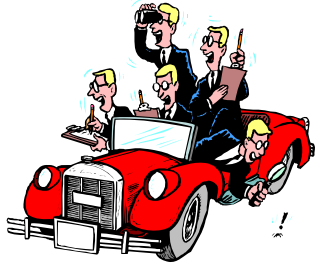


Reference Checking



Importance of Topic

- 96% of organizations check references (Burke, 2005)
- Academia: Letters of recommendation are used by nearly all universities
 - Student admissions
 - Faculty hiring
- Very little research

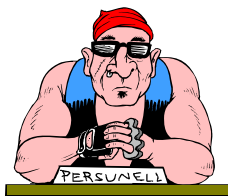
Definitions

- **Reference check**
 - The process of confirming the accuracy of information provided by an applicant
- **Reference**
 - The expression of an opinion, either orally or through a written checklist, regarding an applicant's ability, previous performance, work habits, character, or potential for future success.
 - Content and format are determined by the employer or university
- **Letter of recommendation**
 - A letter expressing an opinion regarding an applicant's ability, previous performance, work habits, character, or potential for future success
 - Content and format are determined by the letter writer

Why Check References?

- Check for resume fraud
- Find new information about the applicant
- Check for potential discipline problems
- Predict future performance

Resume Fraud



Checking for Resume Fraud

- **Why Check?**
 - 25% of resumes contain inaccurate info
 - over 500,000 people have bogus degrees
- **Obtaining Missing information**
 - unintentional omission
 - strategic omission
 - deceptive omission
- **Verifying Information**
 - truth
 - error
 - embellishment
 - fabrication
- **Alternative methods**
 - bogus application items
 - social security reports
 - hire professional reference checkers

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- Jared T. xxxxxx
Miami, Florida

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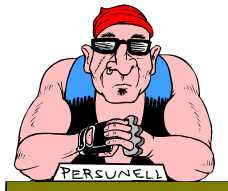


Bogus Degrees

Getting Info Can Be Difficult

Type of Information	% Asking	% Releasing
Employment dates	97	98
Eligible for re-hire	64	42
Salary history	66	41
Reason for leaving	94	19
Performance	86	18
Employability		16
Work habits		13
People skills		11

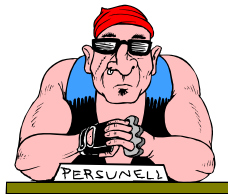
Finding New Information



Finding New Information About the Applicant

- **Types of Information**
 - personality
 - interpersonal style
 - background
 - work habits
- **Alternative Measures**
 - psychological tests
 - letters of recommendation
 - biodata
 - resumes
 - interviews
- **Problems**
 - references seldom agree
 - people act in different ways in different situations

Checking for Potential Discipline Problems



Checking for Potential Discipline Problems

- Criminal Records
- Previous employers
- Motor vehicle records
- Military records
- Credit reports
- Colleges and universities
- Neighbors and friends

Criminal Records

- Obtained from local and state agencies
- Check with each jurisdiction
- Only convictions can be used (EEOC Decision No. 72-1460)
 - "Reasonable amount of time" between release and decision to hire
 - In using convictions, employer must consider
 - Nature and gravity of offense
 - Amount of time that has passed since the conviction and/or completion of the sentence
 - The nature of the job held or being sought
 - Gousie and Aamodt (1993) Study

Type of Crime	Lawyers/HR Managers	State Supreme Court Justices
Violent Crime		
More severe/related to job	> 10 years	Never hire
Less severe, related to job	4-7 years	5 years
More severe, not related	2 years	5 years
Less severe, not related	No waiting	No waiting
Property Crime		
More severe/related to job	7-10 years	Never hire
Less severe, related to job	4-7 years	1 year
More severe, not related	No waiting	5 years
Less severe, not related	No waiting	No waiting
Moral Crime		
More severe/related to job	No waiting	Never hire
Less severe, related to job	No waiting	1 year
More severe, not related	No waiting	10 years
Less severe, not related	No waiting	No waiting

Credit Checks

- **Purpose**
 - Predict motivation to steal
 - Determine character of applicant
- **Fair Credit Reporting Act**
 - Order through a Consumer Reporting Agency (CRA)
 - Provide written notice to applicant to you will be checking credit
 - Get applicant's written authorization to check credit
 - If adverse action is to be taken
 - Provide applicant with "Pre-adverse Action Disclosure" which includes copy of credit report
 - Inform applicant that they will not be hired due to credit check and provide name of CRA and notice of applicant rights to appeal within 60 days



Predicting Performance

Scoring Issues

LoR Components

- Opening
 - Happy to write letter
 - Writer and applicant relationship
- Descriptions of applicant's traits/skills/character
- Descriptions of the letter writer's research team/class
- Description of applicant's activities
 - Resume
 - Applicant statement
 - Other application material
- Overall Evaluation
 - Quality of the student
 - Strength of recommendation
 - Prediction of future success
- Closing
 - Let me know if you have any questions

Scoring Letters of Recommendation

- Overall judgment of favorability
- Evaluation of applicant's traits/skills/character (trait method)
 - Mental agility (openness)
 - Vigor (energy and motivation)
 - Urbanity (extroversion)
 - Cooperation/Consideration (agreeableness)
 - Dependability/reliability (conscientiousness)
- Evaluation of components
 - Quality of the student
 - Strength of recommendation
 - Prediction of future success
- Presence of problems (pass/fail)

Validity

Validity Comparison

Predictor	r	ρ	Meta-analysis
Structured interview	.34	.57	Huffcutt & Arthur (1994)
Work samples		.54	Schmidt & Hunter (1998)
Cognitive ability		.51	Schmidt & Hunter (1998)
Job knowledge		.48	Hunter & Hunter (1984)
Assessment center	.28	.38	Arthur et al. (2003)
Situational judgment tests	.26	.34	McDaniel et al. (2001)
Integrity tests	.21	.34	Ones et al. (1993)
References	.18	.29	Aamodt & Williams (2005)
Conscientiousness	.15	.24	Hurtz & Donovan (2000)
Unstructured interviews	.11	.20	Huffcutt & Arthur (1994)
Interest inventories		.10	Hunter & Hunter (1984)

Predicting Future Performance

References Are Not Good Predictors

- Poor reliability
- Leniency
- Situations are different
- Limited opportunity to view behavior
- Extraneous factors



Reliability of Letters

Trait Category	N	Two Writers, One Applicant	Same Writer, Two Applicants
Mental agility (openness)		<u>.18*</u>	<u>.48*</u>
Vigor		.08*	.27*
Urbanity (extraversion)		.11*	.11
Cooperation/consideration		.04	.11
Dependability/reliability		.10*	.18
Overall impression		.23*	.32*
Structured scoring		.28*	
Lines		<u>.21*</u>	<u>.58*</u>

Reliability of Reference Checklist

Checklist Category	N	Two Writers, One Applicant	Same Writer, Two Applicants
Scholarship		.24*	.22*
Academic potential		.24*	.23*
Initiative		.15*	.30*
Oral communication		.22*	.13
Work well with others		<u>.11*</u>	<u>.46*</u>
Dependability		.14*	.34*
Writing ability		.16*	.21
Average rating		.24*	.35*

LoR Reliability: Meta-analysis

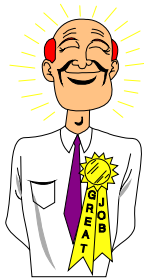
	K	N	r	SE%
Writer				
Favorability	5	1,841	.22*	100
Length	2	1,351	.16*	30%
Reader				
Favorability	4	405	.68	21%

Leniency of References

- Our applicants are from Lake Wobegon
 - Excellent (60.27%)
 - Above average (35.94%)
 - Average (3.56%)
 - Below average (0.23% - only 16 out of 6,854 ratings!)
- Mosel and Goheen (1958)
 - 0.5% of ratings were poor
 - 6.4% were average
- Zeleznik (1983)
 - 74% very highly/highly recommended
 - 25% recommended
 - 1% recommended with reservation

Leniency

- Applicants often choose their own references
- Applicants often have the right to see their files
- Former employers fear legal ramifications



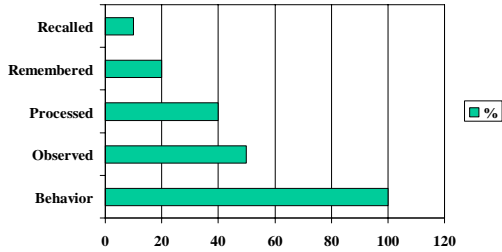
Positive

Neutral

Negative



References Often Have a Limited Opportunity to View Behavior



Potential Legal Ramifications

- Negligent hiring
- Invasion of privacy
- Negligent reference
- Defamation



Legal Issues

	Potential Employer	Previous Employer
Under Aggressive	Negligent Hiring	Negligent Reference
Over Aggressive	Invasion of Privacy Discrimination	Defamation

Defamation

- Three types
 - libel (written)
 - slander (oral)
 - self-publication
- Employers have a conditional privilege that limits their liability

Avoiding Liability for Defamation

Employers will not be liable if their statements were

- Truthful
 - statements were true
 - not true, but reasonable person would have believed them to be true
 - opinions are protected unless reference infers opinion is based on facts that don't exist
- Made for a legitimate purpose
- Made in good faith
 - don't offer unsolicited information
 - statements cannot be made for revenge
 - avoid personal comments
- Made with the permission of the applicant
 - use waivers
 - let the former employee know if the reference will not be positive

Providing Honest References

- Advantages
 - Motivates current employees to do well
 - Makes positive references meaningful
 - Limits negligent reference liability
 - Demonstrates awareness of a social duty to be a good organization
- Disadvantages
 - Increases the chance of a defamation suit
 - May make it harder to attract qualified applicants

Extraneous Factors Surrounding the Reference

- Reference giver's ability to articulate
 - *Ours is a close, caring, and intimate relationship*
- The extent to which the referee remembers the applicant
 - *Jill is a bud that has already begun to bloom*
 - *Tanya is no lightweight, I only hope your program is sufficient for her needs*
- The words used by the reference giver
 - *Bob is cuter than a baby's butt*
 - *she has no sexual oddities that I am aware of*
 - *If Mary doesn't blow away the rest of the students in your program, it will only be because she is being nice to them*

The Real Meaning of Recommendations

Recommendation	Actual Meaning
He is a man of great vision	He hallucinates
He is definitely a man to watch	I don't trust him
She merits a close look	Don't let her out of your sight
He's the kind of employee you can swear by	He likes dirty jokes
She doesn't mind being disturbed	She spent 10 years in a mental hospital
When he worked for us, he was given many citations	He was arrested several times
She gives every appearance of being a loyal, dedicated employee	But, appearances are deceiving

The Real Meaning of Recommendations

Recommendation	Actual Meaning
If I were you I would give him sweeping responsibilities	He can handle a broom
She commands the respect of everyone with whom she works	But she rarely gets it
I am sure that whatever task he undertakes, no matter how small, he will be fired with enthusiasm	He will foul up any project
You would be very lucky to get this person to work for you	She is lazy
You will never catch him asleep on the job	He is too crafty to get caught

Adverse Impact

Group Comparison

	Sex	Race	Meta-analysis
Cognitive ability		1.10	Roth et al. (2001)
GPA		.78	Roth & Bobko (2000)
Biodata		.33	Bobko et al. (1999)
Structured interview		.23	Huffcutt & Roth (1998)
Personality		.09	Schmitt et al. (1999)
References	-.01	.08	Aamodt & Williams (2005)
Integrity tests		.07	Ones & Viswesvaran (1998)

Sex is Men-Women

Race is White-Black

Conclusions

- References and LORs
 - Have low interrater reliability and LORs may say more about the writer than the applicant
 - Can be reliably scored if a structured system is used
 - Are valid ($r = .18$) but don't seem to add incremental validity
 - Structured methods that are job related may be best
 - Seem not to be influenced by the sex or race of the writer or the applicant
 - Low probability of adverse impact
- Further Research Areas
 - Need more info on sex and race differences
 - Need more studies using content valid methods for specific jobs
- Letter Length Trivia
 - Average was 26 lines
 - Shortest was 3 lines
 - Longest was 132 lines

Ethical Issues

Individual Guidelines for Ethical References

- Always refer to your company or school policy
- State the relationship between the writer and the applicant (professor-teacher; supervisor-employee; coworker; family member)
- Be honest with the applicant about the degree to which the reference will be positive
- Meet deadlines for writing and submitting references
- Appropriately use job titles and official letterhead
- Avoid conflicts of interest when asked to provide a recommendation for two or more people applying for the same position
- Decline to provide references for people the writer feels negatively towards
- Maintain confidentiality
- Refrain from asking personal questions about the applicant that are irrelevant to the position
- Acknowledge the impact the relationship between the reference seeker and the applicant (good or bad) may have on the reference seeker.

- Don't share any information without getting an authorization from a student/applicant.
- After writing a reference letter, allow the student/applicant to see it, and to decide whether or not they want the letter to be passed on.
- Provide only job-related information.
- Do not camouflage information on a substandard employee.
- Do not talk about facts "off the record."
- Have requests for references made in writing.

Practical Issues

Suggestions for the Applicant

- Ensure you have references
 - Current
 - Contact info for former
- Choose references to provide information from multiple perspectives
- Provide information to the reference provider
 - Resume
 - Deadlines
 - Other important information
 - Stamped/addressed envelopes
- Follow-up to make sure they have been written and sent
- Waiving the right to see the letter
 - References are more positive
 - But, will you irritate the reference provider

Suggestions for the Reference

- Be Honest
 - Reputation at stake
 - Moral obligation?
- Allow Applicant to Read Letter and Decide to Use
 - Puts Applicant in Control
 - Should Protect Against Defamation Focus on Behaviors and Outcomes
- Use Plenty of Examples
 - Viewed more positively
 - Unique to individual
- Write Relatively Long Letters
 - Viewed more positively than short letters
 - Remember that it's not about you

Suggestions for the Reader

- Use care in making inferences
 - Strange phrases
 - *He is cuter than a baby's butt*
 - *She has no sexual oddities that I am aware of*
 - Missing information
 - Annoying comments
 - *I/O has long been dominated by white males and accepting Karen will give you an opportunity to rectify that*
 - *You previously accepted two of our mediocre students so I see no reason why you wouldn't accept Fred*
