

Niche Update

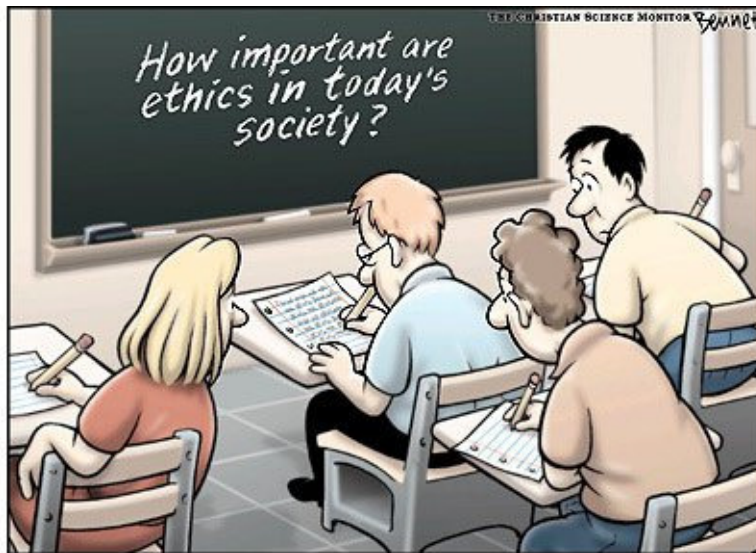
Special points of interest:

- Learning Agility—what is all the hype?
- Test length and Decision Quality
- Reduce hiring failures
- Cheating and fraud in exams and test taking

Cheating and Fraud in Psychometric Assessment

Cheating seems to have been on the news recently with the most outrageous being Lance Armstrong finally admitting to cheating for years in his drug tests for the Tour de France, after years of denial and cover-ups. Internationally in the business and education sectors there has been growing concern about test security, cheating and fraud. This is a concern, not just for applicants for jobs, but this also is occurring in school and university exams. One investigation in the US recently uncovered a group of impersonators who could be hired to take exams or tests for another person.

They would impersonate the individual using faked IDs and forged passports. The typical price for this service was \$3000 US per attempt (Eyob & Poole, 2012).



A 2009 survey of over 500 prospective MBA students in mainland China found quite disturbing views on cheating and fraud. In the survey 1 in 8 students said it was OK to have another

person take the test on your behalf and 1 in 5 said it was OK to sell the test questions in an effort to make money.

Other research has found 1 in 2 don't believe cheating is wrong and the majority believe cheating is necessary to get ahead. A survey of American students found 60-80% had admitted to cheating. Good personality assessments, like the California Psychological Inventory (CPI), are less prone to cheating as the items are less transparent. When an item is less transparent then the person taking the test may struggle to know what the item is measuring and therefore what the right answers might be for a certain job,. However, with ability tests fraud and cheating are more prevalent and more of a concern. Unsupervised internet based tests are especially prone to cheating as it is not possible to verify that the individual is doing the test themselves, alone and with no assistance from others.

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Learning Agility – “Old wine in New Bottles”

Recently you may have heard the term “Learning Agility” bandied around in HR and management circles and there certainly have been some strong claims about the importance for high potential employees to have learning agility to cope with dynamic and complex organisations.

The originators of the preference, Lombardo and Eichinger (2000) conceptualised learning agility into 4 dimensions:

- ◆ Mental Agility
- ◆ People Agility
- ◆ Change Agility
- ◆ Results Agility

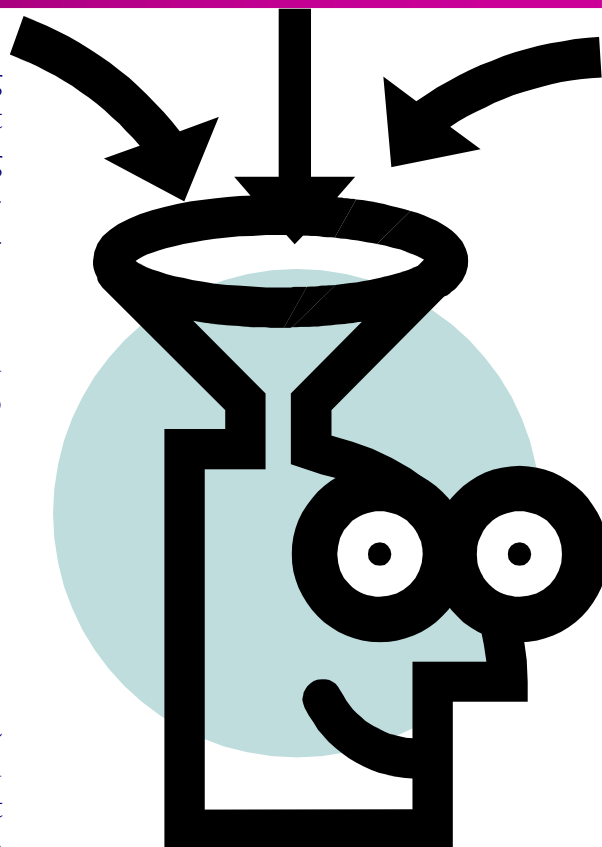
Unfortunately this seems to be another case of a test maker trying sell a new test by repackaging “old wine in new bottles” as Wang and Beier (2012) put it and we have to agree. We are not arguing that the need to learn from experience and come up to speed with new things quickly (mental agility) is not important, it is, however we are arguing that this is something that for many decades has been measured effectively through intelligence testing. The other 3 elements of learning agility in the model – people, results and change agility – also have been measured effectively through personality assessments for many decades.

There is also very little evidence that Learning Agility (as measured by Eichinger & Lombardo’s assessment) has



any predictive validity of any useful job related performance measure. This is not the case for IQ and personality testing where there is strong predictive validity evidence for IQ testing and good predictive validity evidence for personality dimensions such as Conscientiousness. Like with many “new” concepts under analysis there is often not much new to find and while

repackaging may create some excitement in the short term – any new concept or tool needs good science and rigour to back it up or its claims fall flat. Certainly with Learning Agility this seems to be more “old wine in new bottles”.



Test Length and Selection Decision Quality

There has been a push by some test makers and publishers to promote shorter tests as they are efficient to administer and there is less of a time burden on candidates. However shortening tests can impact on a test's reliability and, depending on the test, may also make the test less valid and predictive. Shortened tests for personnel selection include short ability tests but also shortened personality measures, some as short as 5 or 10 item questionnaires to measure the Big 5 construct, which is concerning. If there is only one or two items per scale, just imagine the errors that could happen were the candidate to misread the item or misinterpret its meaning. However, when you have many items on a personality scale misreading one or even two items will have limited impact on a person's overall result (for instance the California Psychological Inventory (CPI434) has 28 - 46 items per scale).



A recent article by Krueger, Emons and Sijtsma (2012) looked at shorter tests of both ability and personality and they investigated the impact this shortening had on the personnel selection decision quality. They found tests (of a single ability or preference) that were shortened to between 5 and 15 items had a serious negative impact on the quality of selection decisions. They conclude that “short tests seriously compromise decision quality if a high certainty of making correct decisions about every single individual is

deemed important”.

For example the DiSC assessment asks only 24 questions about personality and from this you can get a 23 - 26 page computerised report from the results. That is nearly 1 page of interpretation per question item. This test is both very short, which is concerning when it claims to tell you so much about someone's personality, but also when we look at what the Buro review, which is an organisation which tests the test makers by reviewing the test's construction, validity and evidence to support its use, they have this to say of the DiSC – “The DiSC Classic is an easy-to-use, well-organized self-assessment of behavior responses to work environments. On the surface level, it appears that the instrument is useful in personal or professional development. However, the test suffers from questionable reliability and unknown validity. The measure is also remiss in its lack of reliability and validity for diverse ethnic/racial populations and professional occupations. Therefore, the use of the DiSC is not recommended.”

Shortened tests seem to raise some serious concerns on test reliability and also impact negatively on personnel selection decisions. However, it is not only shortened tests that are potentially dangerous, there are many unscrupulous test developers and publishers who care more about selling their test than ensuring their tests are well developed and valid. Always ask any test provider for information on validity and reliability of their tests and ask if they have had their test reviewed by Buros, and if so, ensure you get to see this review. If the test maker has not submitted their test for review you have to ask yourself the question “why would they be afraid of their test being peer reviewed” ? probably due to fear of a negative outcome we would guess.



Reduce Failures - Hire For Attitude NOT Skills



Recent research by Mark Murphy tracking 20,000 new hires in the US, showed 46% of them failed within the first 18 months of employment. However, more interesting than the failure rate, was that new hires failed 89% due to attitudinal reasons and only 11% of the time failed from a lack of skill.

The attitudinal problems displayed by these failures included lack of coachability (26%), low levels of emotional intelligence (23%), low motivation (17%) and temperament (15%). All of these attitudinal problems can be screened from through the use of good personality assessments. Niche Consulting has always advocated hiring for the attitude and personal competencies over skills and the above research definitely backs this up.

Cheating and Fraud - Continued from Page 1

One study of fraud in a unsupervised online intelligence test found, those who were instructed to commit as much fraud as they could when taking the test gained significantly higher test results than those assigned to the honest group who were given normal instructions.

Even supervised ability tests are open to some forms of cheating. People can organise for someone else to go in to do the test on their behalf or they can use smart technology to assist them when completing the test (such as texting a friend to find an answer or searching the internet) .



At Niche we check individual's IDs to ensure it is the right person being tested and while we do not confiscate mobile phones for the testing period, we do ask people to turn them off. In addition, on the tests we use, it would probably take longer to text or search a question and get an answer than it would be to attempt the item yourself in the first place.

**There is one way to find out
if a man is honest - ask him.
If he says "yes", he is a
crook
- Groucho Marx.**

As with any area where there are high stakes in the outcome, such as a job application, some people will find ways to get ahead even when these ways are unethical and unfair. We just need to be aware of these trends and make sure we put in place mechanisms to ensure we keep our testing and

assessments as fair and uncompromised as possible from such cheating.