Why Covert Integrity Testing is Useful in Screening Security Officers

Michael R. Stowers, Psy.D.

High Demand for "Good" Security Officers

The need for security officers is a visible one, particularly given recent tragic events in the United States and around the world. There are constant reminders that the need for effective security is critical in working to keep innocent people safe from harm.

The Department of Labor predicts that the security field will be one of the fastest growing professions, with an 18% increase, by the year 2020 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). This increased demand for security officers comes with the need to accurately assess candidates so ideally only the best are selected, as they will be entrusted with the safety of others.

Within the security industry itself, there is recognition of the need to ensure that officers are capable of meeting their responsibilities. Several of the largest industrial security organizations now recommend that all candidates for security work be screened using proven assessments relevant to security work. Similarly, some states such as Florida (Fla. Stat. § 493, 2012) and Pennsylvania have passed legislation mandating the thorough screening of all armed security officer candidates by a licensed psychologist. Other states will soon follow this same path, given the high stakes involved in the hiring process.

Integrity Assessment Models

Integrity is one of the foundational aspects of protective services work, and underlies a candidate's ability to follow policy and meet the responsibilities of security work. The use of integrity as a selection criterion has been well documented (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Integrity assessments have been traditionally conceptualized in two ways (Sackett, 1994).

Overt models of integrity assessment use direct questions to assess a candidate's levels of integrity. They include such questions as "Have you stolen anything before?" and "How do you feel about theft?"

They are designed to identify undesirable workplace behaviors and attitudes and to attempt to evaluate integrity through the past actions of a candidate. The problem with overt assessments is that their transparency often works against them. The questions are more easily faked, as it is clear that there is one answer more desirable than the alternative options.

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Covert integrity assessments, on the other hand, are designed to measure personality traits that are related to counterproductive work behavior. These assessments use less direct questions such as, "Unless a rule can be justified, it need not be obeyed." or "I would do almost anything on a dare." These questions are designed to assess the relevant personality traits of a candidate, conscientiousness or reliability for example, which have been shown to be related to integrity. Covert assessments of integrity are not as susceptible to faking as overt assessments, and so provide a more viable option for screening security officer candidates.

The Personnel Reaction Blank

The Personnel Reaction Blank, or PRB, is a covert integrity assessment that is designed for use in high-volume, high-risk occupational screening. It consists of 84 items, and is designed to assess underlying personality traits related to integrity. The PRB takes about 15 minutes to complete and can be administered in a number of ways, including via the Internet.

One of the PRB's biggest advantages is that it is more resistant to applicants' attempts to "fake good". Research has shown that the PRB is resistant to most attempts at faking (Wanek, 1991; Alliger, Lilienfied, & Mitchell, 1996). Moreover, when applicants attempted to fake or are coached, there is little impact on their PRB scores (Alliger & Dwight, 2000). Even when the test takers were provided specific instructions to "fake good" their PRB scores differed very little from when they took the PRB with coaching or faking instructions. The PRB then, is an ideal integrity assessment to use when there is a high possibility of faking, such as when applying for a security officer job.

Upon completion of the assessment, PRB reports are generated instantly. PRB reports provide information on multiple critical areas related to integrity:

- Composite Personal Reliability Index (PRI): Best predictor of performance and counter-productivity

- Four subscales:

    1. Sense of Well Being - Degree of positive feelings about one's life

    2. Positive Background Indicators - How satisfying and happy early life was

    3. Compliance with Rules and Routines - Self-disciplined and rule-abiding orientation

    4. Conventional Occupational Preferences - Interest in stable, predictable jobs with career potential

The Personnel Reaction Blank has been shown to be a reliable (internal consistency of .79) and valid predictor of workplace integrity. The PRB predicts on the job performance with a validity coefficient of .34, and counter-productive behavior with a coefficient of .47 (IPAT, 2004). These coefficients demonstrate that the PRB has a robust ability to predict both job performance and counter-productive behaviors. All of the evidence suggests the PRB is a useful tool for integrity screening that can be used with security officers.

Security Officer Study

Using a sample of security officer candidates, independent sample *t*-tests were done to determine if, in fact, there are differences between security officer candidates and the general population on each

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of the PRB scales. Then, to evaluate the fairness of the test in terms of adverse impact as it relates to race and gender differences, the PRB scores were examined using MANOVA.

The sample included 244 security officer candidates, the majority of which were male (66.4%). The racial makeup of the sample (237 reported) was 38.4% African American, 33.8% Caucasian, 8.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.3% Native American/Alaskan Native, and 17.7% Other. Additionally, 16.9% of the sample identified that they were Hispanic. The average age of the candidates was 37 years.

The candidates were all assessed using the PRB and their average scores are shown in Table 1. When comparing the candidate sample scores with the general population (M=50, SD=10) all of the scales showed differences. The security officer candidate sample scored higher on the Personal Reliability Index, Sense of Well-Being, Positive Background Indicators, and Compliance with Rules and Routines. The security officer candidates also scored lower on Conventional Occupational Preferences than the general population. All differences were significant at the .01 level.

Table 1: Security Officer Candidate Average Scores (n=244)

Scale	Mean	SD
Personal Reliability Index	52.9	9.0
Sense of Well-Being	54.9	8.8
Positive Background Indicators	54.4	8.6
Compliance with Rules and Routines	58.9	11.6
Conventional Occupational Preferences	44.2	9.0

Next, any potential differences due to gender were examined by comparing PRB scores of males to those of females. As expected, there were no significant differences found in the PRB scores due to gender. Therefore, it is very unlikely that a candidate's gender has any relationship to scores on the PRB. The scores for males and females are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: PRB Scale Score Averages by Gender (n=244)

Gender	PRI M	PRI SD	SWB M	SWB SD	PBI M	PBI SD	CRR M	CRR SD	COP M	COP SD
Male	52.4	9.1	54.9	9.5	54.3	9.2	59.0	8.6	43.2	11.8
Female	54.0	8.7	54.8	8.1	54.7	7.8	58.7	8.4	46.2	10.9

Differences due to race were examined by comparing the PRB scores of each racial group to one another. Again, no significant differences were found in PRB scores as a result of race. This finding demonstrates that a candidate's race has no influence on the PRB scores. The scores for each racial group are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: PRB Scale Score Averages by Race (n=237)

Race	PRI M	PRI SD	SWB M	SWB SD	PBI M	PBI SD	CRR M	CRR SD	COP M	COP SD
C	54.1	9.4	54.8	9.2	54.0	8.9	60.9	7.1	45.8	11.7
AA	52.1	8.4	55.0	8.2	54.4	7.5	57.8	8.2	43.1	11.2
AI/AN	55.3	8.7	59.3	2.3	57.0	6.5	61.3	11.5	42.7	4.0
A/PI	51.9	7.9	54.2	8.6	56.4	6.9	57.5	9.7	42.1	12.9
O	52.6	10.4	54.4	11.3	54.1	12.0	58.0	10.4	44.6	11.9

Finally, any difference between those who identified as Hispanic and non-Hispanic on the PRB were examined. No significant differences were found between those who identified as Hispanic and those who did not. This suggests that PRB scores are not influenced by whether or not the candidate self-identifies as being Hispanic. The scores for the two groups are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: PRB Scale Score Averages of Hispanic and Non-Hispanic (n=237)

Hispanic	PRI M	PRI SD	SWB M	SWB SD	PBI M	PBI SD	CRR M	CRR SD	COP M	COP SD
Yes	52.5	10.2	54.3	11.6	54.8	11.6	58.1	10.1	44.0	11.7
No	52.8	8.8	54.9	8.6	54.3	8.2	58.9	8.2	44.1	11.5

Discussion

The results of this study of the Personnel Reaction Blank help to provide support for its use in screening security officer candidates. The security officer candidates showed differences from the population on all of the PRB scales. The results suggest that the candidates are likely to be more reliable, have a greater sense of well-being, have more positive life experiences, and are more likely to follow rules and procedures when compared to the general population.

Furthermore, candidates are also more likely to enjoy the ever changing and unpredictable nature of security work. The overall candidate profile points to both higher levels of integrity and likely success in employment as security officers.

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Given the nature of those likely to seek out work in the protective services field, the differences between candidates and the general population fully support the ability of the PRB to identify those well suited to the job. Security work has a tendency to draw people with a sense of duty and respect. Many security officer candidates also come from previous law enforcement and/or military experience, which could also be a contributor to the score differences seen above. The PRB helps to quickly identify those who are likely to succeed and provides a good starting point in the candidate screening process.

With any assessment, fairness is always a concern. Personality-based assessments have repeatedly shown to have little to no adverse impact when compared to other ability-based measures. The results of this study fully support the fairness of using the PRB and show that the risk of adverse impact is very low. This makes the PRB a more defensible selection assessment than others, as it treats candidates the same, regardless of group membership.

Taken together, the outcomes of this research suggest that the PRB can be useful in identifying: 1) Those who are likely to perform at high levels of integrity and 2) Individuals who are likely to avoid engaging in counter-productive work behaviors.

Adding to the usefulness of the PRB as a screening measure are the findings of the adverse impact analyses, which show the PRB is a fair assessment that does not discriminate against protected groups.

Together, these two important findings, along with the covert nature of the PRB, point to the PRB as ideal for use when screening of security officers.

Summary

There will always be a need for people who are willing to make protecting others their responsibility. As the need for security officers continues to grow, the need to ensure the best candidates are chosen will grow as well. Integrity is a key behavioral characteristic for people working in the security field and the PRB provides employers with a valid, fair, and truthful way to screen for this critical characteristic. By using the PRB when choosing security officers, security firms can be assured they are making a sound, reliable hiring decision.

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