

BIAS, RACISM, AND HIRING: WHAT WE KNOW, WHAT WE DON'T AND WHAT WE NEED: PRE-EMPLOYMENT PSYCHOLOGICAL SCREENING

CERISE M. VABLAIS, MBA, PHD, ABPP

PUBLIC SAFETY PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES, PLLC

OCTOBER 14, 2020

HELP@PSSPC.NET

© - 2020 PUBLIC SAFETY PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES



**Public Safety
Psychological Services**

WHERE WE WERE....

- 1967- The need to assess police officer applicants was first acknowledged by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice
 - Recommended that all law enforcement agencies conduct psychological testing to screen out poorly suitable applicants
- 1973 – National Advisory Council on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals recommended all applicants seen by a qualified psychologist or psychiatrist
- California enacted its own regulations requiring that “police officer candidates be found free of mental or emotional conditions that would affect their ability to perform law enforcement duties, as determined by a qualified psychologist or physician.” (Peace Officer Standards and Training – POST)

DEVELOPMENT OF THE POST DIMENSIONS

- Phase 1: Review of past peace officer job analyses
 - Psychologists who were members of the IACP – Police Psychological Services Section were asked to provide job information related to psychological traits
 - Reviewed job descriptions, outcome studies, performance issues
 - An initial list of "psychologically relevant performance problems, job functions and job demands" was developed
- Phase 2: Development of the POST Job Analysis Questionnaire
 - Traits identified in Phase 1 were evaluated by rates to assess their importance to job performance
- Phase 3: Focus Groups
 - Groups were conducted to validate the initial list of psychological traits
- Phase 4: Critical Incidents
 - Reviewed both positive and negative performance incidents in significant events to assess for behavioral traits and their effectiveness in a given situation

FINAL POST DIMENSIONS

1. Social Competence
2. Teamwork
3. Adaptability/Flexibility
4. Conscientiousness/Dependability
5. Impulse Control/Attention to Safety
6. Integrity/Ethics
7. Emotional Regulation/Stress Tolerance
8. Decision-Making/Judgment
9. Assertiveness/Persuasiveness
10. Avoiding Substance Abuse and Other Risk-Taking Behavior

WHERE WE ARE NOW:

- Wide variations in national standards for hiring!
- Washington State
 - Pre-employment required for all LEOs and for all FFs for departments of a certain size
 - Not required for COs and 911, other job categories
- Part of the national conversation **SHOULD** be the importance of competent screening
 - Some states **STILL** do not require pre-employment psychological evaluation for LEOs, many to most do not require for firefighters or dispatcher, corrections and other positions

PRE-EMPLOYMENT PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION

- Suitability
 - Possess personal traits and characteristics that match the values of the organization
 - Possess the maturity and capacity to serve the community in a safe and effective manner
- Stability
 - Select applicants who are free of serious emotional problems
- State of Where we Are
 - Limited Predictive Validity on current measures but.... We are working on that and YOU can help

SUITABILITY ASSESSMENT REPORT (SAR)

- Personal History Report (PHQ)
 - History of Citizen Complaints (Current public safety employees)
 - Ask about bias complaints, excessive use of force, etc.
 - Asks about prejudices against another group of people (True/False)
 - Asks if they have ever been a member or supporter of a group that seeks to deny civil rights to others (True/False)
 - Asks about rejections from other public safety hiring processes
- Supplemental Personal History Questionnaire (Pre-COE)
 - "What is the most negative interaction you have had with a person of a different ethnic or racial background?"

POST COE PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATION

- Psychological History Report (PsyQ)
 - Has never been/Has been the subject of complaints or disciplinary action for verbal or physical behavior directed against women, minorities, or other protected groups.
 - Does not make/has made jokes or negative comments at work about women, minorities, or other protected groups.
 - Does not think/Thinks it is acceptable to make jokes or negative
 - Has no prejudices/Has prejudices against groups
- During psychological interview, we ask: “What is the most negative interaction you have had with a person of a different racial or ethnic background?”
- Note on Virtual Interviewing/Digital Footprint

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH:

- Candidates with higher scores on Dominance (Do) were at greater risk for subsequently being rated by supervisors as having control of conflict problems. (CPI-434)
- Continued support for the CPI-PPSR's probability of involuntary departure equation as being predictive of performance issues
- Preliminary finding that candidates with lower scores of the Tolerance (To) scale are more likely to have verbal conflicts and to have a lower tolerance for individuals with beliefs different than their own

WHERE WE NEED TO GO:

New Changes to California Law:

- peace officers shall meet all of the following minimum standards:
 - (f) Be found to be free from any physical, emotional, or mental condition, including bias against race or ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, disability, or sexual orientation, that might adversely affect the exercise of the powers of a peace officer.
- **SEC. 2.**
- Section 1031.3 is added to the Government Code, to read:
- **1031.3.**
- (a) The Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, by January 1, 2022, shall study, review, and update their regulations and associated screening materials related to the emotional and mental condition evaluation required by Section 1031 to incorporate both of the following:
 - (1) Identification of explicit bias towards race or ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, disability, or sexual orientation.
 - (2) Identification of implicit bias towards race or ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, disability, or sexual orientation.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY 11TH POST DIMENSION?

- Psychologists Casey Stewart, David Corey and Sandra Jenkins have proposed an 11th dimension:
 - Multiculturalism, defined as the “recognition of how cultural factors (e.g., race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, gender, age, disability, class status, education, and religious or spiritual orientation) play out in individuals and society, as well as how applicants are influenced by their own unique identities.”
- Challenge will be developing valid tests to measure these constructs

PROPOSED QUESTIONS:

Ask throughout the hiring process – oral interview, background investigation and psychological interview

- Tell me about your experience studying, working or living with people of diverse backgrounds? What surprised you about these experiences? What did you learn?
- How do you define cultural competency? What do you do to increase your own cultural competency?
- Define explicit bias. Define implicit bias. What do you think of those terms?
- FOR LEO applicants: How do you think policing can address the current national concerns raised by communities of color?

WHAT WE NEED FROM YOU!

- Background investigation, polygraph report, THE MORE information the better
- National call to action
 - Pre-employment psychological evaluations in ALL jurisdictions for ALL public safety personnel
- We need to know when things don't work out! Outcome data is the ONLY way to make better tests that increase predictive validity
 - This is especially true because inappropriate and/or illegal acts by first responders, especially in the area of bias are a “low base rate phenomenon” – so ANY information we can get is helpful
 - Engage your supervisors and command staff in a discussion about the necessity to take note of inappropriate behavior that shows bias, either explicit or implicit

QUESTIONS?

Cerise M. Vablais, MBA, PhD, ABPP

cvablais@psspc.net

425.775.4477