8-25-2000

The Psychology of Ethics and Morality: Implications for Personnel Security and Counterintelligence

Editor

Recommended Citation

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Abstract. This article describes various psychological research approaches that might help manage ethical and moral vulnerabilities related to intentional security violations in political organizations.

Most psychological research on espionage and other intentional security violations focus on individual traits of personality, behavioral elements--including interpersonal behaviors and choice of social contexts--and self-constructed personal narratives. The idea is that traits, elements, and narratives can constitute "select-in" and "select-out" features in crafting efficacious selection, evaluation, and management programs for personnel with security clearances, access to sensitive information, and special duties. However, a strong case can be made that intentionally committing a security violation is an ethical and moral Issue involving conceptions of right and wrong. For the purposes of this discussion, IBPP will focus on the scientific psychology of morality as another venue for managing Issues of personnel security and counterintelligence.

Scientific psychology contains a database on ontogenetic moral judgment. Two of its research exemplars have been Kohlberg and Gilligan. Findings suggest that there may be a discrete number of judgmental stages concerning right and wrong, that these stages may progress in a specific order at last for some people, that gender and various sociocultural and socially constructed aspects may vastly complicate Issues such as the value of these stages and their impact on behavior, and that these stages may be in almost a continual state of flux with individuals varying on the degree of such flux depending on a host of yet other variables. Moreover, security programs would have to concurrently address different stages for a heterogeneous population--a reality that raises the complexity that a security program element would simultaneously increase the security risk from one individual and decrease it from another.

Scientific psychology contains a database on the evolution of phylogenetic moral judgment. Besides offering the same difficulties as the research on ontogenetic moral judgment, the database is not helpful for specific individuals in specific situations for specific behaviors on delineating the comparative strengths of evolutionary constraints and predilections versus contemporary self-change mechanisms.

Scientific psychology contains a database on the linkages between attitudes and behavior--here the intrapsychic elements of moral judgment being conceived of as attitude complexes. However, one well-documented problem is that different people vary in terms of consistency between attitudes and behavior. As well, the same individual may differ at different times. Moreover, examples of what psychology has termed "mindless" behavior suggest that attitudes and other phenomenological elements may at times have little to do with social behavior including that with security implications.

Scientific psychology contains a database on psychiatric nosology bearing on the motivation and ability to engage in various types of moral judgment and behavior--viz., the personality and affective disorders and the psychoses. In fact, professional speculations supporting a contemporary and geometrically increasing incidence and prevalence of the Cluster B personality disorders suggest that this nosology may become a more significant Issue in the future. Here moral judgment and behavior can form an intervening variable--a nexus--between psychiatric functioning and security-related behavior and

1

attenuates the probability that psychiatric disorder serves only as a social stigma that colors security policy but is unrelated to security except in an iatrogenic mode.

Scientific psychology contains a database on disinhibitory or "anti-sociophilic" tendencies fostered by the stimulus press of social psychological parameters--both intrapsychic and those external to the person. An example would be the research on deindividuation and its relationship with the transgression of social norms. The biggest problem here is that psychology has paid much more attention to the person part of the person x environment interaction that generates behavior than the environmental portion.

One relatively novel area of psychology that can be associated with morality and, then, security-related behavior is borrowed from psychological stress research on human behavior in extreme environments. (The following follows Morphew in the Gladwell reference below). For example, emotional panic can be delineated as something that induces or is associated with perceptual narrowing. As one case, individuals under stress--as defined by physiological activation--tend to focus or obsess on one thing. On the other hand, "choking" can be delineated as cognitive broadening wherein an individual is thinking too much. Individuals who intentionally violate security may be subject to what may be called some combination of moral panic/choking. In essence, the individual either focuses on only one moral pathway or too many. In either case, the wrong focus is followed from the political organizations' point of view.

Probably the biggest difficulty in crafting personnel security and relevant aspects of counterintelligence programs relates to a well-documented finding in scientific psychology. Each individual constitutes many selves that fluctuate through time and are contingent on various social, physical, and other psychological elements. Unfortunately, much of these are yet unknown. Assessing and predicting moral judgment and moral behavior necessarily suffers. (See Carpendale, J. I. M. (2000). Kohlberg and Piaget on stages and moral reasoning. Developmental Review, 20, 181-205; Gladwell, M. (August 21 & 28, 2000). The art of failure. The New Yorker, 84-92; Gump, L. S., Baker, R. C., & Roll, S. (2000). Cultural and gender differences in moral judgment: A study of Mexican Americans and Anglo-Americans. Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 22, 78-93; Jones, T. M., & Ryan, L. V. (1997). The link between ethical judgment and action in organizations: A moral approbation approach. Organization Science, 8, 663-680; Miller, J. G. (1997). Understanding the role of worldviews in morality. Human Development, 40, 350-354; Krettenauer, T., & Edelstein, W. (1999). From substages to moral types and beyond: An analysis of core criteria for morally autonomous judgements. International Journal of Behavioral Development, 23, 899-920; Tsujimoto, R. N., & Emmons, K. A. (1983). Predicting moral conduct: Kohlberg's and Hogan's theories. Journal of Psychology, 115, 241-244; West, J. D., & Bursor, D. E. (1984). Gilligan and Kohlberg: Gender Issue in moral development. Journal of Humanistic Education and Development, 22, 134-142.) (Keywords: Counterintelligence, Personnel Security.)