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Personnel Security: A Challenge for Social Science Methodologists

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Abstract. This article delineates three main failings of common approaches to personnel security programs--especially those program components dealings with violations of trust.

Linearity. Many analysts and crafters of personnel security programs assume that the trustworthiness of an organizations' members or population from which members are chosen is normally distributed--or that violations of normality do not prevent the employment of techniques based on normality. Even if significant divergences from normality are allowed or even expected, these analysts and crafters still assume a linear relationship between and among some operational definition of trustworthiness and a number of predictor variables. Unfortunately, the foundation for such assumptions seems to be the constraints of statistical and mathematical education more than some human ecological correspondence with a security environment.

Nonperishability. Many analysts and crafters of personnel security programs assume that their predictors of trustworthiness--once developed--may be efficaciously employed for significant periods of time. At some discrete interval, program managers are to partially or totally revalidate their predictors. These predictors are then "good to go" for some additional period of time, at which point the process is repeated. Unfortunately, there is no substantive basis offered to support the notion that the security environment and trustworthiness aspects of people significantly change only at periodic and/or discrete moments.

Suicidality. Many analysts and crafters of personnel security programs are aware that the innocent may be hurt in efforts to prevent security misbehavior and identify those who are guilty. However, this awareness seems not to have lead to obtaining reasonable qualitative and/or quantitative assessment of this suicidality--e.g., the ratio of careers of innocents being harmed or destroyed in the quest for security. The biggest problem in this assessment is the estimation of the undetected guilty.

A personnel security program must confront the likelihood of a nonlinear security universe, one that is ever-changing, and within which the innocent and guilty of past, present, and future are treated to their just deserts. Without such confrontation there may well be treachery everywhere. (See McDaniel. M.A., & Jones, J.W. (1988). Predicting employee theft: A quantitative review of the validity of a standardized measure of dishonesty. Journal of Business and Psychology, 2, 327-345; The political psychology of deception research. (June 27, 1997). IBPP, 2(9); The political psychology of deception research II. (September 26, 1997). IBPP, 3(9); The psychology of intent: Problems for personnel security and counterintelligence personnel. (May 1, 1998). IBPP, 4(17); Timm, H.W. (1991). Effect of posthypnotic suggestions on the accuracy of pre-employment polygraph testing. Journal of Forensic Sciences, 36, 1521-1535.) (Keywords: Linearity, Perishability, Personnel Security, Suicidality..)

1