

Integrity Testing

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Background

People are a very crucial component in an organization. The usage of computers, flexible-manufacturing systems, robots etc has reduced the dependence on human component for routine and mundane tasks. Still, human beings play a vital role in organizational success, especially at decision-making level as well as in providing service and maintaining relationship aspects. These roles at the field level are handled by what we call as ‘middle management positions’.

While recruiting people into organizations, technical interviews are mandatory. If written tests are conducted, they are mostly technical in nature. Attitude and aptitude tests are normally conducted at entry level to assess that the person has basic intelligence to carry out his duties.

What we do not ensure in the recruit is his level of integrity. Most organizations depend upon a rigorous system of checks and balances and red tape that frustrates the-would-be fraudster or catch him after the event. Even these are implemented for those who are likely to be involved in financial decisions. Organizations are hurt more by people in other functions who lack integrity.

It is in this context that Integrity testing comes in handy to ensure that people-inputs to the organization have the necessary level of integrity that makes them perform their functions fully, and properly.

Background Checks for ensuring Integrity

Background checks are carried out –

1. By calling up the previous employer, discreetly and seeking info. Most cases, accurate info is given and in some cases, they just give out satisfactory report. Accurate info is given, in cases where the employee is a good one. When the employee, is not very upright, the giver of info becomes a little hesitant with the feeling that he may be jeopardizing the other man’s career. Accurate info comes in for good persons and inaccurate info comes in for most of the bad apples.
2. To engage a private detective agency to do a background check before hiring. This, while being costly, is not being practical as good agencies are rare besides getting info is very difficult. There are no ways on how to get credit report of a person, as it is illegal in India to provide such info! It is well nigh impossible without knowing a person’s credit history to judge his character. Second, there is the risk of the detective agency blackmailing the candidate or the organization using the info they collected or giving wrong info to the organization.

3. Police checks are possible for Government related work but they are not accessible for private organizations except for stating if there are any cases filed against them. Absence or presence, of a case, in police stations does not give any indication as to the Integrity of the person and hence this method is not really effective in ensuring the Integrity of the employees.

Therefore, the present method of background checks being made on employees is at best a palliative and certainly not effective.

What, then, is the alternative?

Then, what is the alternative available to Indian Organizations to ensure intake of people with reliable Integrity?

The alternative is Integrity Testing of prospective candidates before recruitment and then periodic evaluation to ensure continued Integrity of the employees.

Surprisingly, Integrity Testing is around for more than two decades and I know at least one Indian organization that was doing it as part of a larger test during the recruitment process.

How do we go about it?

Integrity

What is Integrity – the understanding of Integrity is essential before we embark on Integrity Testing.

Integrity comes from Integration – meaning coming / joining together of different / disparate components to make a single-whole and the single-whole entity synergizes the attributes of the disparate components and presents a useful functionality for the universe. Integrity is the character of the integrated whole.

When it comes to human beings, who are acknowledgedly, complex beings, we use this term in a loose way.

When we talk of Integrity, we generally mean and refer to a person's ethics (of work, of property, commitment, kleptomania etc) or morals. These are drilled into the personality by the parents, teachers, relatives and environment in the early childhood of a person and may undergo a little modification as he grows as a person being exposed to influences outside his immediate circle of family, friends, environment and culture.

When the person first enters the workplace, he brings in a certain Integrity with him, uniquely his own and it is not easy to change that.

However, it is generally acknowledged that a person develops his Integrity taking cues from the behavior of his friends, role-models / celebrities / respected personalities of the organization and society, through out one's life and finally develops his own principled Integrity (conscience) with universal principles of justice, right and wrong. The process is continuous, albeit slow, as Integrity is law-abiding except when the law conflicts with the Universal Principles of Justice, right and wrong.

Classically, the term "Honesty" was used for human beings. Having learned thru painful experiences, that it is well nigh impractical to expect complete and undiluted honesty for employees, the term "Integrity" came into vogue and is being used widely. This goes to show that "Integrity" is somehow, a diluted form of "Honesty".

By Integrity, we also generally refer to the person's refusal to engage in behavior that avoids responsibility for one's actions.

The classical adage about Integrity is "**Integrity is who you are when no one is looking**". The modern day extensions are **Integrity is who you are -**

- When you are sure that no one can catch you
- Perhaps, when you are sure that no one can prove your dis-Integrity
- When you are sure that you have the powers to thwart those that are in the know about your dis-Integrity.
- When you are sure that the pay-out is better than the likely consequence / punishment

Integrity also has levels – namely, low Integrity, average Integrity and high Integrity or perhaps, it can even be seen as a continuum!

We generally refer a person with low Integrity when it is possible to easily manipulate the person's actions thru inducements – perhaps financial.

We generally refer a person with average Integrity when it is possible to manipulate the person's actions thru inducements but not very easily – may not be possible financially unless it is in obscene amounts. Other inducements like position, power or women (only for males) may result in bending the person's integrity.

We generally refer a person with high Integrity when it is not possible to manipulate the person's actions thru inducements except in very extenuating circumstances like threat to his or his family's safety and life.

Unless the society in general, is of a high Integrity, it is not economical or possible to have all employees of high Integrity. We can only aim at persons of average Integrity for employment in working levels.

We also bandy about the term "Professional Integrity". Does this mean that the Integrity a person stands for in matters related to his profession or is it that as long as the person

shows Integrity in Professional matters, we do not care about his personal Integrity or lack of it?

Dimensions of Integrity

The following are the dimensions of Integrity –

1. **Integrity of Commitment** – this indicates how well he fulfils his commitments. In organizational life, there will be many a situation wherein, the individual commitments conflict with those of the organization. It is necessary for the organization that the individual undertakes organizational commitments as his own. Otherwise, he will fail the organization by failing to meet the organizational commitments. This also indicates the person's propensity to indulge in actions – overtly or covertly – that cause – visible or invisible – damage to the interests of the organization. Failure or breakdown of any other dimension of Integrity will not have any impact, if the person has a strong Integrity of Commitment.
2. **Integrity against Inducements / Temptation / Vice** – inducements are part of organizational life. It is common to take it is easy when the boss is away! Inducements could come from vendors, competitors, and colleagues for a variety of reasons. While it certainly is not easy to resist temptation, the threshold level of succumbing to temptation is significant. Some societies frown upon touching alcohol but now touching alcohol is not a taboo but getting drunk still is.
3. **Integrity against Lust** – it is said that most wars are caused by either wine, or women. Every human being is lustful – it is referred to as libido when it is healthy. While libido is necessary for performance, lust digresses the person from his commitments and makes him do undesirable things. A person with lust is known to do unimaginable things – things he otherwise wouldn't do. Such person becomes easily manipulatable. A fine example is Samson in Samson and Delilah. It is significant to know the role played by lust in a person's life.
4. **Integrity against Greed** – greed is wanting more than necessity. Presence of greed in a person causes sell-out – of info, secrets etc. A good example is that of people endorsing products which they do not use and do not know, first hand or from independent sources. The efficacy of claims they are making to millions of people is nil – these are the people who are low in this dimension of Integrity.
5. **Integrity of Respect** – for rights and property of others – Respect for other's rights and property refrains from taking anything that doesn't rightfully belong to him. What constitutes property – office time, stationery, ideas developed in the organizations (intellectual property), phone usage and so on. Rights start from protection of trust placed in the person, right to privacy, right to expect service, right to expect safekeeping, right to expect performance of duties and so on.
6. **Integrity towards Facts** – we are not talking of universal truths here. It is rather about the propensity of the employee to tell lies. Employees tell lies all the time. Some are harmless – such as the reason for not coming into office on a day. But when it comes to protecting an erring colleague, it may become intolerable to the organization depending on the gravity of the error.

7. **Transactional Integrity** – there are many occasions when the employees get stressed out during work – sometimes caused by the customer (internal or external). It is important that the employee maintains transactional Integrity in the face of provocation. It is easy for employees to damage a transaction other than the desired one, either due to provocation or due to mischief or due to malice.
8. **Legal Integrity** – this becomes apparent when the ethics of the employee conflict with the laws – of the organization. A good example is that of dress code – some religions prescribe a strict dress code and it may conflict with organizational dress code or behavior code. It can create conflict within the person and make that person cause damage.
9. **Secular Integrity** – this is becoming increasingly recognized as a major source of anti-social actions. Religion had time again proved to be a bigger inducement compared to other inducements like money, power and self.

Integrity Testing

It is possible to measure one's Integrity. And it is also not possible to get persons with perfect Integrity. Therefore, the question to begin with is – what are dimensions of Integrity that are to be measured.

Testing is a tool for measurement. There are two approaches to Integrity testing – Direct Testing and Indirect Testing.

Direct Testing involves testing the person's Integrity levels vis-à-vis the dimensions of Integrity.

Indirect Testing involves measuring the personality traits of the individual and draw inferences there from. For example, fear is a factor in making people refrain from many undesirable behaviors such as stealing, causing damage etc. Similarly a need for security makes a person maintain decorum at workplace. Thus, inferences are drawn from the personality testing of the individual.

It is essential to define what are the dimensions of Integrity that are crucial for the organization and design tests that are appropriate for the needs of the organization.

It is very difficult to pre-validate the tests. One-way is to test the persons, whose Integrity level is known – with required level of Integrity and below the required level of Integrity.

It is an acknowledged fact that as the situation changes and time passes, the Integrity level of a person undergoes a change and his circumstances may bring in undesirable changes in his integrity level. Therefore, it is essential that Integrity Testing is carried out at regular intervals such as every year or half-year to ensure integrity of employees is at desired levels.

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