FAKABILITY OF A COMMERCIALY PRODUCED PRE-EMPLOYMENT INTEGRITY TEST

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ABSTRACT: Three groups of male inmates were given the PSC Survey ADT, a commercially available integrity test, under differing instructional conditions. Subjects told to fake good were able to provide more favorable test profiles than those who were told to respond truthfully or who were given no specific response set to follow. However, no differences were observed among groups on the Drinking and Drugs subscale. Using only recommended cut scores as criteria, subjects in the fake good condition would have been hired in greater numbers than subjects in the other two conditions. Practical implications of this study include the use of social desirability scales along with integrity tests, and the avoidance of inducing inappropriate response sets by strictly adhering to test instructions.

The passage of the Employee Polygraph Protection Act of 1988 eliminated the routine screening of potential employees with polygraph examinations and led to increased reliance on paper-and-pencil tests of integrity. These tests are designed to identify employees or potential employees who may be unreliable or untrustworthy. Sackett and Harris (1984) reported that 5000 companies were using pre-employment integrity tests, primarily to screen job applicants who would assume responsibilities for handling money or merchandise. O'Bannon, Goldinger and Appleby (1989) reported that over 2.5 million integrity tests are administered annually and summarized information on over 40 commercially available tests. Although Massachusetts has passed legislation banning the use of any type of predictor in hiring, and Rhode Island does not...
allow the use of pre-employment integrity tests as the sole predictor of employee potential (Sackett, Burris, & Callahan, 1989), there is a growing demand for such assessment instruments.

Integrity and honesty tests have been found valid and useful when used in the selection of personnel from among a group of applicants. Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt (in press) performed a comprehensive meta-analysis on 665 validity coefficients (cumulative sample size approached 600,000) and report a coefficient of .41 as the predictive validity of integrity tests in predicting supervisors' ratings. Their findings also revealed that integrity tests are better at predicting broadly defined counterproductive behaviors than the more narrow criterion of employee theft. The American Psychological Association (1991) issued a report by a task force commissioned to "gather and examine data relevant to the scientific and social policy considerations associated with the development and use of predictors of dishonesty, theft, and related behaviors" (p. 4). This report supports the use of integrity tests in employment selection, but points out that some test publishers adhere to standards of test development and use, while others do not. Because of this, there is a continuing need to ensure that test publishers provide instruments of the highest quality.

One area of concern about integrity tests is the possibility of dissimulation on the tests. Hough, Eaton, Dunnette, Kamp and McCloy (1990) summarize research that shows that people instructed to do so can distort responses to many types of personality inventories. Moore (1990) found that his samples of college students and behavioral scientists were both capable of producing favorable test profiles on the Phase II Profile when instructed to respond to the test items as though applying for a desired job. Ryan and Sackett (1987) randomly assigned college students to groups which were instructed to either fake good, respond truthfully, or respond as if applying for a job. Subjects then completed a 74-item scale that was patterned after existing honesty tests. Results indicated that subjects instructed to fake good earned more favorable scores on scales that measured attitudes toward theft, admissions of theft, and social desirability. However, subjects asked to respond as though applying for a job scored more like those asked to respond truthfully, supporting the conclusion that dissimulation may not occur unless prompted.1

These studies indicate that subjects instructed to do so can easily distort their responses on integrity tests in order to create a more favorable impression. However, several questions remain unanswered. Nei-

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1In this context, truthful responding is a response set induced by instructions or bias, whereas "honesty" is used to denote particular attitudes toward work and the workplace.