

Bergh, Z. & Theron, A.L. (Eds) (2003) *Psychology in a work context* (2nd Ed.). Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Reviewer: Nanette Tredoux, Psytech South Africa.

This book is an overview and introduction to Industrial and Organisational Psychology. It is a work of ambitious scope, and it is clear that the contributors have invested a great deal of thought and effort in the planning and execution of the book. The current version is the second edition, and it looks set to become one of those standard textbooks that are revised every few years to keep up with changing times. It is a handsome volume, produced to a high standard of editorial care, pleasingly laid out and organised well enough to be useful as an occasional reference source. An English-Afrikaans glossary, tables of contents for every chapter as well as for the entire book, a comprehensive index and extensive bibliography make it easy to retrieve the information relating to a particular topic. Every chapter ends with a conclusion summarising the gist of the material covered. Quality illustrations lighten the tone and help to bring some of the concepts to life. Learning outcomes and self-assessment exercises and questions for every chapter will be useful to the lecturer using the book as a source for a tutored course, and for the student studying by distance learning. If sold at the suggested retail price, the book represents good value compared to imported textbooks that cover similar ground.

Obviously some difficult decisions had to be made in order to reach a compromise between comprehensiveness and ease of understanding. Similarly, compromises have had to be made between presenting the subject as an international science and devoting sufficient attention to South African issues. Being an introductory text obviously intended to be used as a university textbook, it is potentially an enormously influential work. Many students who do only one or two of Industrial Psychology, could have their perception of Psychology as a science and profession profoundly influenced by what is included or left out of this book, and the way it is presented. While such students may never become Psychologists, they could nevertheless end up as managers with considerable decision making power. Without wishing to seem unduly critical of the choice of subject matter, a few points could be borne in mind for future revisions:

The historical overview of the growth of Industrial Psychology in South Africa could be expanded somewhat. The founding of the National Institute for Personnel Research is rightly mentioned as a landmark event in the development of the subject, but no mention is made of its demise and the effect that

might have. The reader is also left with the impression that the Human Sciences Research Council is still an organisation specialising in the development of assessment instruments, when that is no longer strictly true. The implications of the privatisation and commercialisation of Psychometrics research and development need to be given some exposure.

More attention should be given to delineating the activities that are reserved for Psychologists, Psychometrists and Registered Counsellors. In the interest of stimulating critical thinking and understanding, the book encourages speculation and 'armchair analysis' of case studies. This is important to help students gain insight into the subject matter, but as we all know, a little knowledge can be dangerous. Students should be made aware of the need to use properly qualified professionals for the reserved activities in a work situation.

The theory relating to personality in the workplace is well summarised and presented, and some attention is also given to measurement issues relating to personality. Much less attention is devoted to abilities, skills and the measurement of potential, and the problems of measuring these in South Africa. In a general introduction to the field, this should have been given more attention than the brief discussion of bias and fairness in the methodology chapter. I also missed a discussion of the methodology of job analysis and the importance of good criterion measurement.

Bearing in mind that the book will be used in South Africa where many students are at an educational disadvantage, one should consider the ways in which it may accommodate such students. Apart from the glossary which should be helpful to Afrikaans students, the book does not condescend to the student who may not be used to thinking in conceptual terms. Abstract concepts and technical terms come thick and fast, and the average student is likely to need a good dictionary to cope with the verbal content. The student is assisted by the organisation of the information, the highlighting of specific learning points, self-assessment aids to bring gaps in their knowledge to light, and a summary for each chapter. The student needs to come to the book with a well-developed command of English, a willingness to absorb a great deal of information, and an ability to grasp many new concepts quickly. The authors have done a great deal to make the information accessible, but they stop short of spoon-feeding the student. Thus the usefulness of the book is not limited to students. Anyone needing an overview of the field could benefit by it.