

Practical Considerations for Using the 16PF® Protective Services Report

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Psychological Testing in Law Enforcement

Traditionally, testing in law enforcement has focused on ability and physical requirements. While psychological interviews are utilized, they are often viewed as a quick way to screen out obvious pathology. Similarly, written psychological assessments typically focus on pathology. With roughly 26% of the population demonstrating symptoms of pathology in a given year (Kessler, Chiu, Colpe, Demler, Merikangas, Walters, & Wang, 2006), a purely pathological approach to law enforcement testing is incomplete.

For a comprehensive assessment strategy, psychologists need a tool that will help them understand how an applicant will typically behave, given the job requirements of law enforcement. Generated from the 16PF® Fifth Edition Questionnaire, the 16PF Protective Services Report (16PF PSR) provides insight into the normal aspects of an applicant's personality, with a focus on the qualities that lead to good performance in positions of public safety. Thus, inclusion of the 16PF PSR in the assessment protocol complements the pathology-oriented assessments and interviews by providing psychologists with a more complete picture of each applicant.

Overview of the 16PF PSR

The 16PF PSR is centered on four dimensions that relate to public safety performance: Emotional Adjustment (EA), Integrity/Control (IC), Intellectual Efficiency (IE), and Inter-personal Relations (IR). These four dimensions succinctly capture the essence of the report and inform your decisions on the key selection variables used in pre-employment screening for public safety related positions.

Along with the four PSR Dimensions, the report profiles the sixteen Primary Factors and five Global Factors of normal adult personality. In addition to the normal personality traits, the report provides three Response

Style Indices: Impression Management (IM), Infrequency (INF), and Acquiescence (ACQ).

With the report in hand, a review of the Response Style Indices serves as a validity check before moving to the four PSR Dimensions, and then the 16PF Primary and Global Factors. Using this information, a psychologist can start conceptualizing the applicant and identify areas to explore in the interview process for a deeper understanding of each individual.

PSR Dimensions: Guiding Lights

Consistent with other 16PF report scores, the four dimensions of the 16PF PSR are described in Stens (scores in Standard Ten), and are typically discussed in general terms of "low", "high", and "mid-range" scores.

Emotional Adjustment (EA) is the applicant's ability to be effective on the job due to good coping skills. EA also has implications for one's ability to be a team player and to be perceived by others as team-oriented.

Research is consistent regarding the positive correlation between an individual's ability to manage stress well and good work performance. A high score on this dimension also indicates a better ability to work in groups, perform better in training academies, and a higher probability of being rated as suitable for the job (IPAT, 2007). This is similar to what the California POST requires in screening for peace officers. In California, the term is referred to as Stress Tolerance and, in brief, suggests one's ability to remain composed in stressful situations (California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, 2006).

A low score on EA signifies that the applicant reacts to stress strongly and has difficulty managing stress. Passivity can also describe this type of person. A high score indicates an applicant is assertive and emotionally equipped to manage stress and tension.

Integrity/Control (IC) is the tendency to abide by rules and maintain self-discipline. This dimension is exceptionally helpful in screening applicants for public safety positions because: 1) Public safety personnel require higher standards in self-discipline than ordinary citizens, and 2) Individuals in public safety positions, such as police officers, are given much latitude in their day-to-day decisions in enforcing the law while maintaining a community presence.

Where low scores on IC indicate an applicant who may show less discipline and not abide by regulations and

rules, a high score shows someone who has good internal controls, can be dependable, and follows rules. This is the conscientious, rule-abiding person, which research has shown performs well at work.

High IC scores are also associated with applicants who successfully complete structured training programs and are subsequently hired (IPAT, 2007). This dimension is similar to many suitability ratings related to integrity, ethics, dependability, and self-control.

Intellectual Efficiency (IE) is a concept related to one's ability to solve problems. The IE score also provides information on how the applicant processes information and what factors they may consider when making decisions. This dimension correlates well with academic achievement markers like GPA and other academically supported markers such as job-specific knowledge (IPAT, 2007).

Similar to the other dimensions, high IE scores have positive correlations with good hires. IE tends to account for suitability ratings that look for good judgment, proper decision-making skills, cognitive flexibility, and, along with Integrity/Control, helps you decide on someone's level of impulsivity – another important aspect of pre-employment testing.

The IE dimension is a great resource for insight into the applicant's style of decision making. Low scores show someone who prefers to incorporate others' opinions, who is likely to take more time in problem-solving situations, and who is unlikely to come to their own conclusion when pressure and distress have increased. High scores indicate an understanding for more complex and abstract problems and an ability to make decisions quickly – which is often necessary in public safety situations.

Interpersonal Relations (IR) reveals how an applicant relates to others, which is an important aspect of public safety work that is often overlooked. Whether the job is in community policing or corrections, this dimension is a component of an essential job function. IR assesses an individual's preference for relating to others -- be it cooperative, independent, or a balance of being comfortable in both. This dimension can also be viewed as a means to partially assess for social competence, poise (along with IC), whether someone is a team player, and how they implement assertiveness.

IR provides the added value of detecting an applicant's preference in social situations. The public doesn't need a wallflower protecting them. Individuals with Low IR scores are typically shy and withdrawn and will tend to have difficulty engaging others. A high-IR applicant will show an ability to develop relationships, be

cooperative, and exhibit care and concern for others in relationships.

Job-related, Valid, and Objective

In 2004, the Psychological Services Section of the International Association of Chiefs of Police outlined guidelines for conducting pre-employment assessments. To summarize, the tests used in pre-employment settings need to be job-related, valid, and objective; all of which are met with the 16PF PSR.

Job-related. The four PSR Dimensions can be mapped onto standards identified by police departments. While it can be difficult to establish the relationship between the language of personality and job-related functions, the 16PF PSR effectively bridges the gap between conceptual personality traits and job-related behaviors.

Valid. The *Protective Services Reports Manual* provides validity evidence for the PSR Dimensions for predicting a number of meaningful outcomes such as negative work behaviors, job-specific behaviors, and relations with other officers. Of course, gathering validity evidence to support the competency model for the particular role and organization is consistent with best practice.

Objective. Applicants completing the 16PF Questionnaire (which is used to generate the 16PF PSR) respond to a standard set of structured, unambiguous items, that is the hallmark of objective assessment. This set of responses is further combined to create scale scores which are compared to a normative database allowing for meaningful comparisons between applicants.

Dynamic Duo

The 16PF PSR is often added to batteries that include the Inwald Personality Inventory-2 (IPI-2), another well-researched and job-related tool for pre-employment screening. The IPI-2 measures characteristics likely to interfere with job performance, and assesses attitudes, behaviors, and life events that can detect an applicant's likely inability to be successful in public safety related work.

Together, the 16PF Protective Services Report and the Inwald Personality Inventory-2 provide psychologists with a set of tools to facilitate difficult decisions on suitability. By combining normal personality with a job-related measure that consists of both deviance and job performance indicators, the practitioner is equipped with powerful tools to confidently make solid recommendations to client agencies.

References

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