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Desiderata: towards indigenous models of vocational psychology

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Abstract As a result of a relative lack of cross-cultural validity in most current (Western) psychological models, indigenous models of psychology have recently become a popular approach for understanding behaviour in specific cultures. Such models would be valuable to vocational psychology research with culturally diverse populations. Problems facing current psychological models and methods of improving cultural validity are discussed. An integrative model of cross-cultural psychology is reviewed and the relevance of indigenous psychological methods to the advancement of vocational psychology is explained.

Résumé. Desiderata: vers des modèles indigènes de la psychologie de l'orientation. À la suite d'un manque relatif de validité trans-culturelle dans la plupart des modèles psychologiques actuels (Occidentaux), des modèles indigènes de la psychologie sont récemment devenus une approche populaire dans la compréhension du comportement de cultures spécifiques. Ces modèles seraient utiles à la recherche en orientation professionnelle avec des populations culturellement diverses. Les problèmes auxquels se heurtent actuellement les modèles psychologiques et des méthodes d'amélioration de la validité culturelle sont discutés. Un modèle intégratif de la psychologie interculturelle est examiné et la pertinence des méthodes psychologiques indigènes dans l'avancement de la psychologie de l'orientation est expliquée.

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Zusammenfassung. Desiderata: Hin zu indigenen Modellen der Berufspsychologie. Als ein Ergebnis eines relativen Mangels an interkultureller Gültigkeit der meisten aktuellen (westlichen) psychologischen Modelle wurden seit kurzem indigene Modelle der Psychologie ein beliebter Ansatz für das Verständnis von Verhalten in bestimmten Kulturen. Solche Modelle wären wertvoll für die Forschung der Berufspsychologie mit kulturell vielfältigen Populationen. Probleme von aktuellen psychologischen Modellen und Methoden zur Verbesserung der kulturellen Gültigkeit werden diskutiert. Ein integratives Modell der interkulturellen Psychologie wird beschrieben und die Relevanz der indigenen psychologischen Methoden zur Förderung der Berufspsychologie wird erklärt.

Resumen. Desiderata: Hacia Modelos Autóctnos en la Psicología Vocacional. Como resultado de una relativa falta de validez cros-cultural en la mayoría de los modelos psicológicos actuales (occidentales), los enfoques autóctonos han ganado en popularidad para entender el comportamiento en culturas específicas. Dichos modelos serían muy útiles para la investigación en psicología vocacional con poblaciones culturalmente diversas. En este artículo se analizan los problemas que afectan a los modelos psicológicos actuales y los métodos para merjorar la validez cultural. Se propone y revisa un modelo integrador de psicología cros-cultural y se explica la relevancia de los métodos psicológicos autóctonos, para el progreso de la psicología vocacional.

Keywords Indigenous · Cross-cultural · Cultural validity

Desiderata is Latin and can be translated to "one thing needful" or "that which is essential." The purpose of the current article is to inform the reader about the value of indigenous models of psychology for advancing the field of vocational psychology. The worthiness of indigenous models lies in their attempt to explain phenomena in their native cultural contexts. We will start by addressing the reasons why current models of psychology (both in general and with regard to vocational psychology in particular) may lack cultural validity. We will also discuss what we see as the positive and negative forces influencing the general cultural movement in psychology. Integrative and culturally accommodating models will be introduced to highlight the importance of considering culture in vocational psychology models. Furthermore, steps for creating such culturally accommodating models will be reviewed. Finally, indigenous models of psychology will be discussed with particular attention paid to their potential advantages relative to non-indigenous models. We then discuss the steps required to create indigenous models of psychology and review examples from the recent literature.

The importance of cultural validity in psychological models

In vocational psychology, personality models (commonly used in employee selection, see Barrick & Mount, 1991), environmental models (for example, those

describing the influence of organizational culture on employees, e.g., Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990), and person-by-environment models (often used in assessing organizational fit, e.g., O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991) have all been introduced and applied. Person-by-environment models currently constitute the dominant conceptualization of employee behaviour. Person-by-environment models suggest that a match between a person and his or her environment results in high job satisfaction and high performance; a mismatch results in low job satisfaction and low performance. This model has been criticized because both the culture of the person and the culture of the environment are ignored (Leong, 2002); it is suggested that the relationship between employees and important work outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction) would be better understood if the model accounted for cultural influences. Specifically, while it is currently assumed that vocational choice is a function of a person's general interests, abilities, and values, the decision could be more completely described by including factors specific to the person's culture (i.e., factors specific to the person's race, ethnicity, or nationality, such as collectivism in Asian populations), rather than assuming that all important predictors are global.

This neglect of culture represents a general lack of cultural validity and specificity in psychological assessment and intervention and may be to blame for major cultural gaps in psychological theory and research. *Cultural validity* (etic) is concerned with the validity of theories and models *across cultural groups* in terms of the construct, concurrent, and predictive validity of these models for culturally different individuals; *cultural specificity* (emic) is concerned with concepts, constructs, and models that are *specific to certain cultural groups* in terms of their roles in explaining and predicting behaviour. Because of the lack of attention given to cultural validity and specificity, career interventions in psychology are often applied as "imposed etic" models. An "imposed etic" model results when an assumption that is possibly culture-specific (emic) is treated as an etic and inappropriately applied to one or more other cultures (for a review of etic, emic, and imposed etic models, see Berry, 1989). Consequently, these "imposed etic" models, interventions, and assessment tools can be criticized as culturally inappropriate and sometimes culturally insensitive (Benet-Martinez, 2007).

An increased emphasis on cultural validity and specificity in psychology could be achieved in a number of ways. First, psychologists could develop more complete and inclusive theoretical models and formulations. Second, culture, race, and ethnicity data could be collected consistently and could be formally accepted as significant moderators of relationships between most variables. Third, researchers could identify both the boundaries of the cultural validity of Western models (in terms of generalizability to non-Western populations), and the cultural specificity of variables; this might provide significant and interesting improvements in incremental validity. Finally, psychologists could be educated about the differences between etic, emic, and "imposed etic" models in an effort to reduce the accidental use of the lattermost approach.

Issues with current models of vocational psychology

Why might new or different models of vocational psychology be desirable? Leong and Brown (1995) proposed four major limitations of (Western) models of

psychology. First, researchers have often sampled a restricted range of persons (i.e., White, middle-class). Second, models have been based usually on assumptions of limited scope (e.g., there is little room for between-group variance). Third, it appears that researchers have confused the definitions of race, ethnicity, and minority. Fourth, frequently the socio-political, economic, social-psychological, and socio-cultural realities of minority individuals have been either somewhat or entirely ignored. These limitations have compromised cultural validity and have led to the disconcerting realization that current psychological models may well be irrelevant for culturally diverse populations. As a result, over the last few decades, there has been a consistent call to develop and test new culturally relevant models of vocational psychology.

Prevailing and countervailing forces influencing the multicultural movement

In a chapter for the volume on the development of multiculturalism as a fourth force in psychology, Leong and Santiago-Rivera (1999) outlined the reasons for the slow progress in the development of multicultural models of counselling and psychotherapy. They extended Lewin's (1938, 1975) famous formulation of behaviour as a function of the interaction between a person and the environment (see Leong & Santiago-Rivera, 1999). Leong (2002) suggested that behaviour is an interaction between a person, the environment, the person's culture, and the primary (or dominant) culture in the person's environment. Whereas Lewin was primarily interested in an *individual's* personality and behaviour, Leong believed that his concepts could be readily applied to social movements as well, such as to the trend toward multiculturalism in psychology. Specifically, Leong suggested the need to avoid simple importation of Western models of career counselling to other cultures, and addressed prevailing and countervailing forces as challenges of career counselling in Asia.

With regard to the multiculturalism in psychology, Leong's (2002) *prevailing forces* push the movement forward, while *countervailing forces* limit its progress. These influences are inspired by Lewin's original *driving* and *restraining* forces, which Lewin suggested were inherent in any change that occurs (driving forces propel change; restraining forces inhibit change). Prevailing forces pushing the multicultural movement ahead may include globalization, migration, the popularity and spread of the internet, and culturally based political events that occur (e.g., 9/11). Countervailing forces fueling resistance to change may include ethnocentrism, the false consensus effect, psychological reactance, and the attraction–selection–attrition cycle. Because countervailing forces must be identified and understood before they can be overcome in a given context, each force will now be reviewed in turn.

The first countervailing force is *ethnocentrism*: The human tendency to use one's own culture as the standard for evaluating others. This tendency has been identified as a source of prejudice and racism (e.g., Perreault & Bourhis, 1999). A second force is the *false consensus effect*, or the seeing of one's own behaviour as typical. That is, each person tends to assume that any other person would react the same way

as he or she would, given the same circumstances. Another force inhibiting the growth of multiculturalism is *psychological reactance*, or the motivation to regain lost freedoms or to oppose threats to reduce freedoms. To the extent that changes in how we think about our work require giving up any established and familiar ways (i.e., monocultural versus multicultural), multiculturalism may serve as a threat to the freedom of "business as usual." Thus, the multiculturalism movement is likely to arouse psychological reactance. One final countervailing force is the *attraction-selection-attrition cycle*. According to Schneider (1987), organizations develop a particular culture or climate because they undergo a process of *attraction* of a certain type of employee (who wants to join the organization), *selection* of a certain type of employee (who has been admitted to the organization), and *attrition* of certain other types of employee (who have chosen to leave the organization). Through this process, Schneider (1987) argues, organizations develop a distinctive homogenous character based on the overall cluster of similar employees who work within it. In the movement towards indigenous models of psychology, some of these prevailing and countervailing forces will also likely be in play and may therefore need to be addressed.

The integrative and cultural accommodation models of cross-cultural psychology

Leong and his colleagues (Leong, 1996; Leong & Ow, 2003; Leong & Lee, 2006; Leong & Huang, 2008) have been developing a model of cross-cultural counselling and psychotherapy that is also applicable to career counselling. In their classic chapter, Kluckhohn and Murray (1950) first introduced the tripartite framework: "Every man is in certain respects: (a) like all other men, (b) like some other men, and (c) like no other man" (p. 35). Leong (1996) updated and translated this model for cross-cultural psychology, asserting that individuals simultaneously exist in three different dimensions, namely the Universal, the Group, and the Individual. The author proposed that cross-cultural psychologists need to attend to all three dimensions of human personality and identity in order to effectively assist culturally diverse clients. What is required then is a model that integrates all three dimensions and allows for dynamic and complex interactions across dimensions.

Many current psychological models, especially the dominant cross-cultural models, focus solely on *one* of the three dimensions (the Individual). By ignoring the relevance and importance of other influences that exist, we prevent ourselves from seeing the whole picture and from forming complete solutions. Therefore, an integrative model can lead to better outcomes by providing a more complete, complex, and accurate understanding of human behaviour. Also, it is pertinent to note that cross-cultural psychologists need to appropriately shift between dimensions as time goes on. With regard to cross-cultural psychotherapy, for example, Leong's (1996) Integrative Model assumes that all three dimensions (i.e., Individual, Group, Universal) are present in both the client and the psychotherapist, and that each dimension can serve as the most salient factor in the psychotherapy relationship at a different time, depending on the situation and stage of relationship

development. In vocational psychology, an integrative approach would suggest that employees constantly attend to themselves, their work teams, and their organization as a whole. Further, one dimension is most salient in certain situations. For example, an employee receiving individual performance feedback may think about the individual dimension most, while also making social comparisons with team mates (Group dimension), and considering external organizational rankings (Universal dimension).

As an extension of the Integrative Model, Leong and his colleagues (Leong & Ow, 2003; Leong & Lee, 2006; Leong & Huang, 2008) more recently has introduced the Cultural Accommodation Model (CAM). Its goal is not to abandon extant theories and models and make new ones; instead, the aim is to identify variables specific to each cultural group (defined by race, ethnicity, and nationality) that can be incorporated into assessment and formulation in order to improve the effectiveness and validity of current psychological interventions. The CAM asserts that the cultural validity of any psychological model must be examined before applying it to a cultural population different from the cultural population for which it was originally developed (Leong & Brown, 1995). Cultural validity must be evaluated in order to increase the effectiveness of cross-cultural extensions and applications of such models without limitation. For example, the many models being developed using White middle-class persons are only culturally valid for that specific population and may be subsequently *in*valid for cultural and racial/ethnic minorities in the United States, as well as populations in other countries.

However, while we know that not all theories are culturally valid for populations different from the dominant culture, we should not automatically conclude that all models are invalid. We must first carefully evaluate each model to determine its cultural validity for other populations before making any such conclusions. Indeed, given the Universal dimension of the Integrative Model, most theories will be at least partially relevant to all persons as long as they tap into at least one Universal element. Through careful analysis, "cultural gaps" can be identified which are missing components necessary for application to ethnically- and culturally-diverse groups. Therefore, the purpose of the CAM is to provide a more relevant, valid, and predictive paradigm for the personality and behaviour of culturally-diverse populations as compared with unaccommodating models.

The cultural accommodation approach involves a three-part process. First, identify the cultural gaps or "blind spots" in an existing theory that might restrict its cultural validity. Second, select current, culturally specific concepts and models from cross-cultural and ethnic minority psychology to fill in these gaps and increase the effective application to the group in question. Finally, test the culturally accommodating theory to determine if it has incremental validity beyond the culturally unaccommodating theory. If the test proves favourable, then the CAM model of the concept is worthy of further assessment and study.

Thus, the CAM model is essentially an incremental validity test whereby the universal or culture-generalized aspects of Western models are supplemented with culture-specific information. Once Western models of psychotherapy have been reviewed with regard to their cross-cultural validity and the degree of cultural loading, then culture-specific constructs must be identified in order to fill the gaps

(the second step in the cultural accommodation model, above). It is proposed that adding the culture-specific elements to Western models in order to accommodate for the cultural dynamics of racial and ethnic minority clients will produce a more effective and relevant approach to psychotherapy with these clients.

The question then becomes: Which variables should be used for the accommodation process? To address this question, an evidence-based practice (EBP) approach is proposed. As suggested by Cochrane (1979), practice should be guided by a critical summary of the best available scientific evidence. This suggestion is directly applicable for the selection of cultural variables for accommodation in the current model. Namely, a review of the scientific literature will reveal those culture-specific variables which have been systematically studied in culture-generalized ways. Those variables can then be studied with racial and ethnic minorities in the same population, or in other populations, to see whether the culture-specific models actually do generalize across cultures. For example, when working with Asian American clients, one might consider accommodating for culture-specific variables such as identity and acculturation; self-construal; high-context communication style; shame proneness and loss of face; interpersonal harmony and conflict avoidance; and self-restraint, conformity, and subordination to authority. These constructs, such as shame, have been studied in Western cultures but they may contain culture-specific meaning, manifestations and correlates when examined within Asian American experience.

The logical extension of the cultural accommodation model of counselling is that the culture-specific variables identified from indigenous psychologies will need to be accommodated when working with indigenous populations in order to ensure culturally relevant and appropriate interventions.

The importance and recent growth of indigenous models of psychology

A key goal of cross-cultural psychology is to "explore other cultures in order to discover psychological variations that are not present in one's own limited cultural experience" (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002, p. 3). While cross-cultural psychologists look for effects *across* cultures, indigenous psychologists are concerned with behaviour and effects *within* a culture (Triandis, 2000). They tend to use bottom-up and culture-specific (typically non-Western) methods. Thus, indigenous psychological studies address culture-specific phenomena and emphasize that Western theories and models may not have universal validity. A quotation from Sinha (1993) serves as an excellent example of one motivational drive behind the movement:

> When modern scientific psychology, based on the empirical, mechanistic, and materialistic orientations of the West, was imported into India as part of the general transfer knowledge, it came in as a "ready-made intellectual package in the first decade of this century" (Nandy, 1974, p. 7). It tended to sweep away the traditional psychology, at least among those who had been involved in modern Western education. In fact, this transfer in a way constituted an

> element of the political domination of the West over the Third World countries in the general process of modernization and Westernization. The domination was so great that for almost three decades, until about the time India achieved independence (1947), psychology remained tied to the apron strings of the West and did not show any signs of maturing. Very little originality was displayed, and Indian research added hardly anything to psychological theory or knowledge, and was seldom related to the problems of the country (Sinha, 1980). Research conducted was by and large repetitive and replicative in character, the object being to supplement studies done in the West by further experimentation or to examine some of their aspects from a new angle. Thus the discipline remained at best a pale copy of Western psychology, rightly designated a "Euro-American product" with very little concern with social reality as it prevailed in India. (Sinha, 1993, p. 31)

This quotation illustrates the view that the movement to create local indigenous psychologies in non-Western countries is a reaction to Euro-American dominance, the most salient aspect of which is the limited attention in cross-cultural psychology given to issues that are relevant to other parts of the world, like poverty, illiteracy, and so on. So, in a sense, one reason for the development of indigenous psychologies is that they represent a counter-action to the monopoly and dominance of Western models. Another driving factor behind indigenous psychologies is theoretical: Psychology can be seen as culture-bound such that each cultural population may need to develop its own psychology in order to best understand its peoples' views and behaviours. Simply importing Western models into other cultures may thus result in suboptimal explanations of such processes and behaviours through the neglect of important culture-specific influences.

Indigenization of psychology has gained popularity in non-Western societies in recent decades as a result of the inappropriate application of Western-oriented cross-cultural psychology to non-Western areas (Kim & Berry, 1993; Sinha, 1993, 1997; Yang, 1993, 1999, 2000). As Yang (2000) notes, "it represents non-Western psychologists' self-reflective realization that they have been completely wrong in regarding North-American psychology, which Berry et al. (1992) and Triandis (1997) considered an indigenous psychology, as the universal human psychology. In this respect, Triandis (1997) is right when he says that the current (world) psychology is one of the indigenous psychologies—the one from the West" (p. 245). Though many definitions of indigenous psychology exist in the literature, most agree that indigenous psychologists seek to develop a "scientific knowledge system that effectively reflects, describes, explains, and/or understands psychological phenomena in their native contexts and in terms of culturally relevant frames of reference and culturally-derived categories and theories" (Yang, 2000, pp. 245–246).

Thus, indigenous psychologists seek to understand the thoughts and behaviors of people within a specific culture. After researching this particular culture, their findings may be appropriately generalized to a larger population similarly to how findings from a larger population may sometimes apply to a culture within it. Note that indigenous psychologists use many different methods and theoretical paradigms to understand the psychology and behavior of people within specific cultures

(Kim & Berry, 1993). In fact, Yang (1999, 2000) has argued in favor of using multiple or conflicting paradigms in the same culture. This rule has already been in practice among indigenous psychologists in Chinese societies for some years (see Hwang, 2005; Yang, 1999).

It is important to note that, regarding the link between indigenous models and the tripartite model (Leong, 1996), the tripartite model incorporates all dimensions (University, Group, Individual) simultaneously—not one exclusively. It allows researchers and practitioners to move dynamically "up" or "down" the hierarchy of the three levels when generalizing results or ideas (e.g., researchers may translate findings from Individuals to Groups or from Groups to Individuals). It is a comprehensive and integrative model with many different "Individual" and "Group" dimensions under the broadest "Universal" one. For our current discussion, we view indigenous models of culture as falling within the Group dimension in the same way that gender or race falls into that category but these models still need to be used in conjunction with the other two dimensions (e.g., an indigenous model may not apply equally to all individuals within a particular cultural group).

Moving toward indigenous models of vocational psychology

The movement toward indigenous psychologies requires a few integral steps. The first step is to question and challenge the cultural validity and specificity of the Western models of career development and vocational psychology that are currently being used. Second, it is necessary to take into account any culture-specific elements overlooked in these models via the cultural accommodation approach discussed earlier. Finally, we must join others in discovering and investigating indigenous constructs that will enrich our models and make them more culturally appropriate and relevant. We therefore invite others to join in the exploration of indigenous models of psychology, in an effort to collectively improve the way human behaviour is studied with regard to culture in our discipline.

Next, we would like to illustrate the value of the indigenous approach by highlighting several of the studies that have been undertaken by the lead author in identifying culture-specific variables and how these variables can provide incremental validity to our models. One example is a study by Hardin, Leong, and Osipow (2001). Hardin and colleagues assert that cultural issues in conceptualization and measurement are responsible for findings that career maturity is lower in Asian Americans than in European Americans. In particular, they note that cultural differences in independence may explain the effect. Based on research using a sample of racially diverse students, they concluded that the level of interdependence moderates the difference in career maturity between Asian Americans and European Americans. Therefore, while previous theories and measurement of career maturity relied on *in*dependence, these authors' findings suggest that a collectivist orientation (*inter*dependence, a separate dimension from independence) explains the effect. Such results are important because they suggest that we must empirically investigate how and why cultural differences influence

interrelationships between variables by studying the population of interest, rather than making generalized and simplistic assumptions about what is taking place.

Another indigenous psychology example is Pek and Leong's (2003) study of sexist values in relation to the concept of traditionality-modernity in the Chinese population. With a sample of employees in Singapore, Pek and Leong investigated the nature of general ambivalent sexism and workplace-specific sexism in this particular culture. Consistent with previous research, they found that participant sex, femininity, and authoritarianism predicted sexist attitudes toward women (e.g., males held more antagonistic sexist attitudes than women did). They then used hierarchical regression to show that Chinese values (indigenous cultural variables of Chinese traditionality and modernity) predicted general and workplace-specific sexism over and above sex, femininity, and authoritarianism. These researchers demonstrated the value in studying culture-related differences in variables such as traditionality-modernity, particularly with regard to the incremental explanation of effects they provide. Interestingly, the traditionality-modernity construct in cross-cultural psychology parallels the study of acculturation, cultural and racial identity as major moderator variables in racial and ethnic minority psychology in the United States.

A third example of the indigenous psychology approach is a study by Chang, Arkin, Leong, Chan, and Leung (2004). They were interested in investigating whether subjective overachievement is experienced similarly or differently between Chinese college students and (Caucasian) American college students. Subjective overachievement is an operationalization of an indigenous concept in Singapore called "KIASU" which loosely translated means "afraid to lose" and serves as a powerful but negative/aggressive motivating force among the Singaporeans (see Kirby & Ross, 2007). After controlling for cultural differences in self-construal (independence and interdependence), Chang et al. (2004) concluded that Chinese participants tended to be less concerned with performance, had higher self-doubt, and were more likely to discount their personal ability when overworked than American participants. The researchers suggested that certain cultural differences explain these effects, for example the American belief that "failure may not always be a bad thing" (p. 166), versus the Chinese belief that it is, especially in competitive situations. This research shows that specific cultural elements may serve as important moderators that deserve recognition in psychology, particularly for researchers planning to study Western models in non-Western contexts.

Research by Cheung, Cheung, Leung, Ward, and Leong (2003) provides a fourth and final example of the indigenous approach to psychological investigation. These authors were interested in learning whether the Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory could be successfully used in English-speaking populations, and whether the CPAI would be more useful than the most often-used personality inventory: the NEO Personality Inventory assessing the dimensions of the Five-Factor Model (FFM). They administered the English CPAI to an English-speaking Singaporean Chinese sample and an English-speaking Caucasian American sample and found that similar factor structures emerged for both samples (and both structures were similar to the original Chinese CPAI structure). They also showed that the FFM does not assess Interpersonal Relatedness, a key personality factor in Chinese

culture, and that the CPAI does not assess Openness, a key personality factor in American culture. This research evidences the importance of considering cultural influences before translating measures across cultures. The authors showed that *both* personality inventories, when translated to another culture, lack certain essential elements.

Conclusion: there are many ways to be human

For many years, Kohlberg's (1969) theory of moral development dominated the field. Then Gilligan (1982) proposed a more accurate description of the moral and psychological development of women as well as a critique of Kohlberg's theory. Kohlberg's theory, like many other theories of that time, was both androcentric and Eurocentric. Like Gilligan, those at the forefront of cross-cultural psychology need to challenge the existing theories and the status quo in an effort to enhance the contribution of the field as a whole.

F. B. Tyler (personal communication, January 15, 1986) put it succinctly when he observed that "there are many ways to be human." As cross-cultural psychologists, we need to explore and research these many ways in an effort to counter our natural tendency to view our own way as superior and others' ways as inferior. In recognition that there are many cultures in this world and that understanding and learning about each culture, as well as the differences across cultures, is a worthwhile undertaking, we need to increase our study of the myriad forms and functions of culture around the world and these various "culturally unique ways of being human." Consistent with this perspective, the primary purpose of this article was to emphasize the value of indigenous models of psychology. Indeed, we believe them to be desiderata, or that which is essential, in shaping future research. We propose that vocational psychology will undoubtedly be enriched by the study and incorporation of these indigenous psychologies into its models of assessment and interventions.

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