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An investigation of the predictive validity of implicit and explicit measures of integrity

Integrity involves the capacity to know and do the right thing, especially in situations where there are incentives to do otherwise. Managing risks related to character failure is a problem that many organizations find challenging. The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (2006) suggests that employee theft and fraud cost $600 billion a year to organizations in the United States. Many explicit (self-report) measures have been developed to help identify those who are at greater risk of character failure. Sackett, Burris, and Callahan (1989) organize these measures into two broad categories – overt measures that transparently ask about dishonest beliefs and conduct, and personality measures that involve more subtle questions related to impulsiveness, social insensitivity, and hostility toward rules and authority. More recently, implicit (IAT) measures have been developed that are patterned after measures in both of these categories (Fischer, Stassen, Thomas & Willis, 2015). The present study examined the incremental predictive validity of five Implicit Association Tests (IATs) over that which five established explicit measures from both categories can achieve.

A temptation manipulation described by Ariely (2013) provided opportunities for subjects to lie, cheat, and steal on a number finding task in order to receive a financial reward. About half (51%) of the subjects (N=220) lied about their performance on the task and claimed more money than they earned. Hierarchical discriminant function analysis of this dichotomous criterion measure yielded non-significant results (p=.77). Furthermore, the mean differences across the two groups for only two of the five IATs were in the predicted direction. A second criterion measure involved the magnitude of fraud (i.e., how much money they fraudulently claimed). Although a hierarchical regression analysis using this criterion measure yielded non-significant results (p=.87), the only significant zero-order correlation of the 10 predictor variables with this criterion measure was one of the IATs (r=.15, p<.05). However, a step-wise regression analysis based upon only those who lied (N=112) resulted in a model that included only one of the explicit measures (R=.29, p<.01).

These results are both disappointing and surprising. Past research with the implicit measures had shown that they were predictive of behavior related to character failure (Fischer et al, 2015) and that they provide incremental validity over predictions based exclusively upon explicit measures (Fischer, Thompson & Turner, 2012). One possible explanation involves the nature of the temptation manipulation used to elicit the target behavior. The Ariely procedure differed in several ways from the temptation manipulation used by Fischer to obtain criterion behavior. Another problem involves unreliability in the implicit measures. The mean reliability of the five IAT measures was .62. Future research would benefit from expanding the criterion space (the experimental manipulations used to elicit criterion behavior) and enhancing the reliability of the implicit measures.