

# Reply to Nzimande

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Nzimande's long "bold and courageous" article against "mainstream" Industrial Psychology (Psychology in Society 2) has prompted me to write since it raises numerous issues that should not be "glossed over unchallenged".

Nzimande uses the time worn strategy of moving from "common knowledge" to inaccurate and, on occasions, highly emotive criticisms of, in this case, mainstream industrial psychology in order to build up a monstrous straw man, tailored to meet the requirements of his own ideological persuasions, which he then hastily proceeds to ignite without, I might add, too much concern for what else he burns down in doing so.

Let's have a look at some of the straw in this man. The first point is that by his own admission (p.55) the article is a critical evaluation which is neither positive nor creative; it sets out to criticise without having any real alternative other than a vague blue-print for a "materialist industrial psychology".

Secondly, again by his own admission (p.55) it is aimed at an out-group, the "them" industrial psychologists rather than the "us" critical social scientists. Moreover, the "them" he writes, require simplistic arguments to be able to understand "us".

These two points are quite breathtaking in that they imply that the article is not only destructive but simplistically formulated. Further reading confirms that the author is indeed accurate in his description of his own work. Unfortunately these are among the only really accurate

statements made throughout the entire article which stretches on for some length.

Allow me to point to some of these inaccuracies and misrepresentations, dealing more specifically with my own work to which Nzimande refers. I leave the others to the other authors whose work he criticises as I feel sure that, if they happen to read the article, they will take up the cudgels too on their own behalf.

Before he begins his argument against the methodology used in mainstream industrial psychology, Nzimande first makes certain assumptions which I feel are totally unjustified, except that they provide him with the initial handfults to erect his monstrous man of straw. Firstly, that unpublished studies at the NIPR generally take the form of published ones. Even a cursory glance through the unpublished work of the NIPR will prove that this is simply not the case. Secondly, that the two authors he selects for his pillory, whose work was published in *Psychologia Africana*, represents a fair cross-section of the entire industrial psychological work published in a journal which had been in existence for over twenty years.

His arguments against the methodology used in such studies is equally superficial and erroneous. For example, his accusation that. "The one major characteristic of the methods used in such studies is that they have avoided the use of more open-ended approaches that may yield undesirable or controversial information" (p.57). Even a superficial understanding of the dialectical approach proposed in *Psychologia Africana* (1982) will indicate that this is a gross misrepresentation of that work. Similarly, his suggestion that there is some insidious "capitalist plot" to deliberately use methods which systematically exclude sensitive information among industrial psychologists is, in my experience, really quite wild. One wonders how, in any case, Nzimande is able to pontificate about something for which there is no certain evidence short of first finding out what the actual motive of the Psychologist (in this case Backer) really was. It is quite possible, in the example cited (p.58) that Backer merely, and without malicious intent, wished to reduce the amount of data he would otherwise have had to handle and to maintain a focus on the selected objective of his investigation. Nzimand's argument about the



use of statistical correlation techniques and his description of its aim as - "The basic aim of this technique is to get (sic) to what extent certain variables or factors correlate with other variables or factors" (p.58) - simply will not do.

His arguments about the dangers of using Likert-type scales and ranking techniques are well known among industrial psychologists and are usually countered with, for example, open-ended inclusions; and ranking scales, in nearly all recent examples are formulated to allow the subject to include factors not listed by the researcher.

Although Nzimande acknowledges that the laboratory experiment "... is on the decline in industrial psychological studies of black workers in the country" (p.60), he omits to give a single reference of this kind of work. Certainly, in my experience of roughly 12 years in industrial social science research I have not come across a single example of the kind of laboratory experiment Nzimande specifically describes.

The central methodological issue which Nzimande concerns himself with becomes clear on page 62 of this article: "The point which this article is trying to get to is that although the methods as such may be useful scientific tools they have been used in a manner that excluded contentious information, as it will become evident in the discussion of results of such studies". However, since there is no way of knowing precisely what contentious information (if any) has been left out, without highly imaginative ideological extrapolations, Nzimande's argument falls flat on its face. This is not to deny that methodological errors have occurred, but to argue as Nzimande does, that scientific tricks have been used deliberately by researchers to exclude information is simply not true.

On page 63 Nzimande refers to an article which I co-authored with Moerdyk (1982). He criticises the generalization about the socialization basis by which world views are passed from generation to generation (taken virtually unaltered from Onyemelukwe, 1973) for being "sweeping", and because it is "made without any reference to the possible influence of the current socio-political situation in South Africa". The whole purpose of this article and the earlier one is that they argue for a movement away from the current white cultural hegemony in industry where the Western managerial

paradigm rides roughshod over the indigenous African culture. The solution proposed by these authors is that the dominant Western paradigm in industry must be adapted and transformed in order to meet the requirements of Africans (just as it had been done with marked success by the Japanese). Hardly an argument in support of the "system" I would have thought.

Similarly, Nzimande misses the point when he argues that world views take no account of political, economic and ideological relations in South Africa today (p.80). World views are both a product of these relations and pre-date them. These articles attempt to trace the core of these contrasting world views in African and Calvinistic philosophy, compare them with Japanese and Chinese world views, argue for the essential durability of the African concept of "ubuntu" across class and sub-cultural boundaries, and suggest ways of adapting, even dismantling, the dominant western business paradigm.

Generalizations they undoubtedly are, but no suggestion that they might be otherwise was ever made by the authors who believe they still serve a useful heuristic purpose. There seems little point in Nzimande criticising generalizations for being generalizations. In this regard, it seems quite reasonable to regard blacks as well as whites as homogenous groups since the level of generalization or abstraction of the world view or philosophical description justifies this. It is also quite wrong for Nzimande (p.81) to accuse the 'cultural approach' for treating blacks as a homogenous group since it clearly does not, and however much the "state machinery" may or may not perpetrate ethnic groupings, any cursory reading of history will reveal that these ethnic groupings long pre-date the foundation of the apartheid state. Having criticised the cultural approach for treating blacks as a homogeneous group, Nzimande, paradoxically, refers to generalizations acceptable in his own ideological community, such as "working class culture and black petty (sic) bourgeoisie culture". (I have nothing against such generalizations, I wish only to point to Nzimande's intellectual inconsistency).

Nzimande moves on in his article to a discussion of science and in particular its misuse. "First of all it must be pointed out that science can be subject to misuse. There is a very real danger, as it is already happening that science can be used quite successfully to serve particular



interests" (p.68). This is hardly a revelation and in any case the point is not whether science can be misused, but whether it is misused in "mainstream" South African industrial psychology. Nzimande goes on to inform us that "science is not immune to ideological infiltration" (p.69). Indeed not! Presumably Nzimande's proposed materialist industrial psychology would not be immune to this kind of contamination. He tells us: "... I feel obliged to explode the myth that science can be practised without being influenced by the social, political, economic and ideological factors in the particular environment in which it is practised" (p.70). Any cursory reading of the vast literature on the sociology of knowledge would have shown Nzimande that this myth had been exploded a few years before he wrote his article (However, the blame for this may reside in the compartmentalization of social science education in South Africa, of which he discusses later in the paper). He talks of "positivism in the social sciences" (p.71) without defining what he means by positivism, which is, after all a much bandied about concept. Finally, he writes "Science does not emanate from 'supra' human beings or from the heavens in the sky. Such understanding will go a long way towards the demystification of science" (p.73). Does Nzimande really expect us "mainstream industrial psychologists" to take this seriously?

One wonders who, if anyone, ever supposed that science had such a heavenly existence, and how this knowledge helps in the demystification of science puzzles me.

I would agree with Nzimande's complaint that concepts devised in the United States are sometimes uncritically and without alteration transposed to South Africa (p.72); but I wonder how many mainstream industrial psychologists do this. Speaking for myself, Coldwell (1982), this is simply not the case. Again, paradoxically, on page 80, he criticises the use of an adapted version of the TAT designed specifically for South African blacks.

In short, it would seem that Nzimande has fallen into an ideological trap (p.78) of his own making.

There is one fallacious form of reasoning with which this paper is shot through which bears a rough resemblance to Moore's "naturalistic

fallacy", through quite different form it, of which Nzimande seems to be unaware.

Over and over again when Nzimande describes the "is" situation of South African industrial psychology (which we have already shown to be inaccurate) he immediately assumes this to be what mainstream industrial psychologists morally and ideologically stand for, the 'ought'. With absolutely no evidence cited to support that this is indeed the ideological stance taken by mainstream industrial psychologists, he makes a fallacious leap in reasoning by arguing that because the findings "fit hand in glove with the ruling ideas of this country" (p.77) (which in many cases they don't) they expose the ideological position of the industrial psychologists concerned. I have some sympathy with his complaints against industrial psychology in South Africa for being too compartmentalized and for it being over concerned with professionalization and specialization, though my reasons for doing so are somewhat different from Nzimande's (p.85-86).

In his conclusion Nzimande writes: "Industrial psychology must ditch once and for all the current management framework within which black workers are studied. The abandoning of this approach can only help the discipline to erase its present stigma of being a particular brand of managerial ideology" (p.37). One wonders whether the kind of ideological substitution Nzimande proposes would do anything of the kind. A more likely outcome would be to exchange one type of stigma with another. However, I would agree that industrial psychology is excessively management oriented and the remedial steps must be taken to correct this bias.

Finally, Nzimande's faith in history is misplaced "... to prove that the repository of objectivity on truth is history itself" (p.87). I would have thought that he who wrote the history would have a pronounced affect on what was written.

It is a pity that Nzimande stakes all on an ideological polemic for there are, if one looks closely enough, bits of real flesh among the straw.