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Personnel Security: Beyond Initial Screening and Selection To Career Aftermath

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Abstract. This article describes Issues pertaining to personnel security in the aftermath of an individual's career with an organization.

Much of the scientific and policy research on personnel security focuses on an individual's entry point into said organization. At Issue are the breadth, depth, and type of the background investigation; the reliability and validity of specific assessment tools from interviews through invasive testing devices; and the true and false positive and negative rates of hiring decisions in the context of all, some, or no security violations that may have been perpetrated by specific individuals.

Much less personnel security research has focused on an individual's career with an organization. At Issue here would be the timing, nature, reliability, and validity of updated background investigations, specific assessment tools implemented post-selection, and contingent decisions to maintain an individuals' employment in the context of security violations.

Even less personnel security research has focused on an individual's personnel security risk post-career. That such a question would even be relevant for an organization's security can itself be questioned. After all, in the post-career interlude, isn't the individual no longer an employee, no longer contributing to the organization, no longer cognizant of current organizational pursuits and procedures, and, therefore, no longer a risk?

Such questioning can be countered on logical grounds alone. A post-career individual still retains information of some past and present organizational pursuits and procedures, and at least an inkling what from the past and present may be part of the future. In addition, a post-career individual may, based on ability, personality, and motivation, infer current and future pursuits and procedures about which the individual has had no access. From both retained and inferred information, the post-career individual may choose to do nothing towards the organization or choose to help or hurt it. It follows, then, that personnel security activities might valuably address the combinations of ability, personality, and motivation of post-career individuals.

When one realizes that the construct post-career denotes not only individuals who have willingly retired but also those who have been retired, fired, coercively resigned, and not renewed, one finds that there are anecdotal and empirical data supporting the logical contention that post-career individuals have hurt organizations based not on their career but on their post-career behavior.

Given that there is a logical argument supporting personnel security relevance and that there have been actual cases of organizational sabotage by post-career individuals, one might posit that personnel security authorities should have the responsibility of developing, maintaining, and upgrading programs addressing these individuals. This responsibility would be based on the premise that organizations buy people for life.

On what biopsychosocial phenomena, viz., predictive criteria, would personnel security authorities focus to minimize security risk? Some might be the same that are employed for initial and intra-career screenings. These would include political ideology, self-perceived financial status, the nature of interpersonal context, i.e., family and associates' psychoactive substance use, psychiatric status, and so on.

Other criteria might include those correlated with the construct of the psychology of involuntary job loss. This construct can include all post-career individuals, because even those who choose to retire or leave an organization may be considered to be leaving involuntarily in that they might have stayed with the organization if age, length of career, or various threats and opportunities were different.

It is in this context that a study by Price et al. (2002) from the University of Michigan may be germane. Price et al. were interested in identifying the crucial mediating mechanisms linking involuntary job loss to poor health and functioning. They found that the psychologically defined construct of financial strain (regardless of objective financial status) mediated the relationship between involuntary job loss and depression. They also found that the psychologically defined construct of personal control reduction mediated the impacts of financial strain and depression on poor functioning and self-reports of poor health.

To those readers at this point objecting through protestations concerning the miracle and wonder of retirement, one might counter with the well-documented notion (through empirical and experimental data) that even desired and welcome change can be associated with noxious internal and external events. And the key logical linkage to these supporting data is that any change has aversive potential and actual value. Moreover, just as post-career status can prove noxious to health through intervening variables, it can prove noxious to the losing organization's health through variables affecting post-career behavior, including those that are health-related.

What are the practical implications of research like that of Price et al. for personnel security authorities? One is that human developmental psychology should be mined to identify likely biopsychosocial sequelae of post-career status that may have a security impact. Human developmental psychology also should be mined for other biopsychosocial phenomena that are non-post-career-related but still may have post-career-security impact. Based on sequelae and other phenomena, personnel security intervention for post-career individuals should be constructed, applied, and evaluated. Intervention might include allowing organizational medical benefits to remain operational, allowing some organizational assets to be employed such as physical exercise and parking spaces, inviting post-career individuals to some social events, creating alumni organizations, maintaining a safety net for emergencies, and establishing preferential purchasing programs such as for travel expenses.

Returning to the premise of buying people for life, personnel security authorities might do well to reinforce the notion that one is always part of the family. Although even families have their stories of betrayal, atrocity, and brutality, reinforcing the life experience of the organizational family might well constitute benign and humane policy for the organization's security advantage. (See Depue, R.A., & Monroe, S.M. (1986). Conceptualization and measurement of human disorder in life stress research: The problem of chronic disturbance. *Psychological Bulletin*, 99, 36-51; Hamilton, L.V., Hoffman, W.S., Broman, C.L., & Rauma, D. (1993). Unemployment, distress, and coping: A panel study of autoworkers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65, 234-247; Price, R.H., Choi, J.N., & Vinokur, A.D. (2002). Links in the chain of adversity following job loss: How financial strain and loss of personal control lead to depression, impaired functioning, and poor health. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 7, 302-

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312; Turner, R.J., & Avison, W.R. (1992). Innovations in the measurements of life stress: Crisis theory and the significance of event resolution. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 33, 36-50.)(Keywords: Organizations, Personnel Security.)