

## INTEGRITY TESTING IN ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXTS

This paper aims to provide the reader with a basic understanding of the issues within pre-employment honesty and integrity testing. Firstly, the history of integrity testing and the types of integrity tests which are used are outlined. Coupled with this some actual examples are presented with links to publisher web sites. Following this, there will be a discussion of the psychometric evidence surrounding integrity tests and their effectiveness as selection tools. This will consider the scope, validity, reliability, fairness and acceptability of integrity tests and the impact of each on their use in selection contexts. Finally, some disadvantages of integrity tests are considered and conclusions presented.

### History and Background

Honesty/integrity tests are viewed as one method for controlling employee counterproductive behaviour in the organisation. They work on the notion that assessment of an individual's disposition, attitude and/or past behaviour will provide some evidence of the extent the individual may pose a risk to the organisation in terms of engaging in counterproductive workplace behaviour. It must be stressed at the start that within the literature on counterproductive behaviour, individual causes (e.g. disposition or attitude) only reflect one side of the argument. Organisational and social factors (e.g. perceptions of inequity, organisational commitment, organisational stressors, group norms etc.) are also seen to promote counterproductive behaviour and interventions here tend to be aimed at the organisational rather than the individual level. However, a discussion of the causes of counterproductive behaviour is beyond

the scope of this paper. Readers should note that there is debate in the area as to what the antecedents are and hence which interventions should be used.

Integrity tests, although not as commonly used as other forms of assessment, are not a new phenomenon. They have been in existence since the 1950's (for example the Reid Report developed by John Reid was published in 1951) with the main market being the USA. Whilst at the beginning integrity tests were not used on a large scale, the 1980's saw an explosion in their use in the USA. This has been partly attributed to the sensitisation of the American people towards dishonesty in the workplace as a result of the huge infamous scandals around at that time (Scrivner, 1991) and the implementation of the Employee Polygraph Protection Act (EPPA). This act prohibited the use of polygraphs and other physiological techniques for pre-employment screening in the private sector. Hence organisations which used the polygraph needed an alternative, acceptable method of pre-employment screening.

Bean (1987) estimated that up to 2.5 million integrity tests were carried out annually in the US and Sackett and Harris (1984) report that 5000 US organisations used integrity tests annually. A more recent survey of personnel managers in the UK illustrated that only 7 organisations out of a sample of 279 actually used integrity tests to assess for honesty and integrity in a selection context (Coyne and Bartram, 2000). More commonly, references (78%) and interviews (66%) were used. One would expect that since these surveys the use of integrity tests within selection has increased as a result of a growing awareness of employee counterproductive behaviour, increasing knowledge and availability of integrity tests and more evidence of the validity of such tests for pre-employment selection.

### *Types of integrity tests*

Sackett, Burris and Callahan (1989) proposed two distinct classifications of integrity tests. Overt integrity tests typically involve an attitude and/or admissions scale.

Attitude scales assess the attitudes of people to forms of counterproductive behaviour (i.e. punishment towards theft, perceived ease of theft) and assumes those individuals with a more accepting attitude towards counterproductive behaviour are more likely to engage in that behaviour (e.g. positive attitudes to theft in the workplace will be a strong predictor of workplace theft). Admissions scales rely on the notion that admitting to previous forms of theft/dishonest behaviour (money stolen from previous employer, history of drug abuse) will be a strong predictor of future behaviour. Those who admit to past dishonesty are considered to be highly likely to act in a similar manner in the future. Both the Reid Report (<http://www.pearsonps.com/Solutions/SelectionAssessments/GeneralAssessments1/ReidReport/>) and the Personnel Selection Inventory (<http://www.pearsonps.com/Solutions/SelectionAssessments/GeneralAssessments1/PSI/>) published by Pearson are examples of overt integrity tests.

By contrast, personality-orientated tests employ no obvious reference to theft or other dishonest behaviours. These tests purport to measure multiple dispositional traits, which through empirical investigation, are believed to be related to dishonesty. For example, Hogan and Hogan (1989) developed the Employee Reliability Index (which is scored from the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI)) to measure the construct of Organisational delinquency. Items are taken from the Adjustment, Likeability and Prudence scales of the HPI (Hogan and Hogan, 1995). Another example is Giotto

published by Harcourt Assessment (<http://www.harcourt-uk.com/product.aspx?n=1342&s=1347&skey=2066>). Giotto assesses seven scales including Prudence (careful versus careless), Fortitude (attitude to work), Temperance (ability to control aggression) and Faith (obedience to company policy).

The discussion so far has indicated that although integrity tests are not as commonly used as other forms of assessment (even it seems to measure employee honesty), their use is increasing. Additionally, organisations have a choice of whether to use more overt measures of attitudes and admissions or more covert measures of personality. The next section will discuss the evidence surrounding the psychometric effectiveness of integrity tests for their use in pre-employment screening.

### Psychometric effectiveness

The psychometric effectiveness of integrity tests will be discussed against a framework of 5 quality criteria: scope, reliability, fairness, acceptability and validity. The benefits of using such a framework are that objective comparisons and evaluations of any individual measure can be made and that the overall technical state of the research can be considered. Coyne and Bartram (2002) provide a fuller discussion of the effectiveness of integrity tests on which this paper is based.

### *Scope*

Scope refers to the range of attributes covered by the assessment method and how specific or general the method is. The method may cover a detailed aspect of a specific attribute or a general overall picture. For example a general ability test can be considered broad and general in its scope as it measures a range of attributes (e.g.

verbal ability, numerical ability etc.). By contrast integrity tests are generally narrow and specific in terms of scope as they purport to measure a specific construct of honesty. However, this does depend on the type of integrity tests used (see figure 1). Overt integrity tests tend to be much more specific in their nature (initially they were developed to measure specifically employee theft). Such tests typically comprise subscales that measure specific attributes such as predisposition to theft, past theft and drug abuse. Personality-oriented integrity tests are more concerned with an overall measure of counterproductive behaviour rather than just theft or drug abuse. However, as we will see later when looking at relationships with job performance, the scope of integrity tests may be broader than first thought.

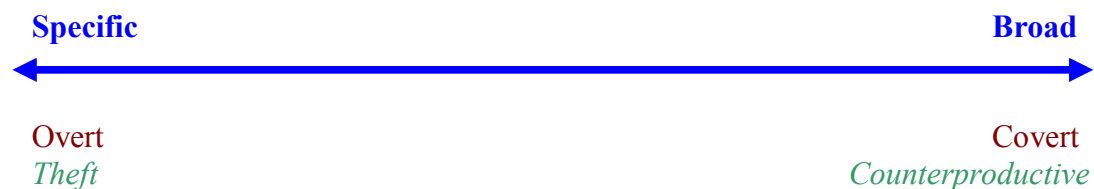


Figure 1. The scope of overt and cover integrity tests

### Reliability

The reliability of a testing method examines the extent to which one can place reliance on a test-taker's score. This can be in terms of consistency (responses to items are related) or stability (the tendency to get the same score over a number of trials). Rather than quoting research paper after research paper on reliability estimates, it is worth noting that empirical studies have clearly illustrated the reliability of integrity tests in terms of internal consistency and test-retest (values consistently above 0.7). Indeed, from a meta-analytic review, Ones, Viswesvaran and Schmidt

(1993) report a mean alpha of 0.81 and mean test-retest of 0.85 for integrity test reliability.

One aspect, which will affect the reliability of the test, is the issue of faking. Consider this scenario: *An applicant is taking part in an assessment centre. The next exercise given to them is a type of questionnaire that assesses their honesty. Given that their responses to this particular questionnaire could affect their chances of obtaining employment will applicants answer truthfully or not?*

The problem of faking answers is considered to be a particular problem with integrity tests, more so overt integrity tests than personality based tests because the individual is required to admit to previous behaviour or express attitudes to deviant behaviour. Studies where samples have been told to 'fake good' on integrity tests have shown that scores were on average more positive than samples instructed to answer truthfully (e.g. Lobello and Sims, 1993; Ryan and Sackett, 1987). In a meta-analytic review of integrity test faking, Alliger and Dwight (2000) reported that overt integrity tests were more susceptible to faking than personality-based tests.

However, the question is whether, under a given set of conditions, the degree of faking good is correlated with a trait of 'honesty', not whether scores can be changed by changing the conditions (i.e. directing the individuals to respond in a specific way). A tendency to fake good does not occur unless there are specific instructions to do so.

## *Fairness*

Equal opportunity laws in many countries will prohibit the use of tests in a manner that discriminates unfairly against protected groups of the population (such as gender, racial, age, disability, religion etc.). Adverse impact in itself is not unfair but it provides initial evidence for indirect discrimination. The question arises then as to whether integrity tests show adverse impact.

Qualitative reviews have suggested that no adverse impact is seen for integrity test scores (Goldberg et al., 1991, Sackett, Burris & Callahan, 1989). However, as Ones and Viswesvaran (1998) point out, studies looking at this issue have tended to confuse adverse impact with inter-group differences. Adverse impact relates to the use of the integrity test in occupational settings, whereas group differences focus on if a bias occurs within a scale. Yet by looking at group differences within an integrity test, information regarding the likelihood that the test would cause adverse impact (so long as selection decisions were based only on that specific test) can be obtained.

Ones and Viswesvaran (1998) examined group differences by age, gender and race on overt integrity tests in a sample of 724,806 job applicants. Effect sizes (differences between groups in terms of standard deviation units) showed females scored 0.16 SDs higher (more positive) on integrity tests than males and that those 40 and over scored 0.08 SDs higher than those under 40. Further, Blacks and Asians scored 0.04 SDs lower than Whites, American Indians 0.08 SDs lower and Hispanics 0.14 SDs lower than Whites. From this they argue that differences between age, gender and racial groups on integrity test scores are minor especially as values of 0.2 or lower are considered to be small (Cohen, 1977).

Previous research appears to illustrate the lack of bias and by implication adverse impact of integrity tests. Indeed, Arnold (1991) argues that the statistical record of honesty/integrity tests, which illustrate their freedom from adverse impact, cannot be matched by any other selection technique.

### *Acceptability*

The co-operation of test-takers and test-users is essential in any testing process as there is a need to gain acceptability by those who will be using the test or taking the test. The test-takers' understanding and evaluation of what the testing procedure is designed to measure has a potential impact on the quality of their responses. If the test is perceived as trivial, irrelevant or simply too embarrassing to answer, test-takers may provide poor quality responses. Given this, imagine your response when faced with a pre-employment selection tool designed to assess your level of honesty. How acceptable would this method be to you?

Studies using single-method designs examine reactions to integrity tests alone and do not make comparisons with other methods. Overall, these studies have not found strong negative perceptions for the use of integrity tests. Whist participants may not enjoy taking an integrity test, in the main they seemed to consider the use of integrity tests as appropriate and non-invasive and would not object to taking the test (Jones and Joy, 1991; Ryan and Sackett, 1987). Interestingly, a couple of studies have shown more positive views for overt as compared to covert integrity tests (Jones, 1991; Whitney, Diaz, Mineghino, & Powers, 1999).

Multi-method comparisons not only examine how integrity tests are viewed, but also how they compare to other (more traditional) methods of assessment. Stone and Stone (1990) found integrity tests were ranked as 6th highest (in the middle) in terms of invasiveness out of 12 other selection methods. Kravitz, Stinson and Chavez (1996) found neutral views were expressed for an integrity test in relation to 16 other tests in terms of job-relatedness, invasiveness, fairness and appropriateness. In addition, a significant position effect emerged for the honesty test, being evaluated more positively when used for a managerial than a production position. However, a more negative evaluation for integrity tests in terms of face validity and privacy has been reported (Steiner & Gilliland, 1996).

The interesting question which arguably has not been fully answered with single or multi-method studies is to what extent are individuals rating the method or the construct in these studies? Does the research focus on reactions to having honesty assessed or does it focus on reactions to integrity tests. Obviously there will be an interaction here as integrity tests are designed to measure honesty – so teasing out construct from method may be difficult. However, it would be interesting to examine the ratings of integrity tests as compared to other methods (e.g. interviews, biodata and references) when specifying that each method will be used to assess an individual's honesty. To what extent will ratings change and to what extent will an individual's view of other methods change when they are to be used to assess for honesty?

### *Construct validity*

Here we are trying to answer the question: What construct do integrity tests actually measure? There are two angles to this. Firstly, we can examine the definitions of counterproductive behaviour and related concepts (e.g. honesty, integrity, etc.) to decide what we are actually trying to predict. Secondly, we can examine the research literature on the relationship between integrity tests and personality which will give us an insight into what integrity tests tap into in terms of disposition.

Before any attempt can be made to assess for some attribute, a precise description of that attribute is required. Integrity tests purport to measure some definable concept such as honesty, integrity or reliability, but what in actual fact is being examined when studying honesty in the workplace? One term which has been widely used and which allows some flexibility is that of integrity. Murphy (1993) suggests that integrity "...refers to the extent to which a person lives up to his or her personal ideals and values...Integrity implies the belief that you are acting correctly..." (p. 5). An individual can possess high integrity yet still perform dishonest acts. The most common example of this is the telling of a 'white lie' so as not to hurt someone else's feelings. This involves a strong sense of personal integrity (the personal belief that you are acting correctly in not hurting another person's feelings) but also dishonesty (the act of lying). However, even though an individual has a personal belief of what is right and wrong; this belief may be an irrational one. An employee may not consider their behaviour as wrong due to irrational assumptions and hence engage in dishonest behaviour (in fact these irrational assumptions can rationalise the counterproductive behaviour). In attempting to overcome this problem, Murphy (1993) suggested the concept of workplace honesty and defined it as: "the extent to which individuals and

groups in organisations abide by consistent and rational ethical principles related to obligations to respect the truth” (p. 9).

Further debate has led to a number of definitions of counterproductive behaviour and a sample is presented below:

- Robinson and Bennet (1995) suggested employee deviance is: “voluntary behaviour that violates significant organisational norms and in doing so threatens the well-being of an organisation, its members or both” (p. 556).
- Marcus et al (2002) – defined counterproductive work behaviour as: “any act by a member of an organization that is obviously likely to do harm but no benefit to other members of the organization or the organization as a whole” (p.19).
- Gruys & Sackett (2003) suggest counterproductive work behaviour is: “any intentional behaviour on the part of an organization member viewed by the organization as contrary to legitimate interests” (p.30).

In general, the concept of counterproductive workplace behaviour (which organisations may try to reduce by using integrity tests) is focused on disruptive/unhelpful behaviours which harm individuals and organisations and which are counter to the rules and regulations of the organisation and its members. Given this, one would expect those individuals with a disposition to be unhelpful and who tend to disregard rules as likely to be a risk in terms of engaging in counterproductive behaviour in the workplace. Therefore, integrity tests should measure these elements.

Taking the above argument on board, what is the evidence to suggest that integrity tests capture a concept of unhelpfulness and a lack of rule following. Lilienfeld, Andrews and Stone-Romero (1994), argue that the relationship between honesty tests

and personality is important for 3 reasons: 1) The need to establish the construct validity of integrity tests, because honesty should be related to certain established traits; 2).. The need to examine the extent to which integrity tests possess incremental validity further to that obtained by personality variables; 3) The need to reduce the selection of individuals on the basis of personality traits that are irrelevant to dishonest behaviour but nevertheless may be assessed for in integrity tests.

Initial research showed consistent relationships with various integrity tests and traits that capture emotional stability and conscientiousness (Moore and Stewart, 1989; Jones & Terris, 1983; Logan, Koettel and Moore, 1986). In particular, individuals high in dishonesty tended to be anxious, troubled by feelings, evasive of responsibility, moody, apprehensive and conscious of criticism (low stability). Those high in honesty tended to be conscientious, traditional, rule-bound, controlled and opposed to change (conscientiousness).

Collins and Schmidt (1993) found large differences between white-collar offenders and non-offenders on the Socialization (So), Tolerance (To) and Responsibility (Re) scales of the California Psychological Inventory and an integrity test. Non-offenders tended to be dependable, rule abiding, trusting and responsible. Collins and Schmidt propose a discriminating function between offenders and non-offenders of 'Social Conscientiousness'. A more extensive construct validation using 4 different integrity tests and 3 personality tests was undertaken by Woolley and Hakstian (1992). Using a factor analytic procedure on the integrity tests and personality scales, Woolley and Hakstian identified the largest factor to contain a construct of 'Socialized Control' which runs throughout the personality-based integrity tests. They suggest that high

scorers on this factor tend to have internalised the rules of society, are mature and stable with a sense of responsibility. On the other hand low scorers tend to be less mature and stable, more carefree and likely to take more risks.

By far the largest investigation of integrity – Five-Factor model links was carried out by Ones (1993, as cited in Sackett & Wanek, 1996). Correlations between a linear composite of integrity test measures and Big-5 personality scales indicated a strong relationship with conscientiousness, agreeableness and stability. Secondly, using a meta-analytic procedure, true score correlations of 0.42 were seen between conscientiousness and integrity, 0.40 between agreeableness and integrity and 0.33 between stability and integrity. The same pattern appeared for both overt and personality-based integrity tests, although the personality-based integrity test correlations were slightly higher. From these studies, Ones suggested that integrity taps a higher order factor that includes conscientiousness, agreeableness and stability. Interestingly, these 3 traits have also been shown to be a higher-order factor from factor analysis of the Big-5 traits (Digman, 1997). Digman suggested that this higher-order factor represents a socialization process such as impulse control, conscientiousness, reduction of hostility and aggression and neurotic defence. More recently, Marcus, Hoft and Riediger (2006) reported relationships between an overt integrity tests and traits of Neuroticism, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness on the revised NEO Personality Inventory. Further, Connelly, Lilienfeld, and Schmeelk (2006) found integrity test scores related less to moral reasoning and more towards moral behaviour of self-centred nature, willingness to manipulate others, externalising blame and an impulse to flout social norms.

In conclusion, the research evidence would suggest that integrity tests capture a higher order construct of conscientiousness, emotional stability and agreeableness and this does appear to reflect a concept of social control as suggested by Digman.

Interestingly, Marcus et al (2006) support this assertion in terms of the data for an overt integrity test. However for a personality-based test, they found support for the notion that it comprises distinct narrow traits at the facet level (rather than global level as described above). These facets included: angry, impulsive, excitement seeking, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, order, dutifulness, self-discipline and deliberation.

#### *Criterion related validity*

As well as establishing what concept integrity tests measure, there also needs to be an examination of the relevance of integrity tests in predicting job performance criteria. Research into the validity of integrity tests has used many different strategies, which have involved correlations with external criteria, time series designs and contrasted group designs. Generally, the results of the validity studies are positive towards integrity tests (see Sackett & Harris, 1984; Sackett, Burriss & Callahan, 1989).

Studies using the external criteria approach have shown positive relationships between integrity test scores and measures of absenteeism, theft, supervisor ratings of behaviour and self ratings of behaviour. To get a fuller picture, the reader should refer to excellent reviews by Sackett & Harris (1984) and Sackett, Burriss & Callahan (1989) as well as consulting integrity test manuals. Time series designs use the organisation rather than the individual as the unit of analysis and collect information on shrinkage (stock losses) or performance both before and after the introduction of

an integrity test. Studies have shown a reduction in shrinkage rates (Brown and Pardue, 1985) and a drop in terminations per month for theft, drug use or violence (Brown, Jones, Terris and Steffy, 1987) between pre and post integrity test intervention.

Contrasted group designs compare integrity test scores of those people who are known to be dishonest with a non-dishonest group. To show validity evidence, the non-dishonest group should score significantly 'better' (more honest) than the dishonest group. Indeed, three studies (Terris & Jones, 1982; Borofsky, 1992; and Collins and Schmidt, 1993) have all shown significant differences in integrity test scores between dishonest and non-dishonest groups.

Overall these initial studies support the validity of integrity tests. However, one needs to consider a number of criticisms when considering the research. External criteria studies suffer from issues of deception and bias when using self-reported data on dishonest behaviour and those that use theft or other more serious forms of deviance as criteria suffer from the problem of low detection rates. It is difficult to develop a measure that is trying to select out a behaviour which is infrequent. However, with more and more studies and the fact that integrity tests aim to predict a broader construct than just theft alone, the problem of low base rates is less of an issue today. Time series designs suffer from the lack of comparison with a control group where an integrity test was not introduced. Without a control group, one cannot confidently state that the reduction in dishonest behaviour was due only to the introduction of an integrity test. The main problem with the contrasted groups design is the use of criminal and non-criminal samples to illustrate the validity of the test. Using such an

approach potentially creates a positive bias in favour of the test as it is easier to distinguish between criminal and non-criminal samples than to discriminate within non-criminal samples.

Meta-analytic studies provide further support for the validity of integrity tests and such studies not only show relationships with counterproductive criteria but also with job performance. Ones, Viswesvaran & Schmidt (1993) reported the mean true validity of 0.47 for integrity tests in predicting counterproductive behaviours and 0.34 in predicting overall job performance.

Table 1 shows the mean true validity coefficients between different criteria (type of test, sample, method of study etc.) with job performance and counterproductive behaviours. The best estimate of true validity of integrity tests with the criteria is higher for the prediction of counterproductive behaviours than for job performance. Still, it is noticeable that integrity tests moderately predict overall job performance as well as substantially predicting counterproductive behaviours. Looking at it in more depth, mean true validity estimates for overt integrity tests are stronger for predicting counterproductivity than job performance, whereas the opposite is seen for personality-oriented tests.

Table 1: Mean true validity estimates of integrity tests for predicting job performance and counterproductive behaviours (adapted from Ones et al, 1993).

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean true validity with job performance</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean true validity with counterproductive behaviours</b>
Integrity Tests	222	0.34	443	0.47

<b>Type of Tests:</b>				
Overt integrity tests	84	0.33	305	0.55
Covert integrity tests	138	0.35	138	0.32
<b>Method of study:</b>				
Predictive	79	0.37	138	0.36
Concurrent	135	0.31	295	0.56
<b>Sample:</b>				
Job applicant sample	43	0.40	183	0.44
Employee sample	135	0.29	153	0.54
<b>Job performance measure:</b>				
Supervisor ratings	153	0.35	-	-
Production records	10	0.28	-	-
<b>Measure of counterproductivity:</b>				
Self-report admissions	-	-	255	0.58
External measure	-	-	187	0.32
<b>Breadth of counterproductivity</b>				
Theft	-	-	152	0.52
Broad counterproductivity	-	-	290	0.45

*Note:* N = number of correlations

From their analysis, Ones et al. (1993) argue that honesty/integrity tests predict a broader range of organisationally disruptive behaviours than just theft alone and that validities are generalisable across situations and settings.

Analysing only predictive study designs based on job applicant samples, Ones and Viswesvaran (2001) meta-analytically examined the relationship between integrity tests and criteria of overall job performance, theft and a broad measure of counterproductive behaviour. Results showed:

- Mean corrected correlation for overt integrity tests and admitted theft was 0.42

- Mean corrected correlation for overt integrity tests and counterproductive behaviour was 0.39
- Mean corrected correlation for covert integrity tests and counterproductive behaviour was 0.29
- Mean corrected correlation for covert and overt integrity tests and supervisor ratings of job performance was 0.41

Of further interest, Ones and Viswesvaran found integrity tests were a better predictor of overall job performance than specific personality trait scales. However, some traits (stability, conscientiousness, achievement orientation and dependability) were better predictors of counterproductive behaviour than integrity tests. One is left to question why integrity tests are not as good at predicting a criterion they were purposely designed to assess than specific personality trait scales. From a practical point of view this would suggest that to predict counterproductive behaviour an organisation may well just use a personality test.

Schmidt and Hunter (1998) reported a meta-analysis that examined 17 selection procedures and the relationship with overall job performance and training performance. In particular they focused on the validity of a method when combined with a general mental ability test (as this is consistently seen as the best predictor of job performance) and the incremental validity of a method above using general mental ability (GMA) alone. The largest incremental validity was seen for the combination of an integrity test with GMA and a structured interview with GMA. In both cases, the percentage increase in validity by adding the method to GMA was 27%. This means that adding an integrity test to GMA produces a 27% increase in validity over GMA

alone. In terms of utility this equates to a 27% increase in gain in dollar value or a 27% increase in percentage increase in output over GMA alone. Interestingly, for the criterion of training performance the largest incremental validity emerged for an integrity test with GMA (20%).

Clearly, these meta-analysis studies show strong support for the validity of integrity tests and even give some indication of their utility in predicting overall job performance.

### Limitations to integrity testing

So far the paper has tended to focus on the positive side to integrity tests and their use in organisations. Although some specific issues (such as faking, problems with validity studies and issues of acceptability) have been addressed, it would be remiss to think that integrity testing is not without its limitations. Individuals and organisations wishing to employ integrity tests need to consider a number of concerns before making a balanced judgement on whether to implement integrity testing.

#### *False positives*

High false positive rates within integrity testing are unattractive. The last thing a user wants is a scenario where a large proportion of honest applicants are incorrectly identified as dishonest because the screening process is attempting to select honest individuals. This aspect is especially important in integrity testing because of the implications of being rejected or in other words being labelled as dishonest. Murphy (1993) suggests that failure rates of 30 to 60% on integrity tests are common and if

base rates are at 10% then at the extreme 50% of individuals will be improperly classified. Camara and Schneider (1994) cite the work by the US Congress Office of Technology Assessment (1990), which concluded that 95.6% of people who fail integrity tests are wrongly classified as dishonest

Paradoxically, integrity tests may actually penalise those who are extremely honest in nature. For example, those who admit the slightest misdeed like taking a pen could well be classified as a thief. Those who do not own up to past misdeeds and hence are being dishonest could well be labelled as honest. Lilienfeld (1993) argues that punitive scales on integrity tests actually bias against those individuals who are forgiving and flexible.

The whole question of false positive rates in integrity testing was examined more closely by Martin (1989). He concluded that to help to reduce false positives, applicants who failed an integrity test should be screened a second time on some other independent measure. However, “As companies reduce the number of... honest applicants who are rejected, they simultaneously expose themselves to more theft prone or dishonest employees” (p. 259)

### *Labelling*

The ethical problem surrounding the interpretation of integrity test scores needs to be addressed, especially as integrity tests deal with a very sensitive human trait. Being labelled as dishonest may be seen as more serious than labels from other selection tests and an individual may suffer from problems if he/she has been wrongly labelled as dishonest or a risk to the organisation (consider how hurt and defensive people get

when others think that they are lying). Organisations and individuals need to consider how they would feed back an individual's score on an integrity test.

Best practice would suggest that an integrity test would not be the sole source of assessment for selection into an organisation. Given this, the impact of labelling would be reduced as an unsuccessful candidate would not be accepted into the job on the basis of their performance on a series of assessment tools. A generic rejection letter can then be used which would not necessarily specify performance on specific assessment tools. However, feedback could be requested on the integrity test specifically and the issue of labelling would need to be addressed.

#### *Training of test users*

As emphasised by the labelling issue, there is no doubt that care and consideration needs to be taken when interpreting and giving feedback on integrity test results. This aspect of training and qualification is an important issue. Allowing the use of integrity tests by untrained individuals is bound to present many problems (e.g. misclassification, unethical practice, and poor interpretation of the results). Assessors need to be fully trained to be able to interpret scores on an integrity test especially as the potential consequences of wrong labelling can be damaging for the test-taker as well as the test-user. The correct interpretation of test scores is perhaps the most important aspect of an integrity testing process. Incidentally, for the Hogan Employee Reliability Index and Giotto, training is required. It is likely that this operates for other integrity tests.

#### *Do you want total honesty?*

On the face of it one could assume that an organisation would want to employ those individuals who were high in integrity as they are less likely to engage in dishonest behaviour. From a dispositional perspective, these individuals would be reliable, attentive to detail, not impulsive, not a risk taker, trusting and able to cope with pressures. The ideal person perhaps? However, consider the fact that due to their personality they will also tend to be inflexible, reserved, conforming and low in spontaneity and innovation. An individual deemed a risk on an integrity test will be a risk-taker, impulsive and likely to engage in dishonest behaviours, but they will also tend to be creative, flexible, outgoing and innovative. There will be certainly some occupations where the need to be creative, innovative and perhaps bending the rules are assets. Indeed, work by Robertson, et al., (2000) reported that managers rated high on promotability tended to be rated by supervisors as flexible, innovative, motivated and persuasive.

The overriding factor emerging from this part of the discussion is the need for a trade-off between the job role and integrity on the job. Hogan and Hogan (1995) support this notion, by suggesting that there is a need to identify job type in relation to measures of integrity. For jobs requiring rule adherence and attention to procedures those with positive scores on integrity tests should be considered further. Yet for creative, imaginative, flexible jobs, those scoring positively on integrity tests will be a disadvantage. Perhaps integrity tests have suffered from the assumption that organisations wish for moralistic and honest employees and no consideration has been directed to the issue of what organisations actually need their employees to be in relation to the job itself. It leads to the question of whether organisations actually want totally honest individuals for all jobs.

## Conclusion

Integrity tests are a controversial form of assessment as they purport to measure a highly sensitive and emotive construct. Whilst sensitive, organisations are increasingly concerned with trying to reduce incidences of counterproductive workplace behaviour which not only impact negatively on the organisation but also on individuals within the organisation. The research evidence would suggest that in terms of psychometric qualities, integrity tests are a reliable, fair, valid and to some extent acceptable pre-employment selection tool which can help organisations reduce such negative behaviour. There are some issues which individuals and organisations will need to address if wishing to use integrity tests, not least the consideration of a trade-off between integrity and innovation. This is intriguing, as it implies that for some jobs organisations are potentially implicitly accepting a level of dishonest behaviour for benefits elsewhere. The problem comes when costs start to outweigh benefits.

As outlined at the start of the paper, integrity tests only tap the dispositional side of counterproductive workplace behaviour. There is a plethora of research on the organisational and social aspects of counterproductive behaviour, which move it away from dispositional causes and hence dispositional interventions. A more rounded intervention strategy of which integrity tests may be a part should be a more effective solution to controlling counterproductive workplace behaviour.

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