Integrity Testing for Personnel Selection

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Setting the Stage

- Integrity tests are self-report instruments designed to predict theft and other forms of counterproductive work behavior (CWB)
- They are used in a personnel selection context
  - Assumes more applicants than openings, hence a need to select some and reject others
  - Used internally by organizations: scores not reported to applicants
  - Basis for use is predictive validity at the aggregate level: does a test-selected workforce engage in less CWB than a non-selected workforce?

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Time for a little quiz

- $20 from friend's wallet in locker room
- $20 from cash drawer
- $20 from Automatic Teller Machine
- $20 extra change from salesclerk
- $20 in wallet on street

- "Conscience is the inner voice that warns us that somebody may be watching"

    (H.L. Mencken)

- Illustrates the tension between a "person" perspective and a "situation" perspective

Trait explanations and situation explanations are compatible

- Situational features can affect the % of individuals engaging in CWB

- But within any one situation, individual differences influence who does and who does not engage in CWB.

Historical Context

- Early integrity tests developed within the polygraph industry (1960s-1970s)
- Work psychologists skeptical of personality measures at this time
  - Interest revived about 1990, with the Big 5 framework
- Predicting theft the primary initial goal
  - Eventually expanded to the full range of CWB
- Three types of tests have emerged

1. Overt Integrity Tests

-Beliefs about the frequency and extent of theft

-Punitiveness Toward Theft

-Ruminations About Theft

-Perceived Ease of Theft

-Rationalizations about Theft

-Assessments of One's Own Honesty

-Admissions

- London House PSI, Reid Report, Stanton Survey

2. Personality-Oriented Integrity Tests

Personnel Reaction Blank
- -Construct Label: "Wayward Impulse"
- -Dependability, Conscientiousness, Social Conformity

Employment Inventory
- -Construct Label: "Employee Deviance"
- -Trouble with Authority, Thrill-Seeking, Hostility, Unhappy Home Life, Lack of Work Motivation

Hogan Personality Inventory: Reliability Scale
- -Construct Label: "Organizational Delinquency"
- -No Hostility, Impulse Control, Good Attachment

3. Conditional Reasoning

- Theory: standing on a trait affects the "justification mechanisms" used to explain behavior

- Example: "hostile attribution bias" in people high on prone to CWB

Sample Item: American cars now more reliable. Why?

- a) 15 years ago American carmakers knew less about building reliable cars

- b) prior to introduction of high-quality foreign cars, American carmakers purposely build cars badly in order to sell more repair parts

Growth of the Research Literature on Using Integrity Tests: Validity Studies

- Sackett and Decker (1979): 6 studies of "honesty tests"

- Sackett and Harris (1984): 40 studies

- Sackett, Burris, and Callahan (1989): 70 studies of "integrity tests"

- Sackett and Wanek (1996): 665 studies

- Berry, Sackett, and Weimann (2007): validity viewed as established: focus on other issues

Validity findings

- Mean correlation in the .2-.3 range

- No clear "winner" between types of tests

- While originally aimed at theft, tests predict a wide array of CWB's

- Some criteria (e.g absence) more predictable than others (e.g., theft); differential reliance on various criteria cloud comparisons of different tests

Other Key Research Findings

- Tests also predict overall job performance

- Minimal subgroup differences (race, gender)

- Generally low correlation with cognitive ability

- Valid for high and low complexity jobs

The fakeability issue

- Overt and personality-based tests are fakeable
  - Instructed faking studies show substantial improvement
  - But validity findings in applicant context show that faking is not so prevalent as to eliminate validity

- Conditional reasoning tests are resistant to faking
  - But become fakeable if test takers discern their true purpose

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Why do integrity tests predict CWB?

- Correlate with Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability

- But have incremental validity over these three Big 5 dimensions

- Big 5 emphasize perseverance, conformity, and achievement-striving facets of conscientiousness; integrity measures give greater emphasis to self-control (Wanek, Sackett, Ones, 2003)

What are the mechanisms by which personality/integrity measures predict CWB?

- Cullen and Sackett (2003) differentiate between two types of CWBs:

  - Initiated -> to satisfy a motive such as pleasure, greed, thrill-seeking, or attention-seeking

  - Reactive: reaction to actual or perceived organizational event -> to satisfy a motive such as retaliation, revenge, release, or escape

What are the mechanisms by which personality/integrity measures link to initiation of CWB?

Using the Theory of Reasoned Action, several features affect attitude toward CWB, and thus affect the likelihood of initiating CWB:

- Beliefs about consequences of CWB
- Beliefs about desirability of those consequences
- Beliefs about norms regarding CWBs
- Motivation to comply with perceived norms

- Hypothesis: these beliefs mediate personality-CWB relationship

What are the mechanisms by which personality/integrity measures link to reactive CWB?

- Personality affects perceptions of environmental events (e.g. leads some to perceive as unjust events seen as just by others)

- Personality affects reactions to environmental events (e.g. leads to different behavioral reactions to perceived injustice)

Should you use integrity tests?

- The opportunity to be selective is a scarce resource: choose carefully

- Example: Supermarket cashiers; two applicants for each opening
    - Focus on speed and accuracy?
    - Focus on customer service?
    - Focus on CWB?

Conclusion

- Over the past 30 years, exploration of CWB has moved from fringe to mainstream within the employment testing fieldI/O psychology

- Not "by the book": much initial focus on the tests, with gradual shift to attention to the criterion

- Gradual shift from applied orientation ("does it work?" to theoretical orientation ("why does it work?")