15 males in the sample (24.2%), 1.6% as gender non-conforming, and 1.6% preferring not to disclose their gender. The racial

distribution of respondents was Black (4.8%), Coloured (14.5%), White (69.4%), and Indian (8.1%), with 3.2% of respondents preferring not to answer. The average age of participants in the sample was 39.88, and most participants were between 30 and 34 years old (19.4%) or 40 and 44 years old (19.4%). 8.1% of the sample preferred not to disclose their age. Most participants indicated holding a post-graduate degree as their highest level of education (87%). The remaining portion of the sample reported either holding a Diploma or Higher Certificate (6.5%), or a Bachelor's degree, Advanced Diploma, or B.Tech (6.5%).

Over half of the sample was registered with the HPCSA as a psychometrist or psychologist (59.7%), and 88.7% of the sample responded that they were able to influence their organisation's choice of selection procedure. Regarding job roles, 35.5% of participants described themselves as being in HR Director or HR Executive roles. A further 24.2% were in HR Manager or HR Lead roles, and 32.3% were in HR Specialist or HR Practitioner roles. 8.1% of the sample preferred not to disclose their job role. Most respondents were in organisations with over 301 employees (51.6%). The most common industries that respondents' organisations were in were HR Consulting (19.4%), Finance (21%), and Technology (19.4%). The most typical role that assessments were used for were Specialist roles (38.7%), which was made up mostly of Technical Specialist roles in IT, such as Software Developers and Engineers (33.33%).

Table 3

Occupational Characteristics of Participants

	n	%
HPCSA Psychometry/Psychology Designation		
Yes	37	59.7
No	25	40.3
Ability to influence organisation's choice in selection procedure		
Yes	55	88.7
No	7	11.3
Job title		
HR Executive/HR Director	22	35.5
HR Manager/HR Lead	15	24.2
HR Specialist/HR Practitioner	20	32.3
Prefer not to answer	5	8.1

Table 4

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

	n	%
Gender		
Male	15	24.2
Female	45	72.6
Gender non-conforming	1	1.6
Prefer not to answer	1	1.6
Race		
Black	3	4.8
Coloured	9	14.5
White	43	69.4
Indian	5	8.1
Prefer not to answer	2	3.2
Age		
20 – 24	1	1.6
25 – 29	7	11.3
30 – 34	12	19.4
35 – 39	7	11.3
40 – 44	12	19.4
45 – 49	7	11.3
50 – 54	7	11.3
55 – 59	3	4.8
60+	1	1.6
Prefer not to answer	5	8.1
Highest level of education		
Diploma or Higher Certificate	4	6.5
Bachelor's Degree, Advanced Diploma, or B.Tech	4	6.5
Post Graduate Degree	54	87.0

Table 5

Characteristics of Participants' Organisations

	n	%
Number of people in organisation		
1 – 20	9	14.5
21 – 50	6	9.7
51 – 150	5	8.1
151 – 300	10	16.1
301+	32	51.6
Industry of organisation		
Agriculture	4	6.5
HR Consulting	12	19.4
Education	1	1.6
Finance	13	21.0
Government	4	6.5
Manufacturing	4	6.5
Media	1	1.6
Mining	2	3.2
NPO	1	1.6
Waste management	1	1.6
Wholesale and retail trade	4	6.5
Technology	12	19.4
Other	2	3.2
Prefer not to answer	1	1.6
Typical roles assessed for		
Assorted/Various roles	16	25.8
Specialist roles	24	38.7
Management roles	6	9.7
Executive/Leadership roles	5	8.1
Prefer not to answer	11	17.7

Measures

Type of Selection Tool. This asked participants to identify the types of selection tools they have used in the past two years from a list. Short descriptions were provided for each tool in order to avoid differing definitions or labels confusing participants. This list was comprised of the list of selection tools presented by Risavy et al. (2019) to participants (see

Table 2), as well as some newer computer-based selection tools. Below the list was an open-ended question prompting participants to include additional selection procedures which may not have been included. See Appendix A.

Perception of Selection Procedure. This survey sought to ascertain reasons for preferring to use or not use a procedure. König et al.'s (2010) method was used as a benchmark but could not be replicated entirely due to limitations of Qualtrics software. In the benchmarked study (König et al., 2010), participants were asked to rate the attributes of a maximum of four procedures, two procedures of which they would have disclosed they used in the preceding section and two of which they do not use. If more than two procedures had or had not been used, two procedures were randomly generated. Qualtrics does not offer the same extensive customisability as seen here. As such, answers from the first section could not be similarly linked to this section, and there could be no random generation. To replicate as closely as possible, after completing the first section, participants were asked to rate the attributes of a maximum of four procedures, first being asked to choose their two most preferred from a list of five, and then being asked to choose their two least favourite from a list of five. As with König et al.'s (2010) study, only five procedures were presented: semi-structured interviews, general mental ability tests, personality tests, assessment centres, and assessment of social media websites. These tools vary in predictive validity and are expected to be used to varying degrees between organisations (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2021). The attributes on which participants rated the procedures were: Diffusion, Legality, Applicant Reactions, Organisational Self-Promotion, Validity, and Costs. Two items were asked per predictor variable, which participants were asked to rate according to a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). These items were taken from König et al.'s (2010) study, where they were previously found to be valid and reliable. See Appendix B.

Demographic/occupational characteristics. Single-item multiple choice questions were asked to ascertain participants' age range, race, gender, level of education, size of organisation, job title, HPCSA registration status, ability to influence organisations' choice in selection procedure, organisations' industry, and most typical roles they used assessments for. These items were included to understand sample characteristics and whether these might have any effect on reasons informing preference of a selection procedure. Understanding sample characteristics is important in determining how generalisable the study may be to the larger population of HR practitioners in South Africa (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). Risavy et al. (2021) included demographic information in their survey study as a supplementary analysis. They found that race and gender had small effects for validity and legality perceptions as

driving the choice to use or not use a selection procedure. However, 75% of their participants identified as 'White'. Age and size of firm were found to be significant moderators for whether perceptions of a tool's validity informed the choice to use or not use it. See Appendix C.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 was used for data cleaning, scoring, and descriptive analysis. This included the reverse scoring of the variable 'Legality', replicating König et al.'s (2010) method. RQ 1, as well as demographic and occupational data, were analysed using descriptive methods. The procedure for the second section of the survey initially aimed to replicate the method used by König et al. (2010). In this section, each participant rated their reason for preferring to use or not use four selection procedures according to perceived attributes generated from institutional theory. As such, the preference of a procedure became a dependent variable resulting from perceived attributes of a selection procedure. As noted in König et al.'s (2010) study, this produces data with a nested structure because multiple observations (ratings of different selection procedures) are clustered within each individual participant. This violation of the independence assumption in traditional regression analysis necessitates a multilevel logistic regression approach.

Multilevel logistic modelling is recommended due to the research design which results in missing-not-at-random data (MNAR), as well as resulting in a repeated-measures design with nested data. Data are MNAR where each participant rated only four out of five procedures, the combination of which was not identical for all participants. Data are nested as described above. There was an imbalance of data per selection procedure, for example, 55 participants provided ratings for not preferring the assessment of social media platforms, compared to three participants providing ratings for preferring this procedure. Additionally, the outcome variable (preference vs non-preference) was dichotomous.

According to Sommet and Morselli (2017), several standard modelling approaches were unsuitable for this analysis. Linear modelling could not be employed due to the presence of a dichotomous variable, as these models predict a mean value of an outcome variable at a particular value of a predictor variable, which is impossible when the outcome is binary (0 or 1). Standard logistic modelling could not be used because of the nested structure of the data. Given that the data were MNAR and considering the limitations of running multilevel logistic modelling in SPSS, R was employed instead. Before assumption checking,

an exploratory multilevel logistic model was run on the data, producing results showing little to no predictive power and no statistical significance.

At this point, G*Power was used to determine required sample and effect sizes. Despite the effort put towards increasing sample size as much as possible, results from G*Power indicated that a minimum sample of 280 participants would be required to detect any kind of effect sizes or to achieve statistical power, a difference of 218 participants between the sample size and required size. Furthermore, research suggests that for multilevel logistic modelling, a minimum of 100 Level 1 units and 80 Level 2 units are needed when estimating cross-level interaction effects (Schoeneberger, 2016). The data consisted of only 62 participants and thus did not meet the requirement of 80 Level 2 units. Due to the insufficient sample size, there was a high risk of generating an unstable model (Stoltzfus, 2011). Furthermore, insufficient sample size, specifically at Level 2 of a multilevel logistic model, increases Type I error rates (Sommet & Morselli, 2017).

For these reasons, it was determined not to proceed with regression modelling and to instead conduct descriptive and correlational analyses. Descriptive analyses included frequency and standard error analyses, as well as a chi-square test of independence.

Similarly, sample size and MNAR data constraints prevented the evaluation of the psychometric properties of the scale used in the second section of the survey. Conducting factor analyses with insufficient sample size is likely to result in bias and errors (Wolf et al., 2013). This risk is increased substantially where there is missing data, where a model with 20% missing data requires a 50% increase in sample size (Wolf et al., 2013). However, this scale was replicated from König et al.'s (2010) study wherein support was found for its validity and reliability. In this study, confirmatory factor analyses were used to test the discriminant validity of the predictor variables showing good fit, thus indicating that the predictors measured separate constructs. Reliability analyses were conducted using Cronbach's alpha with values ranging from 0.66 to 0.83, which, although acceptable, are slightly low.

Chapter 4: Results

Due to several constraints outlined in the previous chapter, results obtained do not include the psychometric properties of the measure or regression modelling. As such, this chapter aims to express the results of this study in terms of descriptive statistics.

Descriptive Statistics

Reported Use of Selection Procedures

RQ 1 examined the current selection procedures used by HR professionals in South Africa. Figure 5 and Table 6 present the percentage of participants who reported using each selection procedure, with participants able to select multiple options. In this sample, résumé, CV, or cover letter analysis was nearly universal, used by 95.2% of HR professionals. Among psychometric assessments, personality tests were the most prevalent (85.5%). Interview methods showed a clear preference for structured formats (74.2%) over semi-structured approaches (62.9%).

Regarding technology-based selection tools, asynchronous video interviews (AVIs) and gamified assessments were moderately adopted, used by 22.6% and 19.4% of professionals, respectively. In contrast, natural language processing tools saw limited implementation (8.1%). Traditional but controversial methods such as graphological assessments (3.2%) and Internet-based non-social media screening (4.8%) were rarely utilised. Additional procedures reported by participants included specialised assessments of capability (1.6%), motives and values (3.2%), complexity (1.6%), and skills (1.6%), along with work simulations (1.6%).

To contextualise these findings, the usage frequencies were compared with previous research from the United States and Canada (Risavy et al., 2019) using chi-square (χ^2) tests of independence. As shown in Table 6, South African HR professionals were significantly more likely to utilise several assessment methods compared to their North American counterparts. These included résumé/CV/cover letter analysis, biodata, GMA/IQ tests, personality tests, and emotional intelligence tests. The only procedure more prevalent in the United States was the use of application forms. This emphasises a significantly higher usage of psychometric assessments in South Africa than North American samples.

Figure 5

Usage Rates of Different Selection Procedures by South African HR Professionals (N = 62)

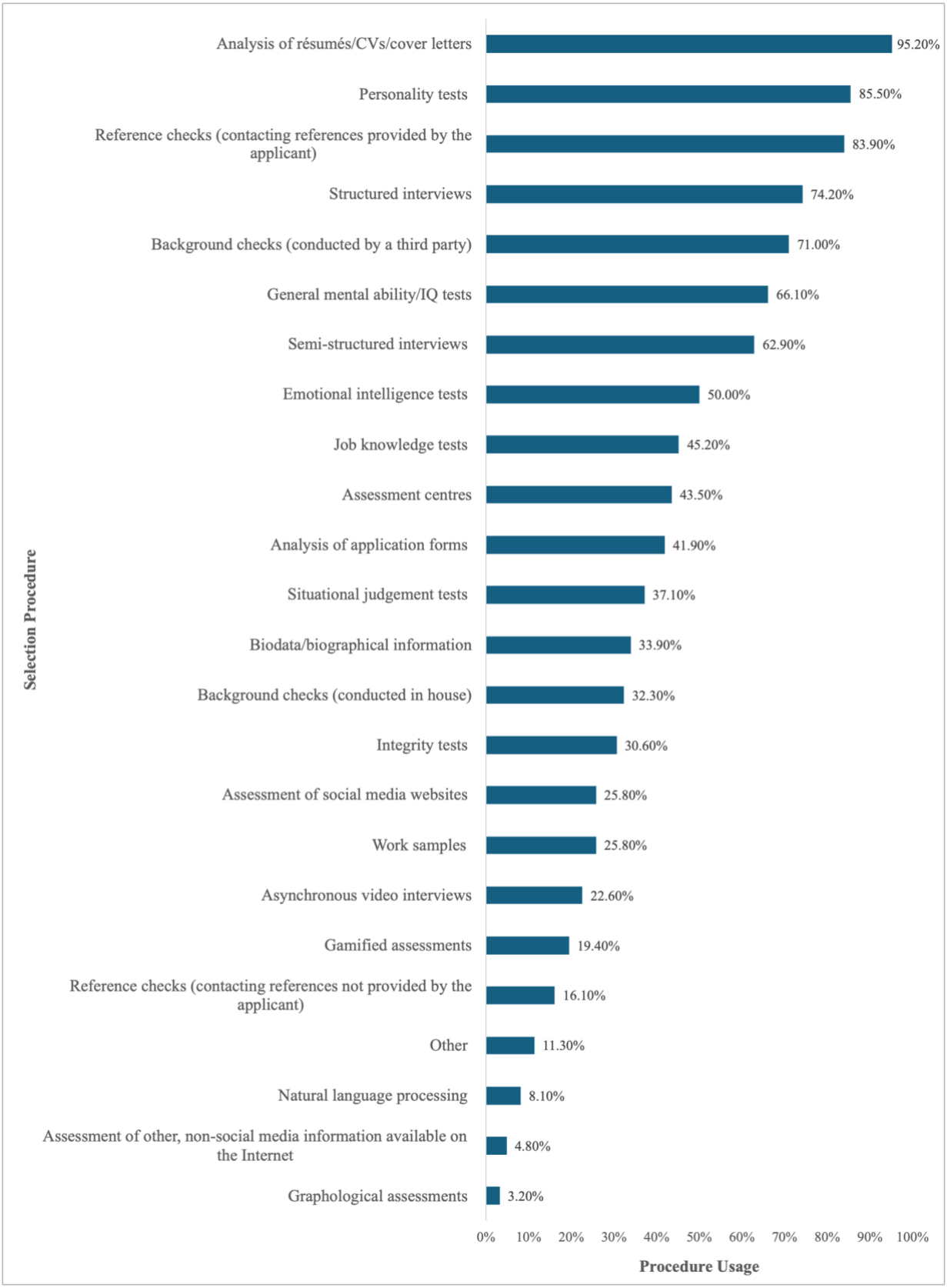


Table 6

Selection Procedures Being Used in Employee Selection in South Africa, Canada, and the United States

Selection tools	South Africa (N = 62)	Canada (N = 119)	United States (N = 334)
Analysis of résumés/CVs/cover letters [ab]	95.2%	82.4%	70.1%
Analysis of application forms [ab]	41.9%	50.4%	58.4%
Assessment centres	43.5%	19.3%	19.2%
Work samples	25.8%	25.2%	18.6%
General mental ability/IQ tests [ab]	66.1%	4.2%	6.0%
Personality tests [ab]	85.5%	6.7%	6.6%
Background checks (conducted in house)	32.3%	12.6%	19.5%
Background checks (conducted by a third party)	71.0%	35.3%	41.6%
Graphological assessments	3.2%	2.5%	3.0%
Emotional intelligence tests [abc]	50.0%	14.3%	6.0%
Integrity tests	30.6%	15.1%	11.4%
Reference checks (references provided by the applicant)	83.9%	70.6%	53.0%
Reference checks (references not provided by the applicant)	16.1%	16.8%	11.1%
Job knowledge tests	45.2%	40.3%	28.7%
Situational judgement tests	37.1%	26.1%	17.1%
Biodata/biographical information [ab]	33.9%	3.4%	3.9%
Assessment of social media websites	25.8%	21.0%	19.5%
Assessment of other, non-social media information available on the Internet	4.8%	5.0%	5.7%

Note. Adapted from "Selection tool use: A focus on personality testing in Canada, the United States, and Germany", by Risavy, S. D., Fisher, P. A., Robie, C., & König, C. J., 2019, *Personnel Assessment and Decisions, 5*(1), p. 66

[a] Statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) between South Africa and Canada

[b] Statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) between South Africa and the United States

[c] Statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) between the Canada and the United States

Reported Reasons for Selection Procedure Preferences

This research question sought to understand which perceived characteristics of selection procedures influenced HR professionals' preferences for or against their use. Participants were asked to evaluate four procedures from a list of five options, indicating two procedures they preferred to use and two they preferred not to use. The available options included semi-structured interviews, GMA tests, personality tests, ACs, and social media website assessments. The evaluation criteria encompassed six characteristics: perceived

diffusion in the field (Diffusion), legal defensibility (Legality), induced applicant reactions (Applicant Reactions), potential for organisational promotion (Organisational Self-Promotion), predictive validity (Predictive Validity), and associated financial and time costs (Costs). Descriptive analyses were conducted to examine both the extent of procedure preferences and the characteristics potentially driving these preferences.

Table 7 displays the frequency with which participants selected different tools as either preferred or non-preferred choices. Personality tests emerged as the most favoured procedure (64.5%), followed by semi-structured interviews (51.6%). In contrast, the assessment of social media websites was unpopular, with 82.3% of participants indicating a preference against its use. ACs generated mixed responses, with similar proportions of participants rating them as preferred (40.3%) and not preferred (37.1%). GMA tests showed a moderate positive skew, with 38.7% of participants favouring their use compared to 27.4% who did not prefer them.

Table 7

Preferred and Non-preferred Selection Procedures in South Africa

Selection tools	Preferred	Non-preferred
Semi-structured interviews	51.6%	33.9%
General mental ability tests	38.7%	27.4%
Personality tests	64.5%	19.4%
Assessment centres	40.3%	37.1%
Assessment of social media websites	4.8%	82.3%

Note. $N = 62$.

Further descriptive statistics were generated to investigate the different characteristics associated with the preference and non-preference of selection procedures. Based on the participant choosing a procedure as preferred, a value of 1 was assigned to a preference variable for a specific procedure. Similarly, if a participant chose a procedure as not preferred, a value of 0 was assigned to the preference variable of the procedure. Using these preference variables, the dataset was split by procedure and by preference value to determine the mean and median scores, standard deviations (SD), standard errors of the mean (SEM), and z-scores associated with each perceived characteristic. This allows for an understanding of which characteristics are most associated with the preference or non-preference of each selection procedure. Z-scores were calculated to compare the mean rating for each

characteristic within specific procedure-preference groups against the overall mean rating for that characteristic across all participants and procedures. The SEM used in this calculation was derived from the overall sample distribution for each characteristic. These z-scores indicate how many standard errors a particular group's mean deviates from the overall sample mean, helping to identify which characteristics are most distinctively associated with preference or non-preference for each selection procedure. These results are displayed in Tables 8 through 12.

Table 8 displays the descriptive statistics associated with semi-structured interviews. For participants preferring semi-structured interviews, mean scores were significantly higher than population means for Diffusion, Applicant Reactions, Self-Promotion, and Validity (all $p < .01$). Applicant Reactions and Self-Promotion showed the most pronounced differences, suggesting these characteristics most strongly influenced preference. Legality mean scores were significantly lower ($p < .05$), indicating potential legal concerns were offset by other perceived benefits. For those not preferring semi-structured interviews, Diffusion remained high ($p < .01$), but Validity was perceived as significantly lower. Overall, while the procedure was widely seen as diffused, perceptions of its predictive validity varied considerably.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics of Preference and Non-Preference Reasons for Semi-Structured Interviews

	Mean	SEM	Median	SD	Z-score
Preferred (n = 32)					
Diffusion	4.20	.14	4.25	0.77	4.52**
Legality	3.20	.11	3.00	0.62	-2.47*
Applicant Reactions	4.34	.09	4.50	0.48	11.81**
Self-Promotion	4.14	.12	4.00	0.65	8.43**
Validity	3.66	.16	4.00	0.89	3.53**
Cost	3.13	.17	3.00	0.97	-1.32
Not Preferred (n = 21)					
Diffusion	4.14	.17	4.00	0.78	3.26**
Legality	3.33	.09	3.00	0.43	-1.52
Applicant Reactions	3.55	.18	4.00	0.81	1.18
Self-Promotion	2.88	.24	3.00	1.08	-1.23
Validity	2.41	.23	2.50	1.03	-3.08**
Cost	3.26	.23	3.00	1.06	-0.38

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

In Table 9, descriptive statistics for GMA tests are displayed. Participants preferring GMA tests perceived the procedure as highly diffused, legally defensible, inducing positive applicant reactions, allowing organisational self-promotion, and having high predictive validity (all $p < .01$). Legality had the z-score which was the greatest number of standard errors from the mean. This factor might therefore be the most notable characteristic of GMA tests to those preferring to use the procedure. Lastly, participants viewed the procedure as cost-effective, with a significantly lower mean score for Cost ($p < .01$). For those not preferring GMA tests, Applicant Reactions and Self-Promotion mean scores were significantly lower than population means ($p < .01$), suggesting these perceived characteristics may deter procedure preference.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics of Preference and Non-Preference Reasons for General Mental Ability Tests

	Mean	SEM	Median	SD	Z-score
Preferred (n = 24)					
Diffusion	4.35	.16	4.50	0.77	4.84**
Legality	4.60	.11	5.00	0.55	9.99**
Applicant Reactions	3.75	.20	4.00	0.99	2.03*
Self-Promotion	3.92	.15	4.00	0.72	5.10**
Validity	4.04	.14	4.00	0.69	6.70**
Cost	2.73	.17	3.00	0.82	-3.70**
Not Preferred (n = 17)					
Diffusion	3.47	.26	3.50	1.05	-0.46
Legality	3.38	.31	3.00	1.28	-0.30
Applicant Reactions	2.65	.18	3.00	0.72	-3.94**
Self-Promotion	2.44	.25	2.50	1.01	-2.97**
Validity	2.88	.27	2.50	1.10	-0.81
Cost	3.53	.24	4.00	0.98	0.75

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 10 displays the descriptive statistics for personality tests. Participants preferring personality tests perceived the procedure as highly diffused, legally defensible, eliciting positive applicant reactions, enabling organisational self-promotion, and demonstrating high predictive validity (all $p < .01$). Legality and Applicant Reactions showed the most pronounced deviations from population means, suggesting that these factors might be most meaningful to participants preferring this procedure. Conversely, participants not preferring

personality tests perceived the procedure as lacking legal defensibility and incurring high costs (both $p < .01$), potentially explaining their reluctance to use the method.

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics of Preference and Non-Preference Reasons for Personality Tests

	Mean	SEM	Median	SD	Z-score
Preferred ($n = 40$)					
Diffusion	4.21	.11	4.00	0.72	5.52**
Legality	4.39	.14	5.00	0.87	6.67**
Applicant Reactions	4.09	.12	4.00	0.74	6.39**
Self-Promotion	3.65	.15	4.00	0.96	3.15**
Validity	3.61	.12	4.00	0.78	4.19**
Cost	3.34	.17	3.50	1.10	-0.07
Not Preferred ($n = 12$)					
Diffusion	3.54	.31	4.00	1.08	-0.15
Legality	2.63	.22	2.75	0.77	-3.81**
Applicant Reactions	3.25	.23	3.25	0.81	-0.39
Self-Promotion	2.88	.22	3.00	0.77	-1.33
Validity	3.21	.24	3.25	0.84	0.46
Cost	4.29	.21	4.25	0.72	4.53**

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

The descriptive statistics for assessment centres (ACs) are contained in Table 11. Participants preferring assessment centres perceived the procedure as legally defensible, eliciting positive applicant reactions, demonstrating high validity, and being cost-effective (all $p < .01$). Self-Promotion was least significant ($z = 2.575$, $p < .05$), while Validity and Cost showed the most pronounced deviations from population means. This indicates that these participants perceived the ability of ACs to aid in promoting the organisation as somewhat less important than other characteristics. Participants not preferring ACs perceived the procedure as legally defensible, highly valid, and costly, despite not choosing to use it. They also viewed ACs as lacking diffusion in their fields. The divergence suggests those preferring ACs view high costs as acceptable given the procedure's perceived validity and legal defensibility, while others find the costs prohibitive.

Table 11

Descriptive Statistics of Preference and Non-Preference Reasons for Assessment Centres

	Mean	SEM	Median	SD	Z-score
Preferred (*n* = 23)					
Diffusion	3.65	.21	4.00	0.98	0.31
Legality	4.22	.18	4.50	0.85	4.19**
Applicant Reactions	3.96	.16	4.00	0.75	3.93**
Self-Promotion	3.67	.20	4.00	0.94	2.58*
Validity	4.22	.16	4.50	0.75	7.13**
Cost	4.46	.14	4.50	0.69	7.69**
Not Preferred (*n* = 23)					
Diffusion	2.76	.25	3.00	1.18	-3.38**
Legality	4.13	.20	4.50	0.98	3.21**
Applicant Reactions	2.98	.21	3.00	1.01	-1.71
Self-Promotion	3.33	.23	3.00	1.08	0.68
Validity	3.85	.18	4.00	0.85	4.26**
Cost	4.24	.19	4.50	0.93	4.61**

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Below, Table 12 includes descriptive data regarding the preference and non-preference data for using the assessment of social media as a selection procedure. Due to the small number of participants reporting preference for social media assessments, the descriptive statistics generated for this outcome may not be reliable. Regardless, the only factor with a significant mean score difference from the population was Cost ($z = 2.951$, $p < .01$), potentially reflecting the time-intensive nature of the procedure despite low financial costs. The vast majority (82.3%) did not prefer social media assessments, perceiving them as lacking diffusion, legal defensibility, positive applicant reactions, organisational self-promotion potential, and predictive validity, although significantly inexpensive.

Table 12

Descriptive Statistics of Preference and Non-Preference Reasons for Assessment of Social Media

	Mean	SEM	Median	SD	Z-score
Preferred (*n* = 3)					
Diffusion	3.33	.67	4.00	1.16	-0.38
Legality	3.00	.58	3.00	1.00	-0.82
Applicant Reactions	3.50	.29	3.50	0.50	0.55
Self-Promotion	3.00	.16	3.00	2.00	-1.11
Validity	3.00	1.00	4.00	1.73	-0.10
Cost	4.33	.33	4.00	0.58	2.95**
Not Preferred (*n* = 51)					
Diffusion	2.54	.15	2.50	1.04	-7.19**
Legality	2.12	.16	2.00	1.14	-8.48**
Applicant Reactions	1.96	.11	2.00	0.81	-12.21**
Self-Promotion	1.95	.15	2.00	1.05	-8.31**
Validity	1.36	.10	1.00	0.68	-18.26**
Cost	2.58	.15	2.50	0.09	-5.08**

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

A comparison of mean scores of preferred and not preferred procedures are displayed below in Figures 6 and 7, as well as Table 13. Across the procedures preferred by participants, the mean scores for Applicant Reactions and Self-Promotion were highest for semi-structured interviews. As such, out of the preferred procedures, participants perceived semi-structured interviews as eliciting positive applicant reactions and allowing for organisational self-promotion to the greatest extent. GMA tests were associated with the highest mean scores for Diffusion and Legality and the lowest for Cost. This suggests that GMAs were perceived as the most diffused, legally defensible, and incurring the lowest costs out of preferred procedures. Validity had the highest mean score for ACs, suggesting that ACs were perceived as the most valid.

Regarding procedures not preferred by participants, the most extreme mean scores were almost all associated with the assessment of social media. This procedure was perceived as being the least diffused, legally defensible, incurring the least positive applicant reactions, being the least useful for promoting the organisation, and being the least predictively valid. The procedure associated with incurring the highest costs was assessment centres.

Reasons for selection procedure usage are further contextualised in Table 13, where the means for each perceived characteristic are compared to previous data collected in a

Swiss sample (König et al., 2010). In the South African sample, means for Diffusion (*M* = 3.58) and Organisational Self-Promotion (M = 3.17) were higher than those in the Swiss sample (M = 2.87; M = 2.73). Conversely, the mean for Legality was higher in the Swiss sample (M = 4.15) than in the South African sample (M = 3.47).

Figure 6

Mean Scores of Perceived Characteristics Linked to Reasons for Preferred Usage of Selection Procedures

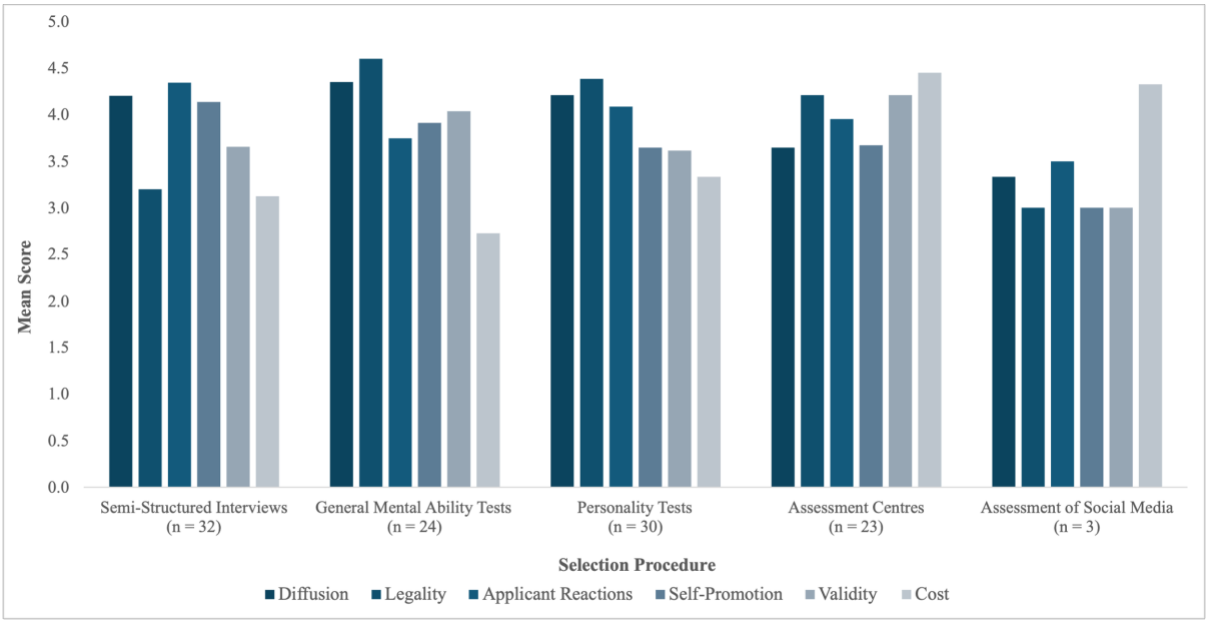


Figure 7

Mean Scores of Perceived Characteristics Linked to Reasons for Non-Preferred Usage of Selection Procedures

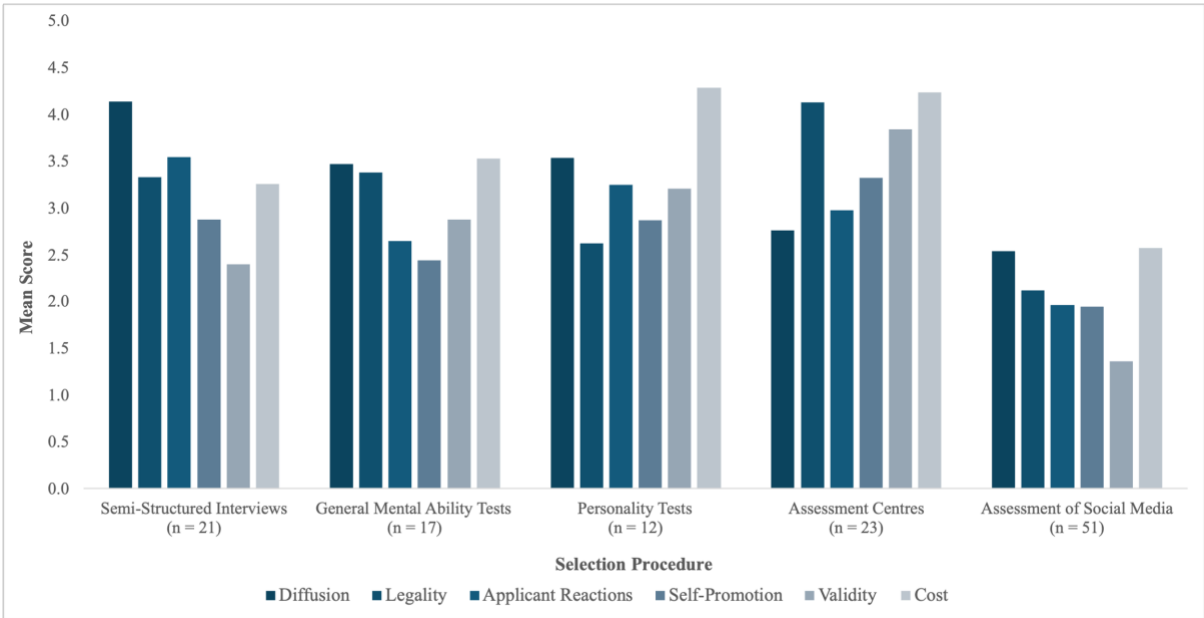


Table 13

Mean Scores of Preference and Non-Preference Reasons for Selection Procedures

	Semi-Structured Interviews	General Mental Ability Tests	Personality Tests	Assessment Centres	Assessment of Social Media
Preferred					
Diffusion	4.20	4.35	4.21	3.65	3.33
Legality	3.20	4.60	4.39	4.22	3.00
Applicant Reactions	4.34	3.75	4.09	3.96	3.50
Self-Promotion	4.14	3.92	3.65	3.67	3.00
Validity	3.66	4.04	3.61	4.22	3.00
Cost	3.13	2.73	3.34	4.46	4.33
Not Preferred					
Diffusion	4.14	3.47	3.54	2.76	2.54
Legality	3.33	3.38	2.63	4.13	2.12
Applicant Reactions	3.55	2.65	3.25	2.98	1.96
Self-Promotion	2.88	2.44	2.88	3.33	1.95
Validity	2.41	2.88	3.21	3.85	1.36
Cost	3.26	3.53	4.29	4.24	2.58

Table 14

Descriptive Statistics of Perceived Characteristics of Selection Procedures in Swiss and South African Samples

	South Africa (N = 62)		Switzerland (N = 506)	
Variable	M	SD	M	SD
1. Diffusion	3.58	0.55	2.87	0.82
2. Legality	3.47	0.59	4.15	0.85
3. Applicant Reactions	3.34	0.44	3.22	0.85
4. Organisational Self-Promotion	3.17	0.65	2.73	0.94
5. Predictive Validity	3.10	0.58	3.15	0.80
6. Costs	3.35	0.57	3.37	0.89

Note. Adapted from "Reasons for being selective when choosing personnel selection procedures", by König, C. J., Klehe, U.-C., Berchtold, M., & Kleinmann, M., 2010, *International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 18*(1), p. 23

Correlation Analysis

A bivariate correlation analysis was used to explore the relationships between tool characteristics. In König et al.'s (2010) study, they created a 'use vs. non-use' variable by averaging participants' dichotomous responses (1 = would use, 0 = would not use) for each

selection procedure, which allowed them to examine correlations between this average use score and the perceived characteristics of each procedure. This analysis was conducted at the procedure level, examining how different characteristics of selection procedures relate to each other and to overall usage preferences.

In the current study, a similar approach was initially attempted. Participants selected procedures they preferred and did not prefer (0 = Not preferred, 1 = Preferred). An average preference score was calculated for each selection procedure across all participants. However, when checking statistical assumptions for the correlation analysis, the preference variable violated assumptions of normality and linearity required for parametric correlation analysis. Consequently, the correlation analysis was conducted only among the procedure characteristic variables (excluding the preference variable), examining relationships between perceived characteristics at the procedure level. Mean scores for each characteristic were computed by averaging ratings across all participants for each procedure, and standard deviations were calculated based on these procedure-level means. Spearman's rho (r_s) was used as the correlation coefficient due to its robustness with small sample sizes and when data exhibit slight violations of normality assumptions (Field, 2018). The results of the correlation analysis can be seen in Table 15, with the means and standard deviations of each selection tool characteristic.

Table 15

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Perceived Characteristics of Selection Procedures and Preference

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Diffusion	3.58	0.55					
2. Legality	3.47	0.59	-.091				
3. Applicant Reactions	3.34	0.44	.308*	.124			
4. Organisational Self-Promotion	3.17	0.65	.236	.240	.465**		
5. Predictive Validity	3.10	0.58	.148	.155	.325**	.430**	
6. Costs	3.35	0.57	.087	-.272*	-.031	.110	.334**

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. $N = 62$

None of the correlation coefficients reported above indicate particularly strong relationships, which would require r_s to be greater than .5 or lesser than -.5 (Field, 2018). The table above shows that perceptions of a tool as inducing positive applicant reactions has a

weak but significant positive relationship with perceptions of the tool's diffusion in a field, r_s = .308, 95% BCa CI [.042, .545], p = .015. Additionally, Applicant Reactions were significantly positively related to both Organisational Self-Promotion, r_s = .465, 95% BCa CI [.217, .647], p < .001, and Predictive Validity, r_s = .325, 95% BCa CI [.052, .539], p = .010. This indicates that as tools are perceived to induce more positive applicant reactions, they are also perceived to be more diffused in the field, to allow for the organisation to better promote itself through the tool, and to be more valid. Further significantly positive relationships were found between Predictive Validity and Costs, r_s = .334, 95% BCa CI [.059, .575], p = .008, as well as Organisational Self-Promotion, r_s = .430, 95% BCa CI [.176, .640], p < .001. These relationships suggest that as a tool is perceived as having more predictive validity, it is also perceived as incurring higher costs and as allowing for more opportunities to promote the organisation. Lastly, there was a significant negative relationship between perceptions of Costs and Legality, indicating that selection tools are perceived as being less costly as perceptions of their legal defensibility increase, r_s = -.272, 95% BCa CI [-.510, .001], p = .032. However, as this confidence interval contains zero, it suggests that the coefficient may not accurately reflect the association between the variables and that there is insufficient evidence to conclude that this relationship is indeed significant (Field, 2018).

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study investigated current personnel selection practices among HR professionals in South Africa, examining both the prevalence of different selection procedures and the factors influencing their adoption or rejection. This chapter is structured into three main sections. First, it examines the current landscape of selection procedures in South Africa, analysing which methods are most employed. Second, it explores the underlying factors that influence HR professionals' preferences for selection procedures. Finally, it outlines the study's contributions to the field and provides recommendations for future research.

This discussion should be contextualised within the specifics of the participant sample of this study. Firstly, the demographic data collected indicated that most of the sample was White (69.4%) and female (72.6%), which, while not representative of the South African population, is representative of the population of registered psychology professionals within South Africa (HPCSA, 2017). While this study did not seek out only psychologists, the majority of the sample consisted of HR practitioners registered with the HPCSA (59.7%) and are thus likely to be practising as Industrial/Organisational Psychologists or Psychometrists. Secondly, one of this study's aims was to understand HR professionals' perceptions and practices. The designation ‘HR Professional’ was used to incorporate more diverse views than in previous studies in this field, where the majority of participants were either highly educated, registered Industrial/Organisational Psychologists, HR Managers or HR Executives (König et al., 2010; Lawler & Benson, 2022; Risavy et al., 2021). Based on the occupational and demographic data collected, this was not achieved where 87% of participants had Post-Graduate Degrees. Additionally, HR Executives, Directors, Managers, and Leads were represented in the sample at a cumulative percentage of 59.7%. These occupational characteristics of the sample indicate that this group is more likely to have specialised knowledge of personnel selection procedures, which might not necessarily reflect the preferences and opinions of more generalist HR professionals.

Selection Procedure Usage

RQ 1 sought to understand which selection procedures are currently in use by South African HR professionals and how these compare to previous trends observed in North American samples. Overall, the South African sample displayed markedly higher selection procedure usage rates than those found in previous samples. This was underscored by higher overall usage of psychometric assessments in particular.

Current Selection Practices in South Africa

South African organisations predominantly rely on traditional psychometric assessments and structured interviews for personnel selection. This study found that personality (85.5%) and GMA tests (66.1%) are the most frequently used psychometric tools, whilst résumé analysis is nearly universal (95.2%). Structured (74.2%) and semi-structured (62.9%) interviews are also widely employed, alongside a high use of ACs (43.5%). These findings align with previous South African studies documenting the prevalence of cognitive ability and personality testing, as well as the use of ACs, in selection processes (Krause et al., 2011; PAI, 2017; Puchert et al., 2022). However, the high usage of structured interview formats is a departure from earlier research that suggested lower structure was the norm (Lievens & De Paepe, 2004).

The alignment between current selection practices and research-based recommendations varies across selection methods. Meta-analytic evidence identifies structured interviews, job knowledge tests, biodata, work sample tests, and cognitive ability tests as the strongest predictors of job performance (Sackett et al., 2022). While the widespread adoption of structured interviews in this sample aligns with these recommendations, the extensive use of personality testing appears to contradict research evidence, given their mixed empirical results and ongoing predictive validity debates (Fisher et al., 2017; Judge & Zapata, 2015; Morgeson et al., 2007).

The historical context of psychometric testing in South Africa should influence current selection practices, yet organisations continue to widely employ these methods. Despite the documented misuse of psychological assessments during Apartheid to validate discriminatory practices (Laher & Cockroft, 2014), both personality and GMA testing remain prevalent. These findings suggest that practitioners who favour these approaches perceive them positively across multiple dimensions, including their widespread diffusion in the field, legal defensibility, and predictive validity. Further, these tools are viewed as effective vehicles for organisational self-promotion (see Figure 6), indicating that practical considerations may outweigh historical context.

In terms of technological innovation, South African organisations demonstrate a preference for traditional selection methods over emerging technologies. The data from this study reveals limited adoption of newer solutions, such as asynchronous video interviews (22.6%), gamified assessments (19.4%), and natural language processing tools (8.1%). This conservative approach to technology adoption likely reflects multiple factors, including the emerging nature of these technologies (Dunlop et al., 2022), stringent legal requirements for

validity and reliability, and concerns about digital access and equity in the South African labour market.

The overall pattern of selection procedure usage illustrates how evidence-based practice and institutional factors shape practice trends. While some alignment with research recommendations exists, the strong preference for specific methods suggests that selection decisions are influenced by factors beyond predictive validity alone. This pattern can be understood through institutional theory, which suggests that organisations adopt certain practices to uphold their legitimacy and stability. This theoretical framework helps explain why specific tools persist despite validity concerns or historical context, particularly in countries with unique historical and regulatory landscapes like South Africa.

South African Selection Practice Trends in Comparison

South African organisations demonstrate markedly higher adoption rates of selection procedures compared to their international counterparts. This sample indicated consistently higher utilisation of selection procedures compared to North American samples (Risavy et al., 2019), across multiple methods, including résumés/CVs/cover letters, biodata, GMA tests, personality tests, and EI tests (see Table 6). This pattern of increased usage continues when compared with European samples (Diekmann & König, 2015; König et al., 2010), especially in the use of GMA, personality, EI, and integrity tests, as well as ACs (see Figure 8).

This high adoption rate exists within a uniquely stringent regulatory framework. The HPCSA mandates that only registered psychologists may administer, score, and interpret tests (HPCSA, 2021). It also requires demonstrated scientific validity, reliability, fairness, and absence of bias before test usage, a requirement unique to South African labour legislation (Myors et al., 2008). Despite these substantial regulatory demands and associated costs, South African organisations maintain higher utilisation rates than observed internationally.

This high usage of selection procedures might be partially explained by South Africa's comprehensive worker protection laws, which contrast sharply with systems like the United States' 'at-will' employment model (USA.gov, 2023). Under 'at-will' employment, either party can terminate the employment relationship for any non-illegal reason at any time, creating different hiring incentives. As such, American organisations might prefer direct performance assessment through employment rather than extensive pre-employment screening, given their lower termination costs. However, South Africa's increased usage of selection procedures extends beyond this US comparison, consistently exceeding usage rates in Canada, Switzerland, and Germany (König et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2019). Interestingly, research indicates that South Africa's labour market is neither over-regulated nor under-regulated in

comparison to both middle-income countries and global norms (Benjamin et al., 2010). While stronger worker protection might contribute to South African organisations' emphasis on thorough selection procedures, as the difficulty of dismissal encourages more careful initial screening, it appears this factor alone cannot fully explain the higher usage rates.

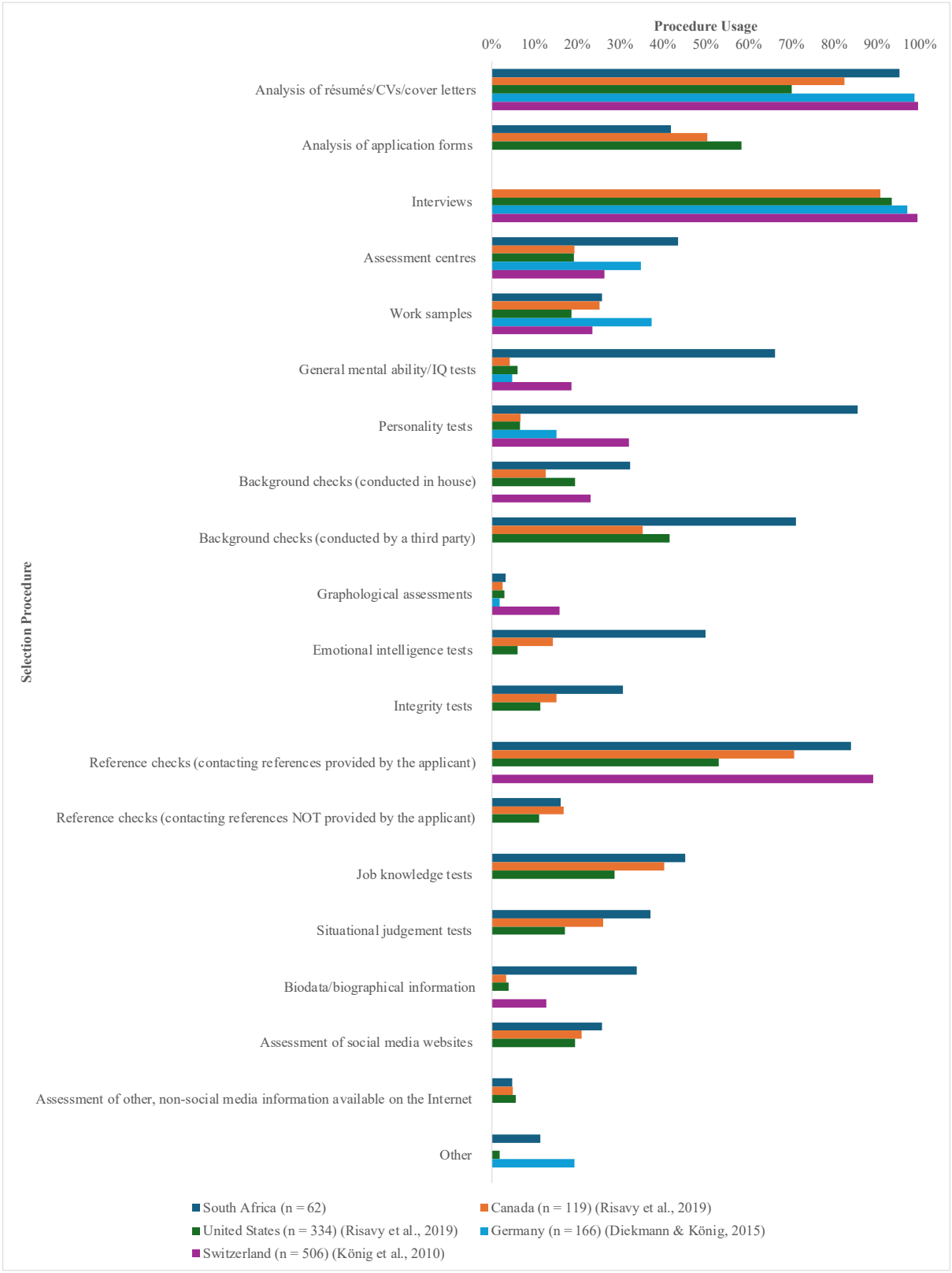
This suggests that the increased use of selection procedures in South Africa is not necessarily due to differences in employment legislation or worker protection but might be related to factors outlined by institutional theory. Institutional theory argues that decisions around selection procedure adoption can be influenced by organisational drives to maintain legitimacy and stability based on perceived characteristics of the procedure. South African means for both Diffusion and Organisational Self-Promotion are higher than the Swiss means reported in previous studies (König et al., 2010; Table 14), indicating that selection tests were perceived as more widely adopted and more valuable for organisational promotion. This contrasts with the Canadian Tech sector, where HR practitioners did not refer to diffusion as a factor in selection choices (Risavy et al., 2021).

In South Africa, diffusion of a selection procedure, therefore, appears as a particular determinant in selection procedure adoption. When selection procedures are perceived as widely diffused, organisations may implement them to establish and maintain legitimacy within their field. Additionally, the heightened perception of selection procedures as tools for organisational self-promotion in South Africa may further drive increased utilisation. This suggests that the extensive use of selection procedures in South Africa may be better understood through institutional theory rather than through legislative frameworks alone.

This institutional perspective raises important considerations about evidence-based practice. This research found that 88.7% of respondents can influence their organisation's selection decisions, yet many employ practices with limited empirical support. For instance, the widespread use of personality tests (85.5%) continues despite low to moderate validity estimates (Sackett et al., 2022). While personality tests might offer insights into a candidate’s behavioural competencies and preferences, their application should be contextualised in the changing world of workplace dynamics and demographics. The increasing emphasis on neuroinclusive hiring practices highlights the potential limitations of personality tests (Hartman & Hartman, 2024). Research indicates that neuroatypical candidates present with more extreme personality traits on personality tests (SHL, 2023), raising concerns about potential inadvertent discrimination when used for screening. The persistence of such methods demonstrates how institutional pressures can sometimes override evidence-based considerations in selection procedure adoption.

Figure 8

Selection Procedures Being Used in Employee Selection in South Africa, Canada, the United States, Germany and Switzerland



Factors Influencing Selection Procedure Preferences

South African HR professionals' preferences for selection procedures are primarily driven by perceived legality, diffusion, and positive applicant reactions. This is closely aligned to reasons for non-preference, primarily driven by perceived legality, diffusion, and associated high costs. Results show that personality tests (64.5%) and semi-structured interviews were the most preferred methods, while social media assessment was largely rejected despite being used by 25.8% of organisations. These preferences closely mirror actual usage patterns, with personality tests (85.5%) being the most widely implemented procedure.

International comparisons reveal distinct patterns in selection procedure preferences across different national contexts. In Switzerland, practitioners prioritise applicant reactions, costs, and method diffusion (König et al., 2010), whilst Canadian practitioners emphasise organisational culture fit and efficiency (Risavy et al., 2021). The Canadian focus on cultural fit parallels organisational self-promotion, as both involve communicating organisational values to candidates. Efficiency is most related to time costs, as the focus of this factor is on creating time efficiency. South African practitioners demonstrate preferences most closely aligned with their Swiss counterparts, prioritising method diffusion and legality, followed by applicant reactions and costs. The key distinction lies in South African practitioners' heightened emphasis on legal considerations, a pattern König et al. (2010) anticipated given South Africa's distinctive regulatory environment. Interestingly, whilst König et al. (2010) predicted similar legal emphasis in Canada, subsequent research by Risavy et al. (2021) did not support this prediction. Cost considerations emerge as a universal factor across all three contexts, though manifesting differently wherein Canadian practitioners focus specifically on efficiency and time costs, whilst Swiss and South African practitioners consider costs more broadly alongside other primary factors.

Correlation analyses further contextualise the relationships between these key factors, though it should be noted that none of the relationships reached the threshold for strong correlations (Field, 2018). The data demonstrate several significant moderate associations, namely that the perceptions of positive applicant reactions correlate with tool diffusion, organisational self-promotion, and predictive validity. These relationships suggest that tools perceived as eliciting positive applicant reactions are also viewed as more widely diffused, more effective for organisational promotion, and more valid. Additional correlational patterns emerge between predictive validity and other factors, with moderate positive relationships observed with both costs and organisational self-promotion. These associations indicate that

tools perceived as more predictively valid are also viewed as more costly and more effective for organisational promotion. A weak negative relationship between perceived costs and legality suggests that tools perceived as more legally defensible are viewed as less costly. This relationship may reflect participants' consideration of long-term costs, where legally sound procedures are seen as reducing potential regulatory risks, or it may indicate that established, legally compliant procedures are perceived as more cost-effective to implement than novel or less standardised alternatives.

These patterns of preference and adoption appear to be primarily shaped by South Africa's stringent legal framework, which exerts greater influence on selection practices than in other contexts (Myors et al., 2008). As such, legal considerations serve as both a driver and a barrier to adoption. The high utilisation rates of selection procedures in South Africa, compared to other countries, is supported by findings that diffusion is a key consideration affecting the choice to use a certain procedure. This can be understood through institutional theory, whereby organisations adopt widely diffused selection tools to maintain legitimacy within their institutional environment.

The findings further highlight the pragmatic considerations underlying practitioners' selection decisions. The emphasis on eliciting favourable candidate reactions reflects their recognised influence on job offer acceptance rates (McCarthy et al., 2018), a relationship supported by the correlational data linking applicant reactions to both organisational self-promotion and tool diffusion. The correlation between predictive validity and costs underscores the necessity for selection procedures to demonstrate return on investment while maintaining organisational viability.

While predictive validity emerges as moderately correlated with several key factors, it appears to be a secondary consideration in procedure selection, despite its intrinsic connection to legal defensibility within the South African context, where psychometric assessments must demonstrate predictive validity for legal compliance (Myors et al, 2008). This presents a contradiction, as legal defensibility is prioritised over the predictive validity that underpins it. As such, this could potentially signify a divergence between research and practice. Practitioners appear to prioritise immediate practical concerns over the theoretical emphasis on predictive validity, despite the latter's fundamental importance to selection efficacy. This disparity suggests a potential misalignment between academic research priorities and practitioner concerns, wherein operational considerations potentially overshadow the theoretical foundations of effective selection practices.

Semi-Structured Interview Preference

Semi-structured interviews were preferred primarily due to their perceived strengths in applicant reactions and organisational self-promotion opportunities. These perceptions align with research confirming interviews' favourability among applicants (Anderson et al., 2010; Risavy et al., 2019; Ryan & Ployhart, 2014) and their effectiveness for organisational promotion (Lievens & De Paepe, 2004).

Further, the preference for semi-structured interviews presents a contradiction wherein practitioners maintain their preference for them despite acknowledging their relatively low legal defensibility. This preference exists alongside a higher usage of structured interviews (74.2%) compared to semi-structured formats (62.9%), where structured approaches offer superior predictive validity and legal defensibility (Lievens & De Paepe, 2004). Given that legal defensibility emerged as a primary criterion for selection procedure choice in this sample, this may explain both the higher adoption of structured formats and practitioners' awareness of semi-structured interviews' legal limitations. Those who oppose semi-structured interviews predominantly emphasise validity concerns, potentially indicating a preference for more structured approaches.

General Mental Ability Test Preference

GMA tests, preferred by 38.7% of practitioners, are preferred primarily due to perceived legality and validity. Practitioners additionally noted their cost-effectiveness, as the data indicate they are perceived as least expensive among preferred procedures. This aligns with previous research confirming their relatively low implementation costs (Visser & Schaap, 2017). While GMA and cognitively-based assessments are reasonably predictively valid, they are less so than several other selection procedures (Sackett et al., 2022). There exists a widespread belief regarding the predictive superiority of GMA tests, potentially overshadowing the utility of alternative selection methods (Nye et al., 2022). Despite this not being supported by research, it is thus plausible that this is the view that most practitioners would have. Due to the legislative requirements for a test to have demonstrated scientific reliability and validity before it can be used (Myors et al., 2008), it would follow that a procedure perceived as highly valid would be perceived as highly legally defensible.

GMA tests were additionally perceived as eliciting the least positive applicant reactions by both those preferring and preferring not to use them. In general, negative applicant reactions are more associated with personality than GMA tests as they are perceived to be less face valid (Visser & Schaap, 2017). However, GMA tests are generally more time and energy-intensive, which might lead to them being perceived as less favourable

to applicants. Participants preferring not to use this procedure did not regard GMA tests as being useful in allowing the organisation to promote itself, potentially related to the perception of these tests as being less likely to elicit positive applicant reactions.

Personality Test Preference

Personality tests stand out as the most extensively implemented selection procedure, with 85.5% of organisations reporting their use and 64.5% of practitioners indicating preference. Their perceived diffusion exceeds all preferred procedures except GMA testing, supporting the institutional theory assertion that higher perceived diffusion increases adoption likelihood through enhanced organisational legitimacy (Klehe, 2004).

However, by those preferring not to use personality tests, the procedure was perceived as having little legal defensibility and as incurring high costs. The perception of the tool as not being legally defensible might be linked to research finding variable support for the predictive validity of personality tests (Morris et al., 2015; Sackett et al., 2022). In terms of the tool incurring high costs, this may be a result of this group perceiving personality tests as difficult to justify legally. Alternatively, it could be related to the time taken to administer and score or the costs involved. The persistence of personality tests despite these criticisms suggests that institutional diffusion may override practitioner reservations, forcing usage even when preferences differ.

Assessment Centre Preference

ACs emerge as a particularly divisive selection tool, generating nearly equal support and opposition among practitioners. Those preferring to use ACs emphasise their high validity while acknowledging substantial costs, whereas critics primarily focus on the cost burden. These perceptions partially align with research confirming ACs' high time and financial demands, though their validity is not necessarily superior to structured interviews or GMA tests (Sackett et al., 2017b; Sackett et al., 2022). Further, as a preferred procedure, ACs were the least likely to be perceived as a useful tool in allowing for the organisation to promote itself. The time intensiveness and difficulty in administering this procedure might result in the poor applicant reactions associated with ACs.

ACs maintain relatively high usage rates in South Africa compared to Canadian and North American samples, suggesting contextual cultural or institutional factors. Among non-preferred procedures, ACs were the only procedure to retain perceptions of legal defensibility and predictive validity. Alongside significantly higher usage rates, this might reflect their sustained professional regard in South African practice (Krause et al., 2011).

Assessment of Social Media Preference

Social media assessment presents the starkest contrast between organisational practice and practitioner preference. With only 4.8% of practitioners supporting its use despite a 25.8% organisational adoption rate, this tool highlights the potential tension between institutional pressures and professional judgement. Practitioners consistently rate it poorly across multiple dimensions, including diffusion, legal defensibility, applicant reactions, and organisational promotion opportunities. These perceived characteristics are supported by previous research findings (Iddekinge et al., 2016; Roulin & Levashina, 2019). This procedure was, however, perceived to incur the lowest costs, which is also supported by previous research (Iddekinge et al., 2016; Roulin & Levashina, 2019).

The gap between preference and usage suggests two possible explanations. Firstly, organisational pressures may mandate these assessments despite practitioner reservations. Alternatively, social media checking might serve as a supplementary screening mechanism, particularly for verifying résumé information against LinkedIn profiles (Roulin & Levashina, 2019), explaining its higher usage despite low preference.

Understanding Selection Procedures in South Africa

This research has demonstrated the complexity of the personnel selection landscape in South Africa, characterised by distinctively high adoption rates of psychometric assessments compared to international counterparts, as well as higher selection procedure usage in general. The findings highlight how, although South African organisations operate within one of the most stringent regulatory frameworks for psychometric testing globally, they maintain higher utilisation rates of these tools than countries with less restrictive environments.

This pattern of selection procedure preferences and adoption cannot be explained by regulatory requirements alone. Rather, it reflects the ways in which institutional pressures, practical considerations, and professional judgement interact. The high emphasis on method diffusion and legal defensibility, alongside considerations of applicant reactions and costs, suggests that South African HR practitioners navigate a complex decision-making landscape where institutional legitimacy often takes precedence over evidence-based practice. While talent shortages might have been expected to drive greater emphasis on evidence-based practices, the findings suggest an alternative interpretation. Organisations may view institutional legitimacy and stability as competitive advantages in attracting scarce talent, leading them to prioritise widely accepted practices over those with stronger empirical support.

This can be demonstrated in the widespread adoption of personality tests (85.5%) despite their contested predictive validity. Similarly, the significant gap between practitioner preference and organisational adoption of social media assessments (4.8% versus 25.8%) highlights how institutional pressures can override professional judgement. These patterns align with institutional theory's assertion that organisations adopt practices primarily to maintain legitimacy within their operational environment. Additionally, the apparent contradiction between practitioners' emphasis on legal defensibility and their relative de-prioritisation of predictive validity, despite the latter being a legal requirement for psychometric assessments in South Africa, suggests a potential misalignment between regulatory intentions and practical implementation, where compliance might be approached more as a legitimacy-seeking exercise than a genuine pursuit of predictive accuracy.

These findings have significant implications for both research and practice. They highlight the need for greater alignment between academic evidence, regulatory requirements, and practical implementation in selection procedures. Future research might explore how to bridge the gap between predictive validity requirements and practical considerations, particularly in contexts where institutional pressures significantly influence selection practices. Additionally, the high adoption rates of traditional methods alongside limited uptake of newer technologies suggest a need to better understand how innovation in selection practices can be effectively introduced within highly regulated environments. Ultimately, this research contributes to our understanding of how selection practices are shaped by the interaction between institutional forces, regulatory requirements, and practical considerations, particularly in contexts with distinctive regulatory landscapes like South Africa.

Contribution of This Study

The South African context presents a unique landscape for selection procedure research due to its highly regulated assessment environment combined with extensive usage rates. Prior to this study, research examining selection procedures in South Africa has been limited, with no previous explorations into the motivations behind selection procedure choice preferences. This knowledge gap is particularly significant given South Africa's distinctive regulatory framework, the diffusion of psychometric assessments throughout industries, and increasing emphasis on evidence-based HR practices. This research contributes valuable insights in two key areas: theoretical development of selection procedure choice models, and comparative analysis of international selection practices. By establishing current usage patterns and decision-making factors in the South African context, this research provides a

crucial baseline for understanding how selection practices evolve in regulated environments and how organisations utilise imitation as a means of legitimisation in selection procedure choices.

Contribution to Theory

This research offers several important theoretical contributions to the understanding of selection procedure adoption. This thesis employed institutional theory as a theoretical foundation, which proposes that selection procedures are chosen based on their perceived diffusion, legal compliance, applicant appeal, cost-effectiveness, value for organisational promotion, and validity. These dimensions serve to communicate the organisation's legitimacy and stability to the applicant. Although unable to employ direct hypothesis testing, the results of this study provided support for these choice factors in the South African context. For example, the two most highly used psychometric assessment types, personality and GMA testing, were perceived as being the most diffused and legally defensible for those preferring to use them. The relationship between perceived diffusion and actual usage provides new insights into how selection practices become institutionalised and potentially resistant to change, even in the face of contrary evidence. Further, high temporal and financial costs associated with a procedure were most related to the choice not to use it. This suggests that institutional factors may play a more significant role in selection procedure choices than the inherent characteristics of a particular tool.

Of note is the finding that practitioners' perceptions of a tool's predictive validity appear secondary to other factors in selection tool choices. This challenges traditional assumptions about evidence-based practice adoption and suggests a more complex decision-making framework. It is often lamented in research-practice gap literature the disregard held by practitioners for making selection procedure choices not based on a procedure's predictive validity (König et al., 2010; Negt & Haunschild, 2024; Prochazka et al., 2022). Throughout the literature this is often attributed to knowledge transfer issues, or simply non-interest from practitioners. An alternative analysis is that practitioners do consider predictive validity, but institutional factors relegate it to a secondary factor, when attracting a candidate amid talent shortages becomes a priority.

Practical Implications

This study highlighted several significant implications for selection procedure tools in South Africa. For example, the persistence of practice 'myths', such as the overemphasis on GMA tests' predictive validity, and the reliance on perceived diffusion of a tool as a justification for preference, indicate that choices favouring specific procedures can be made

on the basis of faulty perceptions. The tendency to use certain procedures primarily because they are widely used in the industry creates a potentially problematic circular logic: tools are adopted because they are common, which in turn makes them more common. This self-reinforcing cycle may perpetuate the use of suboptimal selection procedures while creating barriers to the adoption of more effective alternatives. Organisations should be encouraged to base their selection procedure choices on empirical evidence of effectiveness, job-relevance, and organisational fit rather than industry prevalence or legislative popularity.

Further, the findings suggest the presence of institutional pressures that may lead to suboptimal selection practices. This is particularly evident in cases where practitioners reported using procedures they would prefer not to use, such as social media assessments. The disconnect between preference and practice raises important questions about organisational decision-making processes and the potential need for more evidence-based and autonomous selection strategy development. A key suggestion here is often to enhance or create knowledge-sharing channels between researchers and practitioners.

The growing popularity of the European Work and Organisational Psychology in Practice journal demonstrates that there is a felt need for increasing the accessibility of research and better integrating practice in research. Articles in this journal discuss practice pitfalls in a conversational and understandable tone while remaining peer-reviewed and reputable. Despite the relative health of Organisational Psychology practice in South Africa, the research field is dominated by the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology and South African Journal of Human Resource Management, which, as discussed earlier, are most driven by theory validation research (Pietersen, 2018). As such, creating spaces for practitioners to publish could be integral in addressing the research-practice gap in South Africa and in creating opportunities to share knowledge.

Additionally, despite psychometric assessments being so diffused in the South African context, there is no efficient system for practitioners to investigate the reputability of different assessments. For example, if considering using an assessment, the individual practitioner will need to analyse test manuals and conduct research about the efficacy of an assessment. This is further complicated when considering that testing companies are for-profit, and more diffused tests have a larger online presence which does not always correlate with reputability. A singular practitioner-powered database, consisting of reviews of assessments, accessible test manuals, and comparisons to similar tools could make a notable mark in empowering practitioners to make psychometrically savvy decisions. This would also

provide researchers with the data to better understand practitioners and to focus their efforts more strategically.

Beyond creating knowledge-sharing platforms, there is a critical need to enhance the education of both emerging and current Industrial and Organisational Psychologists as well as HR practitioners regarding selection procedure choice and application. Current educational curricula may not adequately prepare practitioners to critically evaluate selection tools beyond basic psychometric principles. Professional development programmes should emphasise evidence-based decision-making frameworks that assist in systematically evaluating selection procedures based on validity evidence, job relevance, fairness considerations, and cost-effectiveness rather than relying on industry popularity or familiarity. For emerging practitioners, university programmes could benefit from incorporating more practical decision-making scenarios and case studies that demonstrate the complexities of selection procedure choice in real organisational contexts. This could include training on how to critically evaluate test publishers' claims, interpret technical manuals, and navigate the tension between theoretical best practices and practical constraints.

These findings highlight the need for a more nuanced approach to selection procedure implementation, one that considers both the empirical evidence and the practical constraints faced by organisations. Future initiatives should focus on bridging the research-practice gap while acknowledging the complex regulatory and institutional environment in which South African organisations operate.

Recommendations for Future Research

Limitations

This study encountered several methodological limitations that affect the interpretation and generalisability of findings. Critically, the final sample size proved insufficient due to unexpected data collection challenges. The survey link was compromised by automated bot responses, which initially created the impression of sufficient data collection. However, upon data cleaning, a substantial portion of responses had to be removed as they were identified as bot entries rather than legitimate participant responses. This resulted in a drastically reduced final sample size that fell below the power analysis requirements, forcing the adoption of alternative, less sophisticated analytical methods that limited the depth of insights possible.

Further, the sampling approach presented several fundamental issues beyond bot contamination. Most significantly, the study failed to implement adequate measures to

prevent multiple practitioners from the same organisation from participating, despite this being a key consideration in the original König et al. (2010) study. This oversight is particularly problematic given that the unit of analysis encompasses both HR practitioners as decision-makers and the organisations they represent. The research aimed to understand organisational selection practices and institutional pressures, not merely individual practitioner opinions, making organisational-level sampling controls essential.

Additionally, the sample composition may not adequately represent the target population of South African organisations. The high proportion of Industrial and Organisational Psychologists likely skewed results towards preferences for psychometric testing, as this group would be expected to favour such approaches due to their professional training.

The study design resulted in significant MNAR data, compromising analytical options and interpretation. The complex structure of asking participants to rate multiple procedures across preference categories created data dependencies that could not be adequately addressed with the available sample size. It would be recommended for future research to approach this topic with a design that does not result in MNAR data. For instance, instead of attempting to aggregate scales which target five different selection procedures across preference and non-preference, it might be more prudent to simply ask participants to describe in general what leads them to use or not use a procedure. This might be done through a different presentation of the scales presented in this table, or through a mixed methods approach. Regarding sample size, efforts might be made to further shorten the survey, therefore making it less tedious to complete. Alternatively, using a mixed methods approach might offset a smaller sample by allowing for rich data to be collected, thus negating the necessity of collecting a high quantity of data. Future studies should prioritise organisational-level sampling with controls to ensure only one respondent per organisation. There is a need to further understand this topic, with a larger and more diverse sample.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study's findings on selection procedure usage rates provide a valuable baseline for future research examining trends and changes in selection practices. Additionally, several key areas warrant further investigation. First, the perceptions of semi-structured in comparison to structured interviews merit deeper exploration to understand why practitioners view and utilise these formats differently. Secondly, future research would benefit from including applicant perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of selection tool preferences. Given the notably high usage rates of GMA and personality tests in South

African organisations, investigating both practitioner and applicant perceptions of these tools in particular could offer valuable insights into their widespread adoption. Collecting data from I/OPs or psychometrists on specific tests might also allow for further insight, where the reported validity of the test could be compared to the perceived validity. Additionally, the relationship between perceived legality, diffusion, and practitioner preferences deserves more detailed examination. Understanding whether practitioners favour specific tools primarily due to their perceived legality or diffusion, rather than their effectiveness, could provide crucial insights for improving selection practices. Such research could help bridge the gap between evidence-based recommendations and actual practice while informing more effective selection strategies.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire for Selection Procedure Usage

The following questions are related to your organisation's personnel selection procedure.

Please tick (✓) the box to indicate the personnel selection procedures currently in use by your organisation.

- ☐ Résumé, cover letter, or CV analysis
- ☐ Application form analysis
- ☐ Semi-structured interviews
- ☐ Structured interviews
- ☐ Assessment centres
- ☐ Work samples
- ☐ General mental ability tests
- ☐ Personality tests
- ☐ Background checks (conducted in-house)
- ☐ Background checks (conducted by a third party)
- ☐ Graphological assessments
- ☐ Emotional intelligence tests
- ☐ Integrity tests
- ☐ Reference checks (contacting references provided by applicant)
- ☐ Reference checks (contacting references **NOT** provided by applicant)
- ☐ Job-knowledge tests
- ☐ Situational judgement tests
- ☐ Biodata/biographical information
- ☐ Assessment of social media websites (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
- ☐ Assessment of other, non-social media information available on Internet
- ☐ Automated video interviews
- ☐ Gamified assessments
- ☐ Natural language processing
- ☐ Other (please specify)

  _____

Definitions

Résumé, cover letter, or CV analysis	Analysing a résumé, cover letter, or CV, to determine whether a candidate has the skills and experience related to performing a job.
Application form analysis	Analysing a candidate's answers on an application form provided to them by the organisation, in order to determine whether a candidate has the skills and experience related to performing a job.
Semi-structured interviews	Interview that uses an interview schedule to guide the conversation with the candidate. Candidates are asked open-ended questions, and have freedom in their choice of response.
Structured interviews	Interview that follows a defined interview schedule, specifying the content and order of questions. Candidates have a limited number of options to choose their responses from.
Assessment centres	A combination of multiple assessments techniques using simulation-based processes, wherein multiple assessors make judgements on the extent to which a candidate displays competencies required to perform a job.
Work samples	A simulation-based assessment wherein candidates are asked to perform the work tasks or activities that they would be required to perform on the job.
General mental ability tests	Tests consisting of verbal and non-verbal subtests providing an indication of general intelligence. E.g., General Reasoning Test Battery (GRT2), Cognitive and Potential Assessment (COPAS).
Personality tests	Tests that assess personality constructs, allowing for the identification of a candidate's personality traits that match a job's requirements and/or organisational culture. E.g., Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), 15FQ Plus, Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF).
Background checks (conducted in-house)	Validating a candidate's criminal record, education history, and employment history through channels within the organisation.
Background checks (conducted by a third party)	Validating a candidate's criminal record, education history, and employment history through channels external to the organisation.
Graphological assessments	Studies of handwriting style, where handwriting is seen as an expression of personality.
Emotional intelligence tests	Tests that assess a candidate's ability to be aware of, and understand, their own and others' emotions, and how they make use of this information to inform their behaviour. E.g., Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue), EQ-I 2.0.
Integrity tests	Tests that assess a candidate's tendency towards honest and trustworthy behaviours. E.g., GIOTTO Integrity Assessment, Integrity Profile 200 (IP 200), Work-related Risk and Integrity Scales (WRISc).

Reference checks (contacting references provided by candidate)	Contacting references provided by the candidate to validate their prior work history, or to attest to their character.
Reference checks (contacting references **NOT** provided by candidate)	Contacting references **NOT** provided by the candidate to validate their prior work history, or to attest to their character.
Job-knowledge tests	Tests assessing a candidate's knowledge of a certain area of expertise they would need to perform a job. E.g., an assessment asking a software engineering applicant to develop a web application.
Situational judgement tests	Tests that present a candidate with description of a hypothetical work situation, requiring the candidate to rank or choose the response that they feel addresses the situation most effectively.
Biodata/biographical information	Biodata are gathered from measuring a candidate's historical behaviour in order to predict their future behaviour. Test items are developed by analysing the type of behaviour that would be required for a job, and translating these into questions about candidates' prior behaviours.
Assessment of social media websites (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	Assessing candidates' social media presence to determine their suitability for a job.
Assessment of other, non-social media information available on Internet	Assessing information available online about a candidate, outside of social media, to determine their suitability for a job. E.g., a news article about a candidate.
Automated video interviews	Interviews that are conducted by providing a list of pre-set questions to candidates, which candidates video themselves answering, and then send to the relevant organisational stakeholder.
Gamified assessments	A psychometric assessment in the form of a game. Elements of game-play are included such as the ability to pass levels or collect badges, while assessing a certain skill needed to perform the job.
Natural language processing	Artificial Intelligence technology that is used to process and comprehend spoken or written word. This technology can be used for screening candidates or for analysing candidate data.

Appendix B: Questionnaire for Selection Procedure Preference Reasons

The following questions are related to your perception of why a certain selection procedure is in use by your organisation.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements by ticking (✓) the most appropriate response.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Many companies that work in the same field use this procedure					
This procedure is often used to select people					
This procedure is in conflict with legal requirements					
Using this procedure could have legal disadvantages if non-hired applicants complain					
Typically, applicants react positively towards this procedure					
This procedure is accepted by applicants					
An organisation can present itself favourably if it uses this procedure					
I can advertise the organisation if I use this procedure					

Applicants who perform well on this procedure will perform well on the job					
This procedure measures the skills necessary to perform well on the job					
Using this procedure results in high costs					
This procedure requires a great investment of time					

Appendix C: Questionnaire for Demographic Data

The following questions are related to your demographic data.

Please tick (✓) the appropriate box.

1. Are you an HR employee who is knowledgeable about your organisation's personnel selection procedures?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

2. Do you hold decision rights regarding your organisation's choice of personnel selection procedure?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

3. What is your age?
   - ☐ Prefer not to answer

4. What is your gender?
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Female
   - ☐ Gender non-conforming
   - ☐ Other (please specify)
   - ☐ Prefer not to answer

5. What is your race?
   - ☐ Black
   - ☐ Coloured
   - ☐ White
   - ☐ Indian
   - ☐ Asian
   - ☐ Other (please specify)
   - ☐ Prefer not to answer

6. What is your highest level of education?

- National Senior Certificate
- Diploma or Higher Certificate
- Bachelor's Degree, Advanced Diploma, or BTech
- Post Graduate Degree
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

7. How many people are in your organisation?

- 1 – 20
- 21 – 50
- 51 – 150
- 151 – 300
- 301+

8. What is your job role?

- Please specify
- Prefer not to answer

9. What is the typical role you assess for?

- Please specify

10. Do you hold an HPCSA accreditation?

- Yes
- No

Appendix D: Assumptions of Linearity and Normality

Figure 1. Normal P-P Plot of Diffusion in field

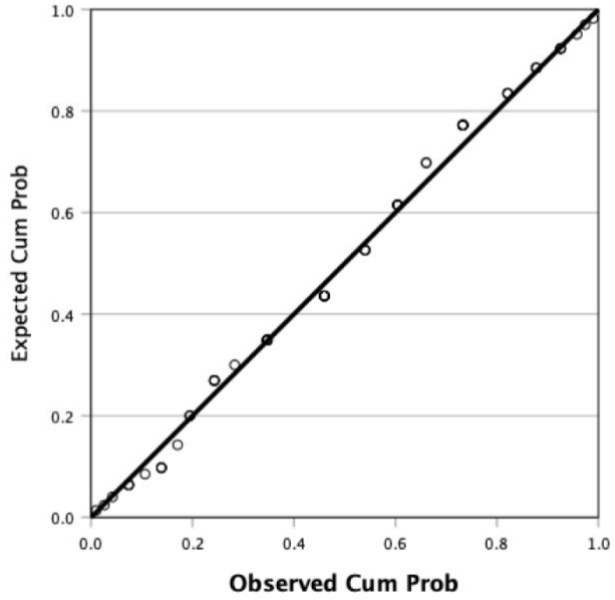

Figure 2. Normal P-P Plot of Legality

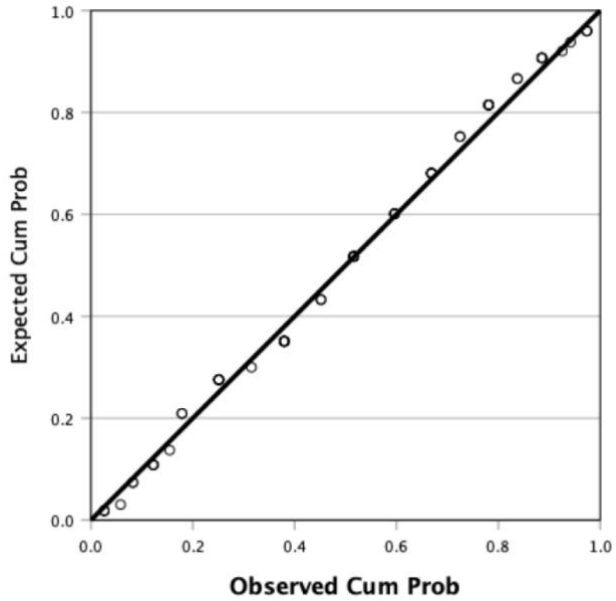

Figure 3. Normal P-P Plot of Applicant reactions

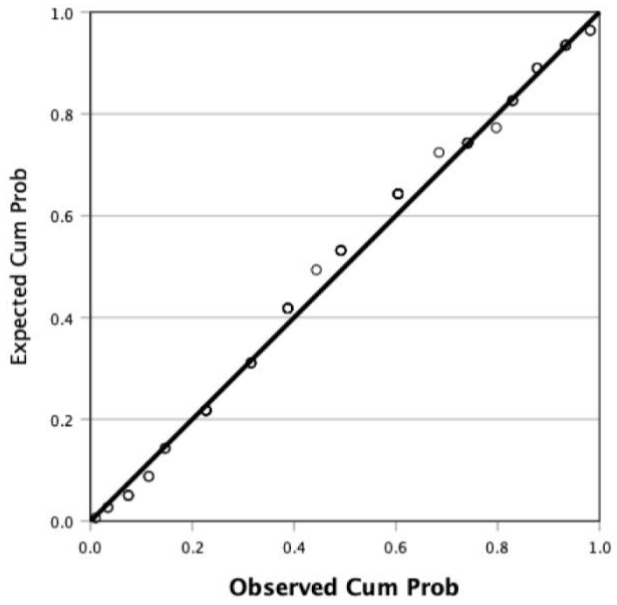

Figure 4. Normal P-P Plot of Organisational self-promotion

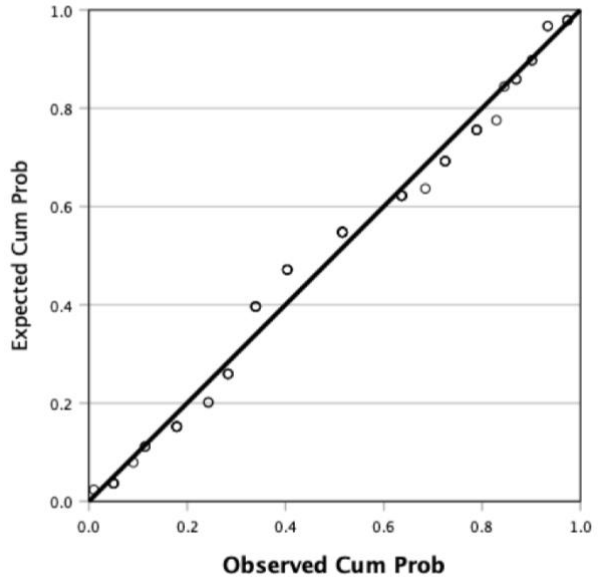

Figure 5. Normal P-P Plot of Validity

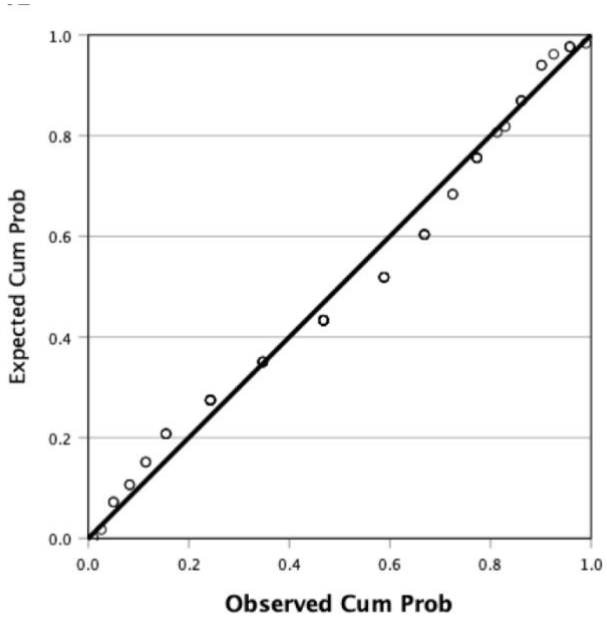

Figure 6. Normal P-P Plot of Cost

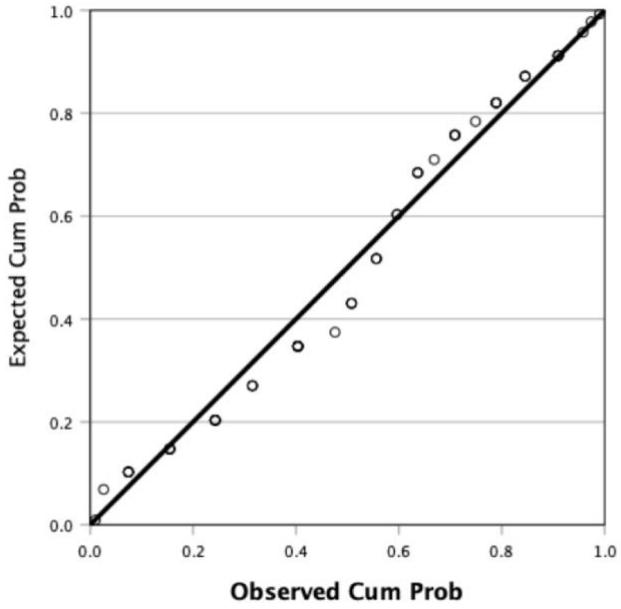

Table 13

Skewness, Kurtosis, and Standards Errors and Z-Scores of Skewness and Kurtosis of procedure characteristic variables

	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Skewness Z-score	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis	Kurtosis Z-score
Diffusion	-.101	.304	.331	.561	.599	-.936
Legality	-.183	.304	.602	.526	.599	-.878
Applicant Reactions	-.314	.304	.032	.380	.599	-.635
Self-Promotion	.032	.304	.105	.296	.599	-.495
Validity	.034	.304	.113	.670	.599	1.119
Cost	.221	.304	.726	.532	.599	-.887

Note. Z-scores were calculated by dividing estimates of skewness and kurtosis by their standard errors.

Figure 6. Scatterplot matrix of procedure characteristic variables