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Case Paper

Testing for Honesty

Dishonesty in the workplace remains a consistent worry in potential employee screenings as well as maintaining honesty after a candidate's probationary period and further on. Preserving business values and ensuring that all employees demonstrate the same values is key to maintaining fairness in the workplace as well as reflecting into the community that shares the same values creating a circle of trust; therefore, is important that it remains just. Many have joyful memories of when the holiday season commences; the cheerful bells of the Salvation Army kettlers. It had surfaced that there were kettlers who were taking charity before the nonprofit was able to distribute it by taking from the donation pails they were ringing by. That was the critical moment that determined that an efficient method in distinguishing who would best fit the desired role a company needs is needed. How does a business detect a potential job candidate who has a high risk of dishonesty while being cost-effective and just?

There have been several companies to develop an assessment that has the ability to gauge honesty in job candidates. Though there is no specific marker in these tests that would exactly pinpoint a potential employee to have a higher likelihood of dishonesty in the workplace, a determined individual can adapt and manipulate written, application honesty tests. As James Walls states in the case study *Testing for Honesty*, "They have a way of conducting themselves that is probably superior to the low-risk person. They have learned what it takes to be accepted and how to overcome the normal interview strategy, the high-risk person will get hired unless there is a way to screen for them." (Wadsworth, Cengage

Learning). The rise of written honesty assessments were due to the restrictions of polygraph tests of Congress and that assessments are economically friendlier since the cost of a polygraph involved a specific location (typically offsite), moderator, and other time consuming and more financially involved work. While honesty assessments still involve a test examiner, the scoring process is more efficient and quicker than reviewing a polygraph. This case has made it clear that these assessments are unbiased and nondiscriminatory because race, gender, or ethnicity of the job candidates have no direct impact on the scoring of their assessment. The case describes the process of these honest assessments beginning with easy and transparent questions such as "If you found \$100 that was lost by a bank truck on the street yesterday, would you turn in the money over to the bank, even though you knew for sure that there was no reward?" (Wadsworth, Cengage Learning) and become increasingly in-depth and harder the further along in the assessment to dive deep into a potential employee's character such as, "Do you think a person should be fired by a company if it is found that he helped employees cheat the company out of overtime once in a while?" (Wadsworth, Cengage Learning). Incorporating a behavioral history is a necessary inclusion to some honesty assessments as an aid for an employer to envision who a candidate is and if their behaviors will best reflect the company's values and work to strengthen those values instead of harming the company's reputation by taking advantage or displaying behavior that may otherwise hurt the profits and trust from the community. Trusting and analyzing a candidate's voluntary honesty of previous behavioral history such as drunk driving, vandalism, forgery, illegal gambling, traffic violations, while also including their opinions of illicit drug use and alcohol consumption demonstrated on more thorough assessments provides a multifaceted perspective into their profile while being considered for the position role. (Wadsworth, Cengage Learning). Later on, psychological assessments

became a way to catch a glimpse into the mind of the individual which would determine interactions in the workplace and compare the psychological profiles created for and by the candidate, again, to the company's ideal employee and the culture that the company currently has to ensure smooth flow. Despite psychological profiles providing an in-depth perspective on each candidate, the results are contingent on the answers that the candidate provides. Psychologist Keith Halperin considers and reminds that, "...would an applicant who is dishonest enough to steal from an employer be honest enough to admit it on a written test." (Wadsworth, Cengage Learning). As stated in this case, the American Psychological Association and many psychologists have voiced their concerns on the standards of these tests, and it is essential to enact governmental standards on these assessments because it is believed that these psychological tests may be an invasion of an individual's privacy by revealing intimate details of their life that is not necessary to their employment.

(Wadsworth, Cengage Learning). The case provides an instance of this invasion of privacy, Rent-A-Center. Rent-A-Center requested inappropriate and intimate true/false questions to current employees who were considered for promotion that consisted of, "I have never indulged in any unusual sex practices...I am very strongly attracted by members of my own sex...I go to church almost every week." (Wadsworth, Cengage Learning) and so on. As provided in the case, there was an employee that was fired to questioning and refusing to complete the test as it was an invasion of privacy and was ridiculous to even be asked such questions despite spokesmen of Rent-A-Center defending the utilization of such questions as they were, "...not unusual and other firms use it." (Wadsworth, Cengage Learning) though the "other firms" were not provided in the text. Where do we draw the line of intimate questions and is there an abuse of power to know too much of an employee such as using

knowledge from the questionnaire used by Rent-A-Center despite the information holding no relevance to the position?

Analyzing this case, it is considered ongoing because of the continued use of honesty and personality assessments in the workplace from candidacy to long-established employees. Though it would be considered an example of just implementation of determining which candidate would demonstrate best interests for the company and customers/community because it is a voluntary action by the candidate themselves who is applying to that specific position. However, in the case of Rent-A-Center, on what grounds are the questions ethical when refusing a questionnaire that invades privacy that would not partake on company grounds nor have legal dilemmas have weight on the decision of a pre-existing employee the opportunity to advance their career and future opportunities. Equal opportunity must be considered in determining whether questionnaires in employment advancement are fair. It is important to remember that equal opportunity is to have an unbiased approach by not judging a candidate based on stereotypes, and to ensure that the competition is worker friendly and demonstrate ability one has to best perform the position. Reflecting on the Rent-A-Center's invasive questionnaire within this context would be grounds of violating equal opportunity because it would cross the stereotype boundary from the true/false questions on the questionnaire; questions such as, "I am very strongly attracted by members of my own sex." and "I go to church every week". (Wadsworth, Cengage Learning). These questions will incite biased approaches on the stereotype of the individual depending on how the candidate answers therefore infringing on equal opportunity by creating an unjust employee selection process that the American Psychological Association had been concerned about which they continue to argue that

there needs to be a standard that addresses what is and is not permissible to request on an assessment for employment. To critique the psychological profile on how the temperament and honesty the candidate possess should only ask routine questions that would be specific to that position. For example, the question about drunk driving should apply to a driving position and should have an opportunity to explain themselves; otherwise, the candidate could be subject to stereotype of a "drunkard" under review thus infringing on equal opportunity. I agree that honesty and personality assessments at time of application are great tools in learning more about the candidate. However, test anxiety and other stress related, or mental functioning is not considered in these tests. It must be used together with the actual interview and not solely remain in prescreening because, as previously stated, it infringes on equal opportunity.

Works Cited

Wadsworth, Cengage Learning. "Testing for Honesty." Shaw, William H. *Business Ethics*. Boston: Cengage, 2014. 344-346.