

ACN

Assessment Council News

Newsletter of the IPMA-HR Assessment Council

October 2008

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From the Editor

By Anthony Bayless

In this issue of the ACN, we say farewell to the long-time editor of the ACN *Technical Affairs* column. After 13 years of providing readers with insight into technical issues dealing with personnel assessment and providing a source of humor dealing with human resources, **Michael Aamodt** is calling it quits. On behalf of all ACN readers, I would like to thank Mike for all of his contributions over the years! I am not the official IPMAAC historian, but Mike's service over the last 13 years must be a record of some sort! Please be sure to read his last *Technical Affairs* column in this edition of the ACN.

Also in this edition of the ACN, **Dennis Doverspike** and **Pamela Vaiana** provide a discussion about employers conducting Internet searches for additional information on their job applicants. Dennis and Pamela talk about the ins and outs of collecting applicant information from the Internet. What are the legal ramifications?

Marianne Ernesto, APA Director for Testing and Assessment, has provided us with a news release about an upcoming revision to the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*. See who has been appointed to serve on the joint committee for revising the *Standards*.

In addition, **Kris Smith**, has included for us the important dates for upcoming professional meetings and conferences. Please review this important information so you do not miss out on any professional activities!

Finally, if you have any suggestions for how to improve the ACN, please contact me at (202) 863-6295 during work hours or via e-mail at anthony.bayless@dhs.gov.

Technical Affairs

By Mike Aamodt, Associate Editor

General Announcement and Some Current Research

Prior to discussing the technical part of this month's column, I would like to add a personal note. In the fall of 1995, Beverly Waldron asked if I would be willing to serve as the *Technical Affairs* editor for 1996. I thought, "What the heck, writing a column for a year should be fun." Well, that one year has turned into 13 years of fun. But all good things must come to an end, and so this will be my last *Technical Affairs* column. Writing the column is still fun, but I think I have run out of interesting things to say (my wife would say I ran out of interesting things to say many years ago, but that is another story). I am also making a career change. After 26 years at Radford University, I am taking advantage of an early-retirement incentive and will be leaving Radford to work full-time for DCI Consulting starting in January. Although DCI is located in Washington, D.C., the good folks at DCI realize that I am a small-town guy and they are allowing me to stay and do my work here in Pulaski, VA – all I need is a computer, a phone, and an airport. For those of you who supplied questions, provided answers, or gave me feedback on the column, thanks so much for making my job easier these past 13 years. Now, on to the good stuff.

What is the Shelf-Life of a Test?

I recently participated in an on-line discussion about the shelf-life of personality inventory results with a group of police psychologists in Canada. I don't know how they let a Virginian into the discussion, but everyone's comments were certainly thought provoking. At about the same time as the discussion, I received a survey from a consulting firm about the same issue so I thought the topic might make good reading for an ACN column.

Perhaps some background on the Canadian discussion would be a good place to start. Most police departments use some form of psychological screening when first hiring police officers. Normally this screening includes a test of psychopathology (e.g., MMPI-2, PAI), a background questionnaire, and a short clinical interview. The question was raised concerning whether this psychological testing should be repeated at certain intervals during an officer's career, and if so, what is the "shelf life" of the test results.

Clearly, the answer to this question involves more than psychometric issues as there are legal concerns, political issues (e.g., police unions), and employee relations issues (who wants to be constantly tested?). For this column, however, we will stick to the psychometric issues.

When we talk about the shelf-life of a test, we are probably talking about three separate issues: content validity, the content of the test itself, and the inferences we can make about the scores that individuals receive on the test.

Content Validity

Although there might not be anything wrong with the test itself, a test can exceed its shelf life if a job no longer requires the competency initially measured by the test. For example, a test of grammar and spelling may have been important in a job in the 1970s, prior to the invention of word processing programs with spelling and grammar checkers, but might not be relevant to that same job in 2008. Thus, tests used in selection should be periodically reviewed and job descriptions updated to ensure a competency is still relevant.

Test Content

For tests involving job knowledge or skill, the content of a test can certainly become outdated. For example, laws change and there are constant advances in technology and science. For these types of tests, the shelf life is relatively easy to determine by updating job analyses to ensure that the *content* of the test is representative of the knowledge and skills currently needed to perform the job.

For tests tapping such constructs as personality, character, or temperament, although the construct being tapped by the test (e.g., agreeableness, conscientiousness) is not likely to be outdated, the test items themselves might be. An example that comes to mind is the question in the original MMPI in which the test taker was asked to answer true or false to the statement "The world is my oyster." Today, few people under the age of 60 would have a clue about the meaning of such a phrase. Likewise, I saw an old personality inventory asking the test taker to rate the extent to which they were "gay." Obviously, this word meant something very different in the 1950s than it does today.

Inferences from Test Scores

An important thing to keep in mind is that any test is merely a snapshot of a person's personality, ability, interests, etc. at a given point in time. Some constructs, such as cognitive ability and personality are fairly stable. That is, we wouldn't expect a person to become markedly less intelligent five years after taking a cognitive ability test. Likewise, we don't expect an adult's personality to change drastically, unless there are significant life events affecting that person.

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Tests of psychopathology used in psychological screening might be a different issue. These types of tests do not measure *normal personality* – a construct that typically is stable (McCrae & Costa, 1994) and measured by “Big 5” inventories or tests such as the CPI or 16PF. Instead, these tests were designed to measure psychopathology, for which some dimensions (e.g., schizophrenia) would be considered fairly stable whereas others (e.g., depression, anxiety) might be less stable.

So, if an applicant “passes” a psychological exam, for how long can we say this person will be free of psychopathology? If we agree that test results are merely a snapshot of the test taker at a particular point in time, all we know is that at this point in time, we don’t see any relevant psychological problems related to being a police officer, for example. So, when we talk about the shelf-life of test results, we are really asking the question, how long will this applicant remain free from psychological problems that will affect his job?

What, then, is the answer to this question? Who knows? With high stress assignments such as undercover or special victims units, the answer might be very different from an officer who is assigned mostly to routine patrol duties.

A related question, it seems, is how long do we *need* an inference from test results to be stable? That is, once an applicant has been hired, wouldn’t behavioral and attitudinal changes be better indicators of potential problems than repeating a series of tests?

I would be curious to hear the thoughts of *ACN* readers on this topic. Perhaps interested readers could provide the content for the first *Technical Affairs* column in 2009.

References

McCrae, R. R. & Costa, P. T. (1994). The stability of personality: Observations and evaluations. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 3(6), 173-177.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - Wednesday, Sept. 24, 2008

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Joint Committee Named to Revise Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing

WASHINGTON -- A committee of researchers and experts in educational and psychological testing has been appointed to revise the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (the *Standards*) - long considered to be the definitive source for information concerning sound test development and use.

Designed to establish criteria for appropriate development, use, and interpretation of tests, the *Standards* have been widely cited by states, Federal agencies, private organizations, legislative bodies and even the U.S. Supreme Court. They are based on the premise that effective testing and assessment requires test developers and users to be knowledgeable about validity, reliability, and other measurement issues.

Co-chairs of the Joint Committee for the revision of the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (Joint Committee) are Barbara Plake, PhD, distinguished professor emerita at the University of Nebraska, and Lauress Wise, PhD, principal scientist at the Human Resources Research Organization, Monterey, CA. They, along with 13 additional members, are charged with revising and updating the Standards to reflect current research and best practices.

“The *Standards* are more important than ever given the current demand for educational accountability, the increase of testing in the workplace, and the popularity of computer-based testing,” according to Dr. Wise. “We believe that we have assembled the right committee to achieve the goal of bringing the *Standards* up to date” said Dr. Plake.

Revision of the standards will continue a long collaboration among the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. The three associations have been responsible for developing, publishing, selling, and revising the standards since 1966, when the first edition was published. The *Standards* were revised in 1974, 1985, and 1999. The popularity of the *Standards* remains strong to this day, with nearly one million copies sold since 1985.

The Joint Committee plans to hold its initial meeting in early 2009. Staff support for the committee will be provided by the American Psychological Association; questions about the committee and its work should be addressed to Marianne Ernesto at mernesto@apa.org.

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Joint Committee Continued

Members of the Joint Committee for the *Revision of the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* are:

Barbara Plake, PhD, Co-Chair
Distinguished Professor Emeritus
University of Nebraska

Laurens (Laurie) Wise, PhD, Co-Chair
Human Resources Research Organization

Linda Cook, EdD
Educational Testing Service

Fritz Drasgow, PhD
University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign

Brian Gong, PhD
The National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment Inc.

Laura Hamilton, PhD
RAND Corp.

Jo Ida Hansen, PhD
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Joan Herman, EdD
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Michael Kane, PhD
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Michael Kolen, PhD
University of Iowa

Antonio Puente, PhD
University of North Carolina-Wilmington

Paul Sackett, PhD
University of Minnesota

Nancy Tippins, PhD
Valtera Corp.

Walter (Denny) Way, PhD
Pearson

Frank C. Worrell, PhD
University of California-Berkeley

The American Psychological Association (APA), in Washington, DC, is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. APA's membership includes more than 148,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial, and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance psychology as a science, as a profession, and as a means of promoting health, education, and human welfare.

The American Educational Research Association (AERA) is the national interdisciplinary research association for approximately 26,000 scholars who undertake research in education. Founded in 1916, AERA aims to advance knowledge about education, to encourage scholarly inquiry related to education, and to promote the use of research to improve education and serve the public good.

The National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME) is a professional organization for individuals involved in assessment, evaluation, testing, and other aspects of educational measurement. Members are involved in the construction and use of standardized tests; new forms of assessment, including performance-based assessment; program design; and program evaluation. NCME members include university faculty; test developers; state and federal testing and research directors; professional evaluators; testing specialists in business, industry, education, community programs, and other professions; licensure, certification, and credentialing professionals; graduate students from educational, psychological, and other measurement programs; and others involved in testing issues and practices.

Googling for Job Relevant Information

By Dennis Doverspike and L. Pamela Vaiana

In January of 2007, a relatively young female teacher here in Northeast Ohio found herself in the middle of a local controversy, although one which has been repeated in similar versions around the country. The teacher ended up resigning her part-time high school teaching position following parental concern over the content of her MySpace page. Although we do not know if anyone has kept official numbers, this young

teacher joined a number of others around the country who lost their jobs because of controversies over personal materials found on the Internet.

Most of the news reports appear to have focused on individuals who were fired from their jobs because of the content

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of social networking sites. However, it is clear that more interviewers, supervisors, and HR departments are now searching the Internet for information on job applicants, as well as current employees. This goes beyond traditional background searches to include social networking sites.

Scouring the Internet for potentially damaging information on job applicants does raise different legal and ethical questions than does the review of data on current employees. We do not have numbers on what percentage of organizations are conducting searches on the Internet but we do have estimates. One estimate is that one half (50%) of U.S. employers use the Internet to search for information on applicants. The percentage may be even higher. It probably varies by the level of the job and the type of the organization. It does appear that many organizations and HR professionals are doing routine searches, both informal and formal, before making a final hiring decision. In all likelihood, this will become more common.

Not only are employers searching for information, but colleges also are using social network sites to gather information on applicants. One article by John Hechinger in *The Wall Street Journal*, September 18th, 2008, indicated that, "A new survey of 500 top colleges found that 10% of admission officers acknowledged looking at social networking sites...The vast majority of the colleges surveyed had no policy about when it was appropriate for school officials to look at prospective students' social networking sites." Our guess would be that the percentage is a lot higher than 10%. In some cases, the negative information comes from competing applicants.

The information searched for by employers may range from the more mundane, such as whether or not the applicant's stated college actually exists, to very public information, such as the content of newspaper articles, to the more private but still public information, such as content on social networking sites. In some cases, the search may be incorporated into a formal background check. The use of such information is more common for higher lever jobs, executive jobs, jobs in the public eye, and jobs where there are security issues.

Overall, organizations are looking for information on the Internet and are using this information in making hiring decisions. There is a tendency to emphasize looking for job-related information, which is good. Of course, in looking for job-related information, organizations may come across potentially inappropriate information or non-job-related information.

This leads to the main concern, primarily legal, that such searches will lead to the collection of information that should not be known. Examples could include health information, marital information, or data on sexual orientation. Once such information is known, the question is always whether it can be placed back in the box. As with many other areas of HR, the informal nature of such searches leads to concerns as to

whether they are being conducted in a consistent and unbiased fashion.

Overall, a lot of organizations and individual recruiters are already using searches of Internet information. There can be legal issues both with using and with not using such information. However, the legal risk may be less for publicly available information on the Internet than for other types of information. Although there is a legal risk in searching for information, there may be a legal risk in not gathering damaging information. In addition, some states may restrict accessing or obtaining certain types of information; even if not illegal under Federal law.

We think the critical point is the need to develop consistent policies for reviewing and making decisions based on social networking sites. As with other HR procedures, there should be documentation and consistency.

From an assessment and psychological standpoint, there is another interesting issue. The searches are a method used for screening, selection, and assessment, but what are the constructs being investigated? What kind of decisions are being reached and how valid are those decisions? It would appear that a lot of the decisions involve using negative information to select people out of the hiring process. Can managers or HR professionals make such inferences or decisions with any accuracy? Is the negative information receiving too much weight? We do not know, but as with any type of assessment, it would be intriguing to look at the reliability and validity of such decision processes.

For those interested in additional information, we would suggest:

Green, J. (2008, June). Personnel assessment: Avoiding the legal pitfalls. Paper presented at the 32nd Annual IPMAAC Conference on Personnel Assessment, Oakland, CA.

Sprague, R. (2007). Googling job applicants: Incorporating personal information into hiring decisions. *Labor Lawyer*, 23, 12-40.

Dennis Doverspike, Ph.D., ABPP, is a professor of psychology at the University of Akron. He is chair of the Professional and Scientific Affairs Committee of the IPMA Assessment Council (IPMAAC), which is a section of IPMA-HR. Dr. Doverspike may be reached by e-mail at dd1@uakron.edu. Pamela Vaiana, MSE, is a principal at St. John the Evangelist Catholic School in Bellefonte, PA, and may be reached by e-mail at pvaiana@saintjohnsch.com. They have an HR blog at <http://www.ohioverticals.com/blogs/hrlite/>

IPMAAC Across the Nation

News of the Councils

By Kristine Smith, Associate Editor

American Psychological Association (APA)

The 2008 conference was held August 14-17 in Boston, MA. The 2009 conference will be held August 6-9 in Toronto, Canada. The deadline for submitting a presentation or program is December 1, 2008. For more information, visit their Web site at www.apa.org.

Chicago Industrial/Organizational Psychologists (CI/OP)

CI/OP is a society of human resources professionals from the Greater Chicago area who meet to discuss current issues in I/O psychology. CI/OP generally has Friday afternoon sessions from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. featuring several speakers addressing a topic. For more information and to confirm meeting dates and topics, visit their Web site at www.ciop.net.

Gateway Industrial-Organizational Psychologists (GIOP)

GIOP is a group of psychologists and human resources professionals in the metropolitan St. Louis area. The group offers programs and conferences on a wide range of topics. For more information, visit the GIOP Web site at www.giop.org.

International Public Management Association for Human Resources (IPMA-HR)

For more information, visit the IPMA-HR Web site at www.ipma-hr.org. The IPMAAC annual conference was held June 8-11 in Oakland, CA. Many presentations from the 2008 conference and previous conferences are available online at www.ipmaac.org.

Metropolitan New York Association for Applied Psychology (METRO)

For more information, call the MetroLine at (212) 539-7593 or visit METRO's Web site at www.metroapppsych.com. **There will be a presentation on October 15, 2008, by Maria Amato on "Engaging Employees by Developing Best-in-Class Managers: How a Focus on Manager Development Can Reap Rewards Throughout the Organization."**

Mid-Atlantic Personnel Assessment Consortium (MAPAC)

MAPAC is a non-profit organization of public sector personnel agencies involved and concerned with testing and personnel selection issues. For details on MAPAC, contact Michael Ford from the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey at mford@panynj.gov, or visit the MAPAC Web site at www.ipmaac.org/mapac.

Minnesota Professionals for Psychology Applied to Work (MPPAW)

MPPAW is an organization consisting of a broad range of practitioners, consultants, and professors who meet to encourage an open exchange of information relevant to psychology as applied to work and human resources management. For more information, visit the MPPAW Web site at www.mppaw.org. The next meeting will be held on October 21, 2008, and the speaker will be Dr. Elise Amel presenting "Plugging into the Green Movement in Organizations."

Personnel Testing Council of Arizona (PTC/AZ)

PTC-AZ serves as a forum for the discussion of current issues on personnel selection and testing. It encourages education and professional development in the field of personnel selection and testing and advocates the understanding and use of fair and professionally sound testing practices. For more information about PTC-AZ, contact Vicki Packman, Salt River Project at 602-236-4595 or vspackma@srpnet.com or visit the PTC/AZ Web site accessible through the IPMAAC Web site at www.ipmaac.org/ptca.

Personnel Testing Council of Metropolitan Washington (PTC/MW)

PTC/MW offers monthly luncheon programs and publishes an informative newsletter. See the 2008 calendar for scheduled luncheon speakers or visit the PTC/MW Web site accessible through the IPMAAC Web site at www.ipmaac.org or directly at www.ptcmw.org. The next meeting will be a workshop presentation on October 15, 2008, by Dr. Deborah Gebhardt on "Developing Physical Ability Tests and Setting Defendable Cutoff Scores."

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Personnel Testing Council of Northern California (PTC/NC)

PTC/NC offers monthly training programs addressing topics and issues that are useful and relevant to personnel practitioners of all levels of expertise. The monthly programs are typically scheduled for the second Friday of each month and alternate between Sacramento and the Bay area. The monthly programs feature speakers who are active contributors to the personnel assessment field. For more information regarding PTC/NC programs, visit the PTC/NC Web site accessible through the IPMAAC Web site at www.ipmaac.org or directly at www.ptcnc.org.

Personnel Testing Council of Southern California (PTC/SC)

PTC/SC serves as a forum for the discussion of current issues in personnel selection and testing; encourages education and professional development in the field of personnel selection and testing; advocates the understanding and use of fair and non-discriminatory employment practices; and encourages the use of professionally sound selection and testing practices. For more information regarding luncheon meetings, workshops, upcoming conferences, or membership, visit the PTC/SC Web site accessible through the IPMAAC Web site at www.ipmaac.org/ptcsc.

Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM)

Contact www.shrm.org/education for a current listing of seminars and conferences.

Society for Industrial/Organizational Psychology (SIOP)

The 2009 conference is scheduled for April 2-4 in New Orleans. For more information, visit the SIOP Web site at www.siop.org. The 4th Annual Leading Edge Consortium, "Executive Coaching for Effective Performance: Leading Edge Practice and Research," will be held October 17-18, 2008, at the Westin Hotel in Cincinnati, OH.

Western Region Intergovernmental Personnel Assessment Council (WRIPAC)

WRIPAC comprises public agencies from the western region of the United States who have joined together to promote excellence in personnel selection practices. WRIPAC has three meetings each year that are typically preceded by a training offering. Additionally, WRIPAC has published a monograph series and job analysis manual. Additional information may be obtained by visiting WRIPAC's Web site at www.wripac.org. The next meeting will be held October 2-3, 2008, in Sparks, NV. The theme of the meeting is "Promoting Excellence in Personnel Selection Practices."

Western Region Item Bank (WRIB)

WRIB is a cooperative organization of public agencies using a computerized test item bank. Services include draft test questions with complete item history, preparation of "printer ready" exams, and exam scoring and item analysis. Membership includes more than 160 agencies nationwide. For more information, call (909) 387-5575. For more information, visit the Web site at www.co.san-bernardino.ca.us/hr/wrib/splash.asp.

Upcoming International, National, and Regional Conferences and Workshops

OCTOBER

- 15 PTC/MW Breakfast Meeting. Dr. Deborah Gebhardt, Human Performance Systems. “Developing Physical Abilities Tests and Setting Defensible Cutoff Scores.”
- 15 METRO Meeting. New York City, NY. Maria Amato, CLC Solutions. **“Engaging Employees by Developing Best-in-Class Managers: How a Focus on Manager Development Can Reap Rewards Throughout the Organization.”**
- 16-17 IPMA-HR. Developing Competencies for HR Success. Long Beach, CA
- 17-18 SIOP Fall Consortium. Cincinnati, OH.
- 18-22 IPMA-HR International Training Conference. Las Vegas, NV.
- 19-22 Organization Development Network. Annual Conference. Austin, TX. Contact: www.odnetwork.org
- 21 MPPAW Meeting. Minneapolis, MN. Dr. Elise Amel, University of St. Thomas. “Plugging into the Green Movement in Organizations.”
- 27-29 SHRM Conference. “Workplace Diversity.” Atlanta, GA.

NOVEMBER

- 5-8 American Evaluation Association. Annual Conference. Denver, CO. Contact: www.eval.org
- 12 PTC/MW Luncheon Meeting.
- 12-14 MAPAC Meeting. New York City, NY.
- 13 IPMA-HR Webinar. “Benchmarking Survey-Employee Engagement.”
- 13 PTC/NC Luncheon Meeting. Bay Area.
- 13 IPMA-HR Webinar. “Employee Engagement – IPMA-HR Benchmarking Survey Results.”

DECEMBER

- 10 PTC/MW Luncheon Meeting.
- 11 PTC/NC Luncheon Meeting.

Kristine Smith is a Senior Associate with Darany and Associates in Redlands, California. If you have regional organization news or an item to add to the calendar, please contact her by e-mail at smithk1@earthlink.net or by telephone at (909) 798-4475.

(Some of the information in this calendar was reprinted with permission from the PTC/MW Newsletter which was compiled by Lance W. Seberhagen, Seberhagen & Associates.)

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Nominations/Bylaws

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TEST PRODUCTS & SERVICES



IPMA-HR...

- Offers entry-level and promotional tests for police, fire, corrections, telecommunicator and administrative personnel.
- Delivers high-quality, reliable test products and services to the public sector.
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About the *ACN*

The *ACN* is the official newsletter of the International Public Management Association Assessment Council, an association of individuals actively engaged in or contributing to the professional, academic and practical field of personnel research and assessment. The Council has approximately 400 members.

The *ACN* is published six times a year during the even months of the year. It serves as a source of information about significant activities of the council, a medium of dialogue and information exchange among members, a method for dissemination of research findings and a forum for the publication of letters and articles of general interest.

Submissions for Publication: Assessment Council members and others with letters or articles of interest are encouraged to submit materials for review and publication. Submission deadlines for 2008 are:

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Articles and information for inclusion in the sections (*News of the Councils, Technical Affairs, Practice Exchange*) should be submitted directly to the Associate Editor responsible for the appropriate section. Submissions may also be made to the Editor.

If you have questions or need further information please contact the Editor, Associate Editors, or IPMA-HR.

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