



The ITC Archives: Interviews with the Early Leaders of the ITC



YPE POORTINGA

As explained in the cover e-mail, the ITC Council would appreciate your providing detailed answers to the following questions:

1. During what year did you become involved with the ITC, how did this affiliation occur (e.g. were you asked to join the ITC, were you a representative of another organization, or did you elect to become involved), and what was the nature of your initial work on the ITC?

“Already in 1974, before ITC was established I became involved. In that year Jean Cardinet invited national committees on tests and testing from several countries to be represented at a meeting in the context of the congress of the International Association of Psychology (IAAP) in Montreal. As I was going to attend this congress I was asked to be the delegate for the test commission of the Netherlands (COTAN) of which I was a member at the time.

Cardinet had a strategic vision on the need for an international association of national committees on tests and testing, but wanted to hand over the task of further development of his initiative because of other pressing responsibilities. Before the meeting in Montreal he asked me whether the COTAN could take over and I agreed to propose this to the COTAN. During the meeting, of less than 10 people, there was consensus when Cardinet tabled this plan.

At the time, the idea was that an international test commission would function under the auspices of IAAP, but its Secretary-General unexpectedly ruled this out as IAAP’s constitution only recognized individual membership. Back home The COTAN was not forthcoming either; its chair insisted that I had taken this on and that it was my baby. Admittedly, I felt quite desperate but there was no way to pass on or return what had landed in my lap.

Guided by a set of recommendations drawn up by Cardinet, which I considered to be the backbone for future activities, and with the firm belief that tests and testing are an important part of psychological science and practice, I started to think of a structure for an independent International Test Commission. The following steps have helped to get things started: I established a Newsletter as a means of communication and posted it to persons and committees who had expressed an interest, asked four key persons to form an advisory committee (see Oakland et al., 2001), and drafted a constitution.



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In 1976 a meeting was convened annexed to the congress of the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS). On that occasion the draft constitution was accepted provisionally, with some suggestions for future change, and a board was elected. At this meeting, one might say, ITC was born.

As elected president I spent time in the two years from 1976 to 1978 on a small survey in European countries on attitudes towards tests among psychologists (at the time there was a fairly strong anti-test sentiment), on a revision of the constitution and on the preparations for a symposium at the 1978 IAAP congress in Munich organized under the auspices of ITC. (Perhaps I should mention that at this congress the IAAP president mentioned ITC as an important development)."

2. What were your initial impressions of the ITC, including its organizational structure, missions, and personnel?

"There was little else beyond the in my view sound set of recommendations drafted by Jean Cardinet and approved by the IAAP General Assembly in 1971."

3. Who were some of the key leaders in the ITC at that time and what were their roles?

*"It is difficult to imagine how ITC would ever have come about without the initial steps by Jean Cardinet. I see him as the patriarch of ITC (see Oakland et al., 2001). There were two other significant persons in the early period. The first is Justin Schlegel who accepted responsibility for the Newsletter in 1976 and arranged to have it published as a supplement to the *Revue de Psychologie Appliquée*, a great improvement over the earlier mimeographed form. He remained the editor for several years. I remember Justin as a very constructive and modest person, always prepared to help out where he could. The second is Iraj Ayman who was elected president of ITC in 1978. He was a superb organizer and expectations were high about what he would achieve. Unfortunately, shortly after his election the revolution in Iran, his home country, forced him to move to the USA where he had to start a new career, leaving no time for ITC. Ken Miller, the vice-president, had to take things from there."*

4. Every organization and association goes through growing pains. During your first few years on the Council, what were some of the impediments that you felt limited the ITC's work and needed to be changed?

"As already indicated, when I started here was no structure or organization, it was almost a one-man show; also there were no financial means (fortunately, nobody ever asked questions about the reproduction of the ITC Newsletter at the printing office of the university in Tilburg). Even today it seems to me that first and foremost there needed to be an organizational structure, the reason why the drafting of a constitution was important. In retrospect I might have been bolder in taking action, but lacking both money and experience at a time when administering tests to people was often seen as a highly questionable practice, I have even today no clear idea how that could have been realized. As I see it ITC made a slow start, but institutionalization was the first task, and there was progress between 1974 and 1978.



After Iraj Ayman left, ITC moved into hard years until Ron Hambleton came to the rescue. More than anyone else he has made ITC into the organization it is today."

5. What prominent changes have you seen in the ITC between when you first were a member and now?

"ITC is now an established and respected organization. It probably helps that attitudes towards testing are generally more positive today, both among the public at large and within the profession of psychology."

6. Where has the ITC done well? What do you think the ITC's biggest accomplishment has been over the years?

"The most outstanding achievement of ITC are the sets of Guidelines together with the fact that they are published on the Internet. These are products that can help to improve the quality of instruments and testing practices. To me the guidelines are more important than the congress, another strong feature of ITC."

7. Where has the ITC possibly made "wrong steps" or mistakes?

"No mistakes or errors in the structure or operations of ITC are evident to me."

8. What do you perceive to be current challenges facing the ITC and what role should the ITC play in this regard?

"I see two (latent) challenges.

ITC is largely made up of experts on tests and testing and there are also test publishers. A third category of stakeholders is not really represented, at least not directly, namely the clients or test takers. They have a great interest in the quality of tests and in safeguards concerning the proper use of tests. I am not sure how their representation could be arranged, but perhaps some international association of national consumer organizations and/or a body like UNESCO could be invited to take a position, or at least observer status, on the ITC Council.

Another challenge is the limited citation impact of the International Journal of Testing. Establishing the IJT was a wonderful idea. However, for some reason it did not really take off to become a preferred outlet for authors with excellent manuscripts. Somehow this will have to change. I know that this suggestion has been made before, but one way to boost the number of citations is through the publication of a set of excellent review articles. Approaching senior persons in the field one by one will not work, because they are being asked for a serious time investment that does not lead to anything much for anyone. Perhaps things would work out better if a larger plan were developed for a set of review articles that would span about three years with every second issue of IJT being devoted to a major review, perhaps with commentaries. Current ITC seniors and the IJT editors might form an editorial committee to draw up the plan and invitations could be issued to teams of authors as well as to single



authors. An important element would be that invitees should also receive a letter asking for commitment from the ITC Council. The authors of the first article in the series should start writing only when a sufficient number of commitments have been made. Not only should it be a bit of an honor to be asked, but the set of IJT issues would form a solid overview of contemporary issues in testing theory, methods and applications. Of course, the assumption is that the review articles will boost the number of citations.”

9. What do you believe should the ITC be focusing on right now and who are the key stakeholders that should be involved?

“This question pertains to contemporary issues on which I do not really have an opinion.”

10. If there was one thing you could change with regards to the ITC, what would it be?

“This question pertains to contemporary issues on which I do not really have an opinion.”

11. What structural or organizational changes to the ITC should be considered to further its effectiveness?

“This question pertains to contemporary issues on which I do not really have an opinion.”

12. To what extent did you find it difficult to dedicate your time to the work of the ITC?

“Spending time on ITC was a matter of giving this sufficient priority. Activities involved writing contributions for the ITC Newsletter (not much copy was received) and various time consuming administrative tasks, such as writing addresses for the Newsletter (which the departmental secretary only shared if she had some spare time). Between 1974 and 1978 ITC certainly put a dent in my scientific productivity, but the pressure to publish was then much lower than today; in a sense I could afford to spend the time.”

13. How would you compare the first ITC conference you ever attended with the one hosted in San Sebastian in 2014?

“I did not attend the congress in San Sebastian, but evidently the ITC congresses have become better over time.”

14. Among your various contributions, what do you believe may be your lasting legacy?

“For a better part the early constitution was based on my ideas and I am still rather satisfied with most of it. Especially, full membership of national test committees and associate membership for publishers was a good starting point for ITC. Of course, there have been substantial changes in later years, and the constitution is certainly not my legacy. Most other activities were sort of run-of-the-mill; for example, newsletters were already much in fashion at the time. I am very pleased with having been the first president of such a viable organization, but I am afraid that “legacy” is too big a word for anything I achieved for ITC.”



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