Pre-Offer Personality Testing
in the Selection of Entry-Level California Peace Officers

Resource Guide

California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training

POST 2010S&E-0403

Pre-Offer Personality Testing in the Selection of California Peace Officers: Resource Guide

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Preface

Scores on pre-employment personality tests – particularly those measuring conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, and integrity – have been shown to aid in the prediction of on-the-job performance across a wide variety of occupations, including peace officers. Unlike psychological examinations, personality tests can lawfully be administered early on in the hiring process, prior to the extension of a conditional offer of employment.

This Resource Guide provides law enforcement agencies with the information necessary to weigh the costs and benefits of adding a personality test to the pre-offer phase of the peace officer hiring process. The Guide provides both a summary of the current state of pre-employment personality testing, as well as practical advice on how to evaluate individual tests. Information on specific tests, provided by test publishers, is included in the companion POST Pre-Offer Personality Test Information website.

Questions regarding this Guide should be directed to POST consultant Shelley Spilberg, Ph.D. at shelley.spilberg@post.ca.gov or 916.227.4824. Questions on the Pre-Offer Personality Test Information website should be directed to POST consultant Melani Singley at melani.singley@post.ca.gov or 916.227.4258.

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Executive Summary

Peace officer screening is a rigorous, costly, and time-consuming process that focuses on all aspects of an applicant's suitability and readiness. Personality and character are assessed throughout the process, particularly during the background investigation and the psychological evaluation – two of the most costly and time-consuming assessments that occur later in the screening process.

In many other sectors of employment, personality tests – objective measures that can be administered prior to a conditional offer – are used to measure applicants' suitability for the job. What could be gained by the addition of a personality test to the already extensive peace officer hiring process? What personality traits have been shown to be the most predictive of peace officer job performance and behavior? If adopted, how should personality testing be integrated into the larger peace officer hiring process? What factors should be considered in choosing a specific personality assessment?

The purpose of this Resource Guide is to address these questions and other related issues, and provide an overview of the current science and practice of personality testing, particularly the potential impact and respective costs and benefits of adding such a test to the current peace officer hiring process. Information discussed in this Guide is summarized as follows:

- Personality tests - particularly those measuring conscientious, emotional stability, and agreeableness - can be useful for predicting a variety of peace officer job performance measures, including negative employment outcomes and counterproductive behaviors.

- A personality test can lawfully be administered prior to a conditional offer of employment if it is designed, capable of, and used exclusively for the assessment of normal-range traits and characteristics, rather than the identification of mental or emotional impairment. In fact, administering a normal-range personality test pre-offer is consistent with the requirement that an applicant be determined to be "otherwise qualified" prior to extending a conditional offer of employment.

- It is noteworthy that personality test scores are unrelated to cognitive ability measures, and yet both types of measures are related to job behavior and outcomes. Including both a pre-offer personality test along with a cognitive test (such as the POST written exam) may therefore improve the prediction of job performance over that which is achieved by either test alone.

- Although instances of adverse impact are far less frequent for personality tests than cognitive tests, it is still necessary to monitor personality test scores for group-level differences based on race, ethnicity, or gender.

- There are clear indications that a personality test administered early on in the hiring process may aid in identifying applicants who would be disqualified in the background investigation or psychological evaluation.

- Job applicants will respond in a socially desirable manner to a personality test or other self-report measure. Controlling for the positive bias in applicant responses to test questions is best achieved by interpreting applicant test scores against publisher-provided law enforcement applicant norms.

The decision to include a pre-offer personality test in the peace officer hiring process must be based on a number of considerations. The cost-effectiveness of the current process and the demands on available personnel resources should be compared to the potential improvement in cost and efficiency associated with the use of personality tests at the pre-offer stage.

To assist agencies that wish to consider using an off-the-shelf pre-offer personality test, this Resource Guide discusses issues and criteria to be considered when evaluating individual tests. Also, a dedicated POST website[*] offers publisher-provided information on these issues and criteria for various commercially available tests. In addition, POST stands ready to support our client agencies should they want to pursue the use of pre-offer personality testing in their peace officer selection process.

[*] The POST-developed website will be available to law enforcement agencies in June 2010.

Introduction

The demands on peace officers are considerable and wide-ranging. Peace officers must be capable of serving as law enforcer, first responder, mediator, negotiator, and public servant. The job requires leadership, interpersonal skills, initiative, integrity, perseverance, conscientiousness, judgment, adaptability, and creativity. The working conditions are dangerous and stressful; stakes are high both personally and to public safety.

There is little doubt that those vested with this awesome responsibility must be selected with the utmost care. Accordingly, state law (California Government Code Section 1031) and POST regulations (Commission Regulations 1950-1955) stipulate a multi-phase screening process that assesses all aspects of an applicant's suitability and readiness. Personality and character are assessed throughout, particularly during the background investigation and the psychological evaluation. The peace officer selection process averages a minimum of ten weeks to complete at a cost of over $2400 per applicant. Furthermore, only 8% of initial applicants on average successfully complete the process and receive peace officer appointments.

Personality tests have been found useful for predicting a wide variety of work behaviors and job performance indices across a full spectrum of occupations. As a result, personality testing is estimated to be a $400 million/year industry, growing at a rate of 8-10% per year. A 2003 survey by Recruiters International, Inc. indicated that about 30% of all companies use personality tests to assist in employment decisions.

What could be gained by the addition of a pre-offer personality test to the already extensive peace officer hiring process? If adopted, how should personality testing be integrated into the larger peace officer hiring process? What factors should be considered in choosing a personality assessment?

Answers to these and other related questions form the basis for this Resource Guide. The purpose of this Guide is to provide readers, especially agency heads and hiring authorities, with a balanced, practical overview of the current science and practice of personality testing, with a focus on the potential impact and respective costs and benefits of adding such a test to the current peace officer hiring process.

To assist agencies that wish to pursue pre-offer personality testing, a dedicated website* has been developed that offers publisher-provided information for various commercially available tests. Information on the site is updated and expanded as additional test publishers contribute information on their tests. Questions about the website should be directed to POST at (916) 227-4258.

Definitions and Distinctions

"***Personality*"** refers to the spectrum of enduring dispositions or individual attributes that consistently distinguish people from one another in terms of their basic tendencies to think, feel, and act. Because of their enduring nature and consistency, personality characteristics manifest themselves in predictable tendencies of an individual to behave in a similar way across situations and settings.[2]

"Personality tests" are objectively scored tests that measure *normal-range* traits and characteristics such as dependability, even-temperedness, agreeableness, or interpersonal sensitivity. Because they do not include inquiries about mental or emotional conditions or disorders, such tests can be administered prior to a conditional offer of employment.

"*Psychological exams,*" in contrast, are psychodiagnostic in nature and are geared toward the detection of psychological impairments, conditions, or disorders and therefore cannot be administered until the post-offer stage of hiring, in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and state law.

Distinguishing between a personality test and a psychological exam can be quite challenging. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has published guidance to help employers in making that distinction. In their 1995 Enforcement Guidance[3], the EEOC provides examples of both psychological impairments vs. personality traits and behaviors:

> *"Examples of emotional or mental illness include major depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders (which include panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder), schizophrenia, and personality disorders….. "*
>
> *"Traits and behaviors are not, in themselves, mental impairments. For example, stress, in itself, is not automatically a mental impairment. .Similarly, traits like irritability, chronic lateness, and poor judgment are not, in themselves, mental impairments…"*

The EEOC provides the following factors that will be considered when determining whether a personality test can be administered pre-offer:

- The test does not need to be administered by a health care professional (e.g., psychologist or psychiatrist);
- The test does not need to be interpreted by a health care professional;
- The test is not designed or capable of identifying a mental impairment;
- There are no specific test items that constitute a medical inquiry.

The 1995 EEOC Guidance includes examples of hypothetical tests that would be considered medical and those that would not:

> *"Example: An employer gives applicants the RUOK Test (hypothetical), an examination which reflects whether applicants have characteristics that lead to identifying whether the*

individual has excessive anxiety, depression, and certain compulsive disorders (DSM-listed conditions). This test is medical.*

On the other hand, if a test is designed and used to measure only things such as honesty, tastes, and habits, it is not medical. Example: An employer gives the IFIB Personality Test (hypothetical), an examination designed and used to reflect only whether an applicant is likely to lie. This test, as used by the employer, is not a medical examination."

The bottom line: if a test is designed and/or capable of identifying mental impairment, or includes inquiries that are medical or disability-related, it cannot be administered pre-offer, regardless of the employer's purpose for using the test.[4]

The Structure of Personality

Prior to the 1990's, personality research was hampered by the use of hundreds if not thousands of terms to describe personality attributes. However, over the past 20 years, researchers have come to a general agreement that personality traits can be categorized into five broad dimensions. Referred to as the "Big Five," they consist of:[5]

1. Conscientiousness
2. Emotional Stability
3. Agreeableness
4. Extraversion
5. Openness to Experience

A brief description of the Big Five is provided in Table 1.

This agreement on the structure of personality has allowed better comparisons across studies and the aggregation of research results across multiple studies, thus providing a better estimate of the true relationship between personality attributes. This research has shown that although numerous personality attributes are purported to be measured by personality tests, most of these attributes consist of components of one or more of the Big Five, in varying combinations.

* The ***Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*** (**DSM**) is published by the American Psychiatric Association and provides diagnostic criteria for mental disorders.

Table 1: Adjective Descriptions of the Big Five[6]

Dimension	High end		Low end	
Conscientiousness	conscientious responsible	persevering dependable	unscrupulous frivolous	quitting undependable
Emotional Stability	calm placid	poised unworried	emotional worrying	easily upset anxious
Agreeableness	good natured cooperative	not jealous trustful	spiteful obstructive	jealous suspicious
Extraversion	sociable talkative	assertive adventurous	retiring silent	reserved cautious
Openness	intellectual cultured original	imaginative polished	boorish conventional practical	clumsy awkward

Peace Officer Personality-Based Job Requirements

To evaluate the job-relatedness of personality tests in the selection of California peace officers, POST conducted a statewide analysis of the personal and interpersonal demands of the job. A description of that analysis is provided in the initial project report.[7]

As part of the job analysis, subject matter experts (patrol supervisors and field training officers) from throughout the state rated a set of competencies based on their importance to successful peace officer job performance. “Competencies" were defined as observable patterns of behavior (whose sources may lie in skills, knowledge, abilities, values, or traits) that account for individual differences in job performance. The identified personality-based competencies include:

- Integrity/Ethics
- Assertiveness/Persuasiveness
- Decision Making and Judgment
- Impulse Control/Attention to Safety
- Emotional Regulation and Stress Tolerance
- Conscientiousness/Dependability
- Teamwork
- Adaptability/Flexibility
- Social Competence
- Service Orientation

All competencies received average importance ratings ranging from “very important” to “critically important.” A description of the competencies is provided in Appendix A.

The personality-based competencies derived during this project parallel the results of several recent POST job analyses. In 2006, POST published revised background investigation dimensions (Appendix B) and issued new peace officer psychological dimensions (Appendix C).

Table 2 lists the peace officer personality competencies and attributes from all three POST studies. The first column lists the personality-based competencies, the middle column lists the background investigation dimensions, and the third column displays the psychological screening dimensions.

Table 2: POST Peace Officer Personality-Based Competencies, Background Dimensions, and Psychological Dimensions

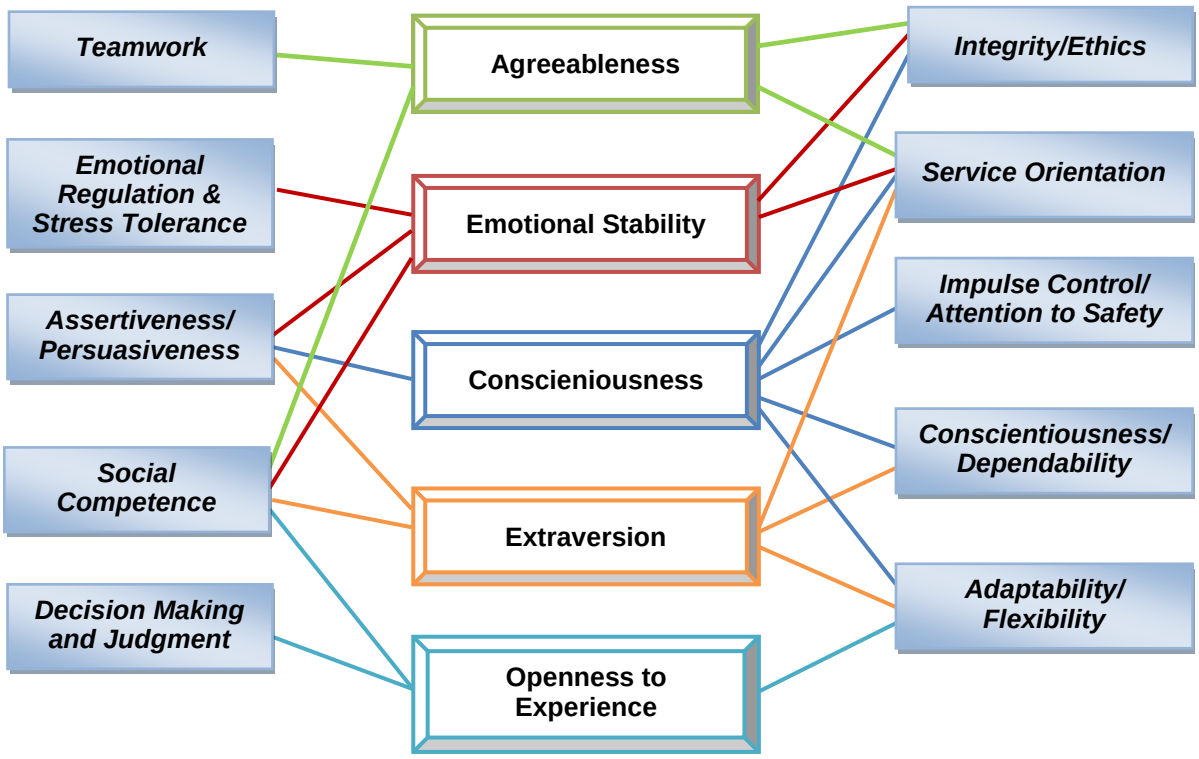
PERSONALITY	BACKGROUND	PSYCHOLOGICAL
• Integrity/Ethics	• Integrity	• Integrity
• Conscientiousness/ Dependability	• Conscientiousness	• Conscientiousness
• Emotional Regulation/Stress Tolerance	• Stress Tolerance	• Emotional Regulation/ Stress Tolerance
• Social Competence • Teamwork • Service Orientation	• Interpersonal Skills	• Social Competence • Teamwork
• Assertiveness/ Persuasiveness	• Confronting and Overcoming Problems, Obstacles & Adversity	• Assertiveness/ Persuasiveness
• Decision-Making and Judgment	• Decision-Making and Judgment	• Decision-Making and Judgment
• Adaptability/Flexibility		• Adaptability/Flexibility
• Impulse Control/ Attention to Safety	• Impulse Control/Attention to Safety	• Impulse Control/Attention to Safety • Substance Abuse and Other Risk-Taking Behavior

Notable (but not unexpected) is the striking similarity in the attributes and characteristics: virtually every competency or dimension is represented across all three lists, including integrity, conscientiousness, assertiveness, emotional control, social competence, impulse control, and decision making. This consistency further confirms the importance of these attributes in peace officer performance.

Relationship to Big Five. An analysis of the relationship between the POST competencies and the Big Five was conducted by personality subject matter experts who linked competencies to the Big Five. Figure 1 provides a schematic overview of those linkages. As is evident in Figure 1, each of the Big Five dimensions is related to multiple personality-oriented

competencies. Not unexpectedly, Conscientiousness –the Big Five dimension with the strongest relationship to work-related behaviors and outcomes – has the greatest number of ties to peace officer competencies, followed by Emotional Stability, Extraversion, and Agreeableness.

Figure 1: Linkages between Competencies and Big 5



The results clearly show the importance personality attributes play in peace officer job performance. The specific personality traits underlying these competencies encompass all of the Big Five, especially Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability.

Job-Relatedness of Personality Traits: Validity Evidence

Analyses on the Big Five personality dimensions' relationship to job performance have yielded several consistent findings. First, measures of Conscientiousness have by far the strongest relationship with work-related behavior and outcomes. This is true across all occupational groups, work settings, and across all types of job outcomes measured – whether it be overall job performance (typically supervisory ratings), counterproductive work behavior (such as theft, misuse of information, inappropriate work behavior), or training performance.[8]

Significant relationships have also been found for Emotional Stability and Agreeableness. Emotional Stability has been found to be related to overall job performance, and, along with Agreeableness, related to counterproductive work behavior and performance in training.[9] Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability have also been shown to be related to workplace deviance.[10]

Research specific to law enforcement has yielded a similar pattern of results.[11] Analyses of the validity of personality tests in peace officer employment settings have found that personality test scores have a consistent (albeit sometimes modest) relationship to job performance.[12] Analysis conducted for POST further confirmed these published findings. Conscientiousness and Agreeableness had the strongest relationship to counterproductive work behavior. In particular, Impulse Control (a facet of Conscientiousness) was found to be significantly related to the full range of work behaviors studied (job performance, training performance, interpersonal performance, avoidance of counterproductive work behaviors, etc.).[*]

To enhance the accuracy of predicting work-related behaviors, some personality tests have been expressly developed for predicting specific work outcomes, such as job-related stress tolerance, workplace violence, customer service, and, most notably and most commonly, integrity.

Integrity tests can either be "overt" or "personality-oriented."[13] Overt integrity tests are designed to directly assess attitudes toward theft and honesty; accordingly, test items ask directly about past behavior and attitudes about theft and related illegal acts. In contrast, personality-oriented integrity tests do not provide test takers with a clear indication that integrity is being assessed. Paper and pencil integrity tests were developed in response to the prohibition against the use of polygraphs and other detection of deception devices in the private sector resulting from the 1988 Employee Polygraph Protection Act.

Relative to general tests of personality, applicant scores on integrity tests and other tests designed to predict specific work outcomes have been found to have even stronger relationships to negative employment outcomes such as discipline, failure to complete training, and termination. Strong associations have also been found between integrity tests and counterproductive behavior such as theft, poor attendance, misuse of information, destruction of property, and other such behaviors listed in Table 3. Integrity tests have also been shown to be useful predictors of general job performance both on the job and in training. [14]

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[*] For more specific information on the results of the Ones, et al. (2004) meta-analysis, see pp. 54- 57 of the initial project report.

Analyses of integrity tests, customer service tests and other tests developed to predict specific work outcomes have shown that these types of tests measure varying degrees and combinations of three of the Big Five: Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability.[15] Not surprisingly, these same three factors are those that have been found to be the best predictors of job behavior and other work-related outcomes.

Table 3: Categories of Counterproductive Work Behaviors*

Category	Behaviors
Theft and Related Behavior	theft of cash or property, giving away goods/services, misuse of employee discount
Destruction of Property	deface, damage, or destroy property, sabotage property
Misuse of Information	reveal confidential information, falsify records
Misuse of Time and Resources	waste time, alter time card, conduct personal business during work time
Unsafe Behavior	failure to follow safety procedures, failure to learn safety procedures
Poor Attendance	unexcused absence or tardiness, misuse of sick leave
Poor Quality of Work	intentionally slow or sloppy work
Alcohol Use	alcohol use on the job, coming to work under the influence of alcohol
Drug Use	possess, use, or sell drugs at work
Inappropriate Verbal Actions	argue with customers, verbally harass co-workers

* from Gruys, M.L. (1999). *The dimensionality of deviant employee performance in the workplace.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Incremental Validity. Scores on personality tests and cognitive ability tests (such as reading and writing tests) have been found to be statistically independent; thus, the attributes measured by these two types of tests are effectively unrelated. Since each of these types of tests is *uniquely* related to job performance, adding a test of personality to a test of cognitive ability - itself is a powerful predictor of job performance - should provide “incremental validity,” that is, improve the prediction of job performance over that which is achieved by either test alone. Additional incremental validity may be gained by including a personal history measure, the scores of which are predictive of negative job outcomes (such as discipline and job terminations), yet largely unrelated to either cognitive ability and personality test scores.[16]

Multiple Measures of the Same Attribute. Is it worthwhile to include multiple measures of the same attribute, even if there is no increase in incremental validity? Recent research has in fact found that the use of multiple measures of the same personality trait does increase predictive validity. Multiple measures of conscientiousness, for example, have been found to increase validity up to 50%, depending on the number of scales combined.[17] Thus, including multiple measures of conscientiousness or integrity can increase validity over that achieved with a single personality test alone.

Cost and Resource Effectiveness

On average, only 8% of initial applicants successfully complete the expensive and extensive peace officer selection process. Many are disqualified, but others voluntarily drop out of the

process to accept job offers from other agencies that were able to process them more efficiently. Clearly, a process that quickly and efficiently identifies viable applicants will put that agency at an advantage, both in terms of saving time and money and in hiring top talent.

The background investigation and psychological evaluation, both of which are aimed at assessing personality and personal characteristics, are two of the more costly and time-consuming phases in the selection process. A personality test administered early in the hiring process has the potential to identify applicants who would be disqualified in these later phases, resulting in cost savings that could more than offset the cost of adding another test to the hiring process.

Several recent studies have found significant relationships between personality tests scores and both background investigation results and hiring decisions.[*] A 2007 study by the City of Los Angeles found a significant relationship between scores on a pre-offer personality test measuring conscientiousness, emotional stability, and agreeableness, and the likelihood of subsequently passing the background investigation and being appointed as a peace officer. [18] Also in 2007, a study of police officer applicants in Portland, Oregon found that scores on personality characteristics such as responsibility, self-control, well-being, tolerance, achievement, and flexibility differentiated to a significant extent between those who passed and those who failed the background investigation.[19]

Faking: Response Distortion on Personality Tests

Applicants are understandably motivated to provide a positive impression of themselves. Therefore, like all self-report measures, personality tests are susceptible to efforts to present oneself in an overly favorable manner and deny undesirable thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. Peace officer applicants have been found to score considerably higher on scales that measure emotional adjustment, extraversion, tolerance, warmth, rule-consciousness, and tough-mindedness.

Test publishers employ various methods to mitigate the impact of this type of response distortion in personality tests. One of the more common practices involves the use of special test scales to assess the degree to which a test taker is responding in a socially desirable manner. However, an even more practical approach to offsetting the impact of socially desirable responding is to interpret applicant test scores in terms of the scores of other law enforcement applicants rather than the general population. By using law enforcement applicant norms, the positive bias in an individual's scores can be interpreted against other applicants who would have the same tendency to answer in the same overly positive manner. An important consideration in choosing a personality test is the test publisher's use of law enforcement applicants against which to interpret test scores.

Another way to control for response distortion available to law enforcement agencies (who are exempt from the Employee Polygraph Protection Act) is the use of a polygraph or other detection of deception measure. Research has shown that peace officer applicants admit to more drug use, domestic violence, and other counterproductive behavior when applying to law

[*] As reported in the initial project report, an earlier study by POST found no significant relationship between personality test scores and background investigation outcomes, but this was largely attributed to limitations in the research design.

enforcement agencies that use a polygraph or other detection of deception measure as compared with those who do not.[20]

Note: Per the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1991, the use of different test norms for different groups of test takers based on gender or ethnicity is prohibited.

Legal Considerations

Adverse Impact. Although cognitive ability tests are powerful predictors of job performance, as a group, African-Americans, Hispanics, and other minorities score consistently lower on these tests. Substantial group differences that work to the disadvantage of members of a race, sex, or ethnic group is referred to as "adverse impact." Unlike cognitive ability test results, group differences on personality tests of sufficient magnitude to meet the legal definition of adverse impact are rare.[21] Nevertheless, personality tests must be monitored for adverse impact as should all selection measures.

Disability Discrimination. Commission Regulation 1955 stipulates that, in addition to a test of abnormal behavior (i.e., psychopathology), the post-offer psychological evaluation of peace officers must include a normal-range personality test to assess the candidate's ability to withstand the psychological demands of the position. Moreover, in actual practice, the vast majority of disqualifications based on psychological evaluations result from the detection of unsuitable personality traits or characteristics rather than clinically significant mental or emotional disorders.

Since a test of normal personality is required during the post-offer psychological evaluation, the administration of a personality test at the pre-offer stage may appear to skirt the law. However, in addition to deferring any psychological questions and evaluations to the post-offer stage, the sequencing provisions of ADA and FEHA stipulate that for the offer to be considered bona fide (i.e., "real"), the employer must determine that the candidate is "otherwise qualified" by evaluating all non-medical information it reasonably could have obtained and analyzed prior to extending the conditional job offer.[22] It could be argued that administering a test of traits and characteristics pre-offer is therefore *most consistent* with the intent of federal and state disability law.

As mentioned earlier, departments considering the use of any personality test pre-offer are strongly encouraged to consult with their legal counsel. More detailed information on the legal issues associated with personality testing is provided in the Legal Review chapter of the initial project report.

Privacy. Since personality tests require applicants to reveal thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that they may or may not wish to reveal, almost by definition these tests infringe on personal privacy. Not surprisingly, studies of applicants' reactions to various selection tests used by employers show that personality tests generate a greater negative reaction than other types of testing. Not uncommonly, applicants find personality test questions to be unnecessarily invasive and irrelevant to their qualifications for the job.

Provisions in both the federal and state Constitutions and employment statutes stipulate that employment tests must not be unnecessarily intrusive. The responsibility for ensuring the necessity and appropriateness of personality test items rests with both the test publisher and the employer.

Summary and Conclusion

Information discussed in this Guide can be summarized as followed:

- Personality tests - particularly those measuring conscientious, emotional stability, and agreeableness - can be useful for predicting a variety of peace officer job performance measures, including negative employment outcomes and counterproductive behaviors.

- A personality test can lawfully be administered prior to a conditional offer of employment if it is designed and only capable of assessing normal-range traits and characteristics, rather than identifying mental or emotional impairments, and if there are no individual items that would constitute inquiries into medical or psychological condition or disorder. In fact, administering a normal-range personality test pre-offer is consistent with the requirement that an applicant be determined to be “otherwise qualified” prior to extending a conditional offer of employment.

- Personality test scores are unrelated to cognitive ability measures, and both types of measures are related to job behavior and outcomes. Including both tests may therefore improve the prediction of job performance over that which is achieved by either test alone.

- Although instances of adverse impact are far less frequent for personality tests than cognitive tests, it is still necessary to monitor personality test scores.

- There are clear indications that a personality test administered early on in the hiring process may aid in identifying applicants who would be disqualified in the background investigation or psychological evaluation.

- Most job applicants will respond in a socially desirable manner to a personality test or other self-report measure. Using publisher-provided law enforcement applicant norms will help correctly interpret individual applicant scores despite potential positive bias.

- The use of a variety of reliable and valid assessment tools provides a more complete picture of the individual.

Before considering adding a personality test, it is important to have realistic expectations about the benefits that may be gained and the costs that will be incurred. Pre-offer personality tests should not be expected to improve the cognitive ability levels of new hires. A pre-offer personality test may provide comparable information to the later character assessments, such as the background investigation and the psychological evaluation. Additional costs of adding a personality test include those associated with the acquisition, administration, and scoring of the test, as well as the cost of monitoring the test to determine both how well it is working and for evidence of adverse impact or other potential employment discrimination.

Pre-offer personality testing does, however, provide an opportunity to assess critical applicant attributes at an earlier stage in the process in an objective, less-costly manner, and may therefore reduce disqualification rates on the more costly, later steps in the screening process. Moreover, the addition of a personality test at the pre-offer stage can complement the cognitive ability test. By providing a more complete picture of the applicant, information from these multiple selection measures can serve to boost the effectiveness of decision-making.

Choosing a Personality Test

There are a number of important criteria to be considered when evaluating individual personality tests. These criteria form the basis of the POST test publisher database. The database includes four sections: Background Information, Test Description and Uses, Technical Information, and Test-Related Litigation. Guidelines on interpreting and judging the test publisher responses are discussed in the order in which they are addressed in the database.

Section I: Background Information

Contact Information. This section identifies the name and contact information for technical information about the test. You may need to call the publisher for additional information regarding the suitability of the test for your needs. Is the publisher cooperative in this regard? Does the publisher have staff available to assist you?

Section II: Test Description and Uses

Date Published/Revised. What is the date of the latest version? If the test is old, it is possible that the test content and norms for scoring and interpretation have become outdated.

Objectionable or Unallowable Test Items. Pre-offer personality tests, especially overt tests of integrity, contain direct questions about personal conduct (theft, etc.) and/or attitudes about the acceptability of such conduct. Other tests contain items that are far less direct, but nevertheless may be considered inappropriate by the test taker. Has the test publisher received complaints about test content from test takers? What actions have been taken to prevent or mitigate such adverse reactions?

For a test to be lawfully administered prior to a conditional job offer, it must not be designed, capable, or used for the purpose of identifying a mental impairment, nor can any individual test items constitute a medical/psychological inquiry. It is also unlawful to ask questions pertaining to an applicant's race/ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, or include questions that constitute an unreasonable invasion of privacy. Test publishers should be willing to provide inspection copies of their tests to permit review of test item content.

Qualifications to Administer and Interpret Test Scores. What training and background are needed to administer, score, and interpret the test? A graduate degree is required to have access to some tests; coursework or experience related to personnel testing and/or attendance at publisher-hosted training is required by others. Do you have suitable staff available now or will you need to train and/or hire staff?

Test Administration and Scoring. Is the test available in paper-and-pencil and/or computer format? Is it meant to be administered to one person at a time, or can it be administered in a group setting? How long does it take to administer?

Testing Costs. What are the costs associated with purchasing, administering, and scoring a test? Are the costs per applicant, per use, or some other method? Are there additional costs for score reports, narrative interpretation, or other services? How quickly are test results provided?

Test Score Interpretation/Uses

Manual/Interpretive Guide. A test manual and/or interpretive guide should be available that addresses many of the same issues addressed on the POST website.

Test Score Reporting. Variations exist with regard to the manner in which results are reported. Results may be reported as total scores, test score profiles, and/or individual scale scores. A narrative report may be included or available that interprets the test scores with respect to applicant suitability. A sample copy should be available to review to determine its usefulness for relevance to agency needs and goals.

Response Distortion. How does the test publisher handle inflated scores due to impression management (i.e., faking)? Are test takers admonished to answer honestly? Are there separate scales to detect response distortion, and if so, what happens to applicants with invalid test scores? Are there adjustments on primary scales, and if so, what evidence is offered to show that these adjustments work?

Minimum Passing Scores. What type of guidance is provided for making selection decisions based on test scores? Is this guidance consistent with your intended use of the test; for example, will it be to select-in applicants by ranking them in order of suitability? To screen out those who are poor risks?

The test publisher should provide evidence to support any recommended cut score for a test. That is, there should be evidence that those who score below the cut score are significantly less likely to succeed on the criterion of interest to the agency, whether it be poorer job performance, poorer performance in training, or a higher proclivity towards engaging in one or more counterproductive work behaviors.

Some test publishers include expectancy charts or tables or risk ratios that predict the likelihood of an expected level of performance of an individual based on his or her test score. However, the target group should be comparable to the reference group on which the expectancy chart was developed. For example, test scores should be linked to performance problems of police officers, not retail store clerks.

If one of the goals of using a pre-offer personality test is to screen out applicants who are likely to be disqualified later in the selection process (e.g., background, psychological screening), any information pertaining to this issue should be carefully scrutinized. This would include test score correlations with pass/fail decisions on the background/psychological, or preferably, classification “hits” and “misses” when pass/fail decisions on the test are used to predict who will succeed or fail the background/psychological.

Test Norms. A raw score itself does not provide much useful information; to be meaningful, a test score must be considered in the context of the scores of others. The reference group can be the population in general, non-law enforcement job applicants, law enforcement officers, or ideally, law enforcement applicants who have gone on to become successful officers.

Law enforcement applicants score higher on average than the general population on conscientiousness and other desirable personality traits, due both to socially-desirable responding and the likelihood that highly conscientious people are attracted to a career dedicated to upholding laws. As a result, a passing score based on general population norms might be too low, resulting in individuals passing the test who, compared to job applicants, received very low scores. Therefore, norms based on law enforcement applicants are more desirable than general population norms.

While it is preferable that test scores used for selection decisions be referenced against law enforcement applicant norms, it is unlawful to use norms based on gender, ethnicity, or other personal characteristics that are protected by fair employment law. It is important to verify that any test under consideration is not normed in this manner.

Section III: Technical Information

Personality Test Scales. The personality attribute(s) measured by the test should be clearly defined. Is there a match between these characteristics and what you intend to measure? The test scales should not only relate to one or more important aspects of the job, but in particular to your specific issues of concern and interest.

Other Test Scales. Are there other types of measures included in the test (for example, measures of cognitive ability or biographical information)? If so, how does this add to the purpose of the test, its overall effectiveness, and incremental validity? Do these measures result in adverse impact, or include items or scales that are prohibited at the pre-offer stage?

Test Development and Evaluation. Care should be taken to avoid reaching conclusions about what a test measures solely on basis of the names of the attributes said to be measured by the test. There should be solid research evidence to show that the test measures these attributes. Claims that the test measures many different personality attributes should be closely scrutinized, especially if few items are used to measure each attribute (for example, a 25-item test that purports to measure 10 different factors).

What were the characteristics of the reference group that was used to develop the test? How similar are they to peace officer applicants? Consider such factors as age, gender, racial and ethnic composition, education, occupation, and cultural background. In general, the closer your applicants match the characteristics of the reference group used by the test publisher, the more confidence you can have that the test will yield meaningful scores for your purposes.

Validity Evidence. A test is “valid” if it allows more confident conclusions or better predictions about individuals based on their test scores. Validity evidence can take many forms, depending upon the characteristics measured by the test and the work-related behaviors or outcomes it purports to predict (e.g., job performance, counterproductive work behaviors, and/or performance in training).

The strength of the validity evidence reflects the *degree* to which you can make specific conclusions or predictions about people based on their test scores. In other words, it indicates the usefulness of the test. A test’s validity is established in reference to a specific purpose; the test may not be valid for different purposes.

In addition to the information on the POST website, the test publisher's technical manual should provide a thorough description of the procedures used in the validation studies, and the results of those studies. Evidence specific to law enforcement-related occupations is preferable to that for other occupations.

Independent test reviews will let you know whether the sample size was sufficient, whether statistical procedures were appropriate, and whether the test meets professional standards. Test reviews can be found in several sources, including the Mental Measurements Yearbook and Test Critiques. The American Psychological Association provides a description of these and other testing references at http://www.apa.org/science/programs/testing/find-tests.aspx#.

The *validity* of a test is often expressed as a correlation coefficient. It is reported as a number between -1.00 and +1.00. Positive correlations (between 0 and 1.00) indicate a *direct* relationship between the two variables (for example, between conscientiousness and overall job performance); negative correlations (between -1.00 and 0) indicate an *inverse* relationship (such as between conscientiousness and employee theft). The size of the correlation, whether positive or negative, indicates the magnitude of the relationship between the test and a measure of job performance or other criteria. The larger the validity coefficient, the more confidence you can have in predictions made from the test scores. The following are general guidelines for interpreting validity coefficients:

Validity Coefficient	**Interpretation**
above .35	very beneficial
.21 - .35	likely to be useful
.11 - .20	depends on circumstances
below .11	unlikely to be useful

A single test can never fully predict job performance because success on the job depends on so many varied factors. Therefore, validity coefficients rarely exceed r = .40. Validities for selection systems that use multiple tests are generally higher because different tools are used to measure/predict different aspects of performance, where a single test is more likely to measure or predict fewer aspects of total performance.

Reliability. Reliability refers to how dependably or consistently a test measures a characteristic. The reliability of a test is indicated by the *reliability coefficient* that ranges between 0 and 1.00, with r = 0 indicating no reliability, and r = 1.00 indicating perfect reliability. The larger the reliability coefficient, the more repeatable or reliable the test scores. The following are general guidelines for interpreting test reliability:

Reliability Coefficient	**Interpretation**
.90 and up	excellent
.80 - .89	good
.70 - .79	adequate
below .70	may have limited applicability

There are several types of reliability estimates. The two reliability coefficients of relevance for objective personality tests include *test-retest reliability* and *internal consistency reliability*.

Test–retest reliability indicates the repeatability of the test with the passage of time. This estimate also reflects the stability of the characteristic being measured by the test. Personality attributes would be expected to be fairly stable over time. Therefore, you would expect a relatively high test-retest reliability on a personality test.

Internal consistency reliability indicates the extent to which items on a test measure the same thing. A high internal consistency reliability indicates that the test items are relatively homogenous in test content. Internal consistency reliability will increase as the number of test items increases. Tests that measure multiple characteristics will have a separate internal consistency reliability reported for each attribute.

Adverse Impact. A selection test that is found to have adverse impact against a protected group (race/ethnicity, age, gender, etc.) may result in costly litigation in which the employer must show that the test is job-related and consistent with business necessity. Findings of adverse impact on personality tests are rare but not unheard of. Thus, an important consideration in selecting a personality test is whether the test is known to have adverse impact. It is also important to ensure that the test administration procedures are fair to all test takers. For example, time limits may impact someone with a learning disability.

Systematic Evaluation. Is the test publisher willing to provide periodic summary reports of agency-specific test results? What is the scope of their ongoing efforts to continually monitor, revise, and improve the test? Are there opportunities to collaborate with the test publisher in the evaluation of test utility and effectiveness in your agency?

Section IV: Test-Related Litigation

Has the test been the subject of any litigation? If so, how similar were those circumstances to those faced by your agency, and what was the outcome? Does the test publisher offer any legal support should the test be challenged, and if so, at what cost?

Using POST as a Resource

If your agency decides to conduct pre-offer personality testing, POST stands ready to provide technical and other assistance to evaluate the impact of your testing program. To that end, if you have any questions about the information in this guide or the availability of POST resources, please contact the Standards and Evaluation Services Bureau at (916) 227-4258.

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POST Patrol Officer Personality-Based Competencies

(Entire set of competencies are provided in the Pre-Offer Personality Testing in the Selection of California Peace Officers: Technical Report)

SOCIAL COMPETENCE: Being tactful and respectful, and showing sensitivity and concern in one's interactions with others; able to "read" people; having an awareness of the impact of one's own words and behavior on others; showing interest and concern for the feelings of others; treating all members of society with impartiality; able to approach individuals and to confront and reduce interpersonal conflict in ways that show sensitivity to the feelings of others; being comfortable and skillful in interacting with people and establishing and maintaining rapport.
TEAMWORK: Establishing and maintaining effective, cooperative working relationships with fellow officers, supervisors, community partners, representatives of other agencies, and others tasked with serving and protecting the community; sharing information and providing assistance and support to fellow officers, supervisors, and others; balancing personal ambitions and organizational/team goals; performing one's fair share in a group effort; collaborating effectively with others to accomplish work goals; not allowing personal differences to affect working relationships; accepting and giving constructive feedback.
ASSERTIVENESS/PERSUASIVENESS: Unhesitatingly taking control of situations in a calm, persuasive, and appropriately assertive manner, even under dangerous or adverse conditions; confronting suspects when appropriate; acting assertively and without hesitation; not being easily intimidated; being able to assert ideas and persuade others to adopt a desired course of action; commanding respect; emanating professional pride and demeanor; being willing to put oneself in harm's way.
SERVICE ORIENTATION: Exhibiting an active interest in assisting others; being eager to help others and doing so in a responsive, compassionate, respectful, and enthusiastic manner.
ADAPTABILITY/ FLEXIBILITY: Adjusting to the many different, sudden, and sometimes competing demands inherent in law enforcement work; appropriately shifting between the role of law enforcer and public servant; adjusting to planned and unplanned work changes, including different types of incidents that must be handled one right after another; being able to prioritize and work effectively on several different tasks/projects at the same time; using appropriate judgment and discretion in applying laws and regulations to specific situations; working effectively in unstructured situations with minimal supervision; physically and mentally adjusting to shift work; adapting techniques and procedures as needed to fit a situation.
DECISION-MAKING AND JUDGMENT: Exercising common sense; using practical judgment and efficient problem solving in both routine and non-routine situations; making sound decisions by sizing up situations quickly and determining the appropriate action; being able to sift through information to glean that which is important, and to use that information effectively; recognizing the similarities and differences in situations; developing creative and innovative solutions to problems; basing decisions on the collection and consideration of important information; reasoning effectively.
CONSCIENTIOUSNESS/DEPENDABILITY: Performing job duties in a diligent, thorough, and timely manner in accordance with rules, regulations and agency policies; striving to do the best job possible; carrying assigned tasks through to successful and timely completion; being punctual; persevering in the face of obstacles, difficulties, long hours, and other adverse working conditions; staying organized; carefully attending to details; staying current on new rules, procedures, etc.; accepting responsibility for one's work, and analyzing prior mistakes or problems to improve performance; performing effectively under difficult and uncomfortable conditions; continually working to achieve or maintain trust with peers, supervisors, and citizens; being consistently productive; taking the initiative to get work done without waiting to be told what to do.
IMPULSE CONTROL/ATTENTION TO SAFETY: Taking proper precautions and avoiding impulsive and/or unnecessarily risky behavior that endangers the safety of the public and/or oneself; being self-disciplined and self-restrained; thinking before acting, and always behaving in conscious regard for the larger situation at hand; being continually mindful and attentive to hazards to self and/or others; taking appropriate safety precautions in all situations.
INTEGRITY/ ETHICS: Maintaining high standards of personal conduct; being honest, impartial, and trustworthy; abiding by laws, regulations, and procedures; not abusing the system nor using the position of authority for personal gain; not bending rules or otherwise trying to beat the system by tampering with evidence, slanting reports, providing inaccurate testimony, etc.; not engaging in illegal or immoral activities – either on or off duty; taking action to prevent unethical/illegal conduct by others; avoiding behavior that is inappropriate, self-damaging, and can adversely impact the agency; maintaining the confidentiality of information.
EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND STRESS TOLERANCE: Being composed, rational, and in control, particularly during life-threatening, time-critical events and other stressful situations; taking the negative aspects of the job in stride without becoming unduly cynical or distrustful; maintaining an even temperament; exercising restraint, and not over reacting in emotionally-charged situations.

Summary of POST Background Investigation Dimensions

(Complete dimensions descriptions are located in the POST Background Investigation Manual at http://lib.post.ca.gov/Publications/bi.pdf)

MORAL CHARACTER	**1. Integrity** ▪ Honesty ▪ Impartiality ▪ Trustworthiness ▪ Protection of Confidential Information ▪ Moral/Ethical Behavior **2. Impulse Control/Attention to Safety** ▪ Safe Driving Practices ▪ Attention to Safety ▪ Impulse/Anger Control **3. Substance Abuse and Other Risk-Taking Behavior**
HANDLING STRESS AND ADVERSITY	**4. Stress Tolerance** ▪ Positive Attitude and Even Temper ▪ Stress Tolerance and Recovery ▪ Accepting Responsibility for Mistakes **5. Confronting and Overcoming Problems, Obstacles, and Adversity**
WORK HABITS	**6. Conscientiousness** ▪ Dependability/Reliability ▪ Personal Accountability and Responsibility ▪ Safeguarding and Maintaining Property, Equipment, and Belongings ▪ Orderliness, Thoroughness, and Attention to Detail ▪ Initiative and Drive ▪ General Conscientiousness
INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS	**7. Interpersonal Skills** ▪ Social Sensitivity ▪ Social Interest and Concern ▪ Tolerance ▪ Social Self-Confidence/Persuasiveness ▪ Teamwork
INTELLECTUALLY-BASED ABILITIES	**8. Decision-Making and Judgment** ▪ Situation/Problem Analysis ▪ Adherence to Policies and Regulations ▪ Response Appropriateness ▪ Response Assessment **9. Learning Ability** **10. Communication Skills** ▪ Oral Communication ▪ Written Communication

POST Psychological Screening Dimensions for Peace Officers

(Complete dimensions descriptions can be found in the POST Psychological Screening Manual at: https://www.post.ca.gov/peace-officer-psychological-screening-manual.aspx)

Social Competence

This involves communicating with others in a tactful and respectful manner, and showing sensitivity and concern in one's daily interactions. It includes several facets, including:

- The ability to "read" people and be aware of the impact of their own words and behavior on others (Social Awareness)
- Sensitivity and concern towards the feelings of others (Empathy)
- Tact and impartiality in treating all members of society (Tolerance)

Adaptability-Flexibility

This involves the ability to change gears and easily adjust to the many different, sudden, and sometimes competing demands inherent in law enforcement work. It consists of:

- Appropriately shifting between the role of law enforcer and public servant
- Adjusting to planned and unplanned work changes, including different types of incidents that must be handled one right after another
- Prioritizing and working effectively on several very different tasks/projects at the same time
- Appropriately applies laws and regulations; understands the difference between the letter and the spirit of the law
- Performs duties without constant supervision or instructions
- Works in unstructured situations with minimal supervision
- Adjusts to differing supervisory styles
- Can physically and mentally adjust to shift work
- Makes sudden adjustments in use of force as appropriate

Impulse Control-Attention to Safety

This involves taking proper precautions and avoiding impulsive and/or unnecessarily risky behavior to ensure both public and officer safety. It includes the ability and inclination to think before acting – to keep one's impetuous, knee-jerk reactions in check, and instead behave in conscious regard for the larger situation at hand. It includes:

- Drives and otherwise behaves within one's own limits – doesn't excessively speed, take on too many individuals without backup, etc.
- Taking proper precautions during and after vehicle pursuits, traffic stops, administering emergency assistance/first aid, etc.
- Thinking things through before acting (including considering consequences), rather than doing the first thing that comes to mind, yet maintaining a training edge to respond optimally to deadly force situations
- Careful use and maintenance of firearms, less lethal weapons, OC spray, edged weapons, vehicle, flashlight, baton, tactical vest, radio, cell phone, etc.; consistently possesses all issued equipment
- Safe driving practices during routine and high arousal activities
- Attention to and awareness of hazards

Teamwork

This involves working effectively with others to accomplish goals, as well as subordinating personal interests for the good of the working group and agency. It involves establishing and maintaining effective, cooperative working relationships with fellow officers, supervisors, community partners, representatives of other agencies, and others tasked with serving and protecting the community. It consists of:

- Sharing information and providing assistance and support to fellow officers and other working partners
- Balancing personal ambitions with organizational/team goals
- Performing one's fair share in a group effort
- Collaborating effectively with others to accomplish work goals, as necessary
- Not allowing personal differences to affect working relationships

Conscientiousness-Dependability

This involves diligent, reliable, conscientious work patterns, performing in a timely, logical manner in accordance with rules and regulations and agency policies. It includes:

- Carrying assigned tasks through to successful and timely completion
- Maintaining a punctual, reliable attendance record
- Persevering in the face of obstacles, difficulties, long hours and other adverse working conditions
- Staying organized
- Carefully attending to details (e.g., typos, missing/incorrect information)
- Staying current on new rules, procedures, etc.
- Maintaining accountability for one's work, and analyzing prior mistakes or problems to improve performance
- Performing effectively under difficult and uncomfortable conditions
- A promise made is a promise kept
- Continually works to achieve or restore trust with peers, supervisors, and citizens

Integrity-Ethics

This involves maintaining high standards of personal conduct. It consists of attributes such as honesty, impartiality, trustworthiness, and abiding laws, regulations, and procedures. It includes:

- Not abusing the system nor using the position of authority for personal gain
- Not bending rules or otherwise trying to beat the system by tampering with evidence, slanting reports, providing inaccurate testimony, etc.
- Not engaging in illegal or immoral activities – either on or off duty

Avoiding Substance Abuse & Other Risk-Taking Behavior

This involves avoiding participation in behavior that is inappropriate, self-damaging, and can adversely impact organizational functioning, such as alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, sale of drugs, and harmful gambling.

Emotional Regulation & Stress Tolerance

This involves the ability to maintain composure and stay in control, particularly during life-threatening, time-critical events and other stressful situations. It includes taking the negative aspects of the job in stride and maintaining an even temperament, as well as accepting criticism rather than becoming overly defensive or allowing it to hamper job performance. It includes:

- Acceptance/ownership of personal limitations and mistakes
- Ability to perform under difficult, threatening situations
- Maintaining positive self image under adverse circumstances
- Maintaining even-tempered composure and demeanor
- Proper use of force

Assertiveness-Persuasiveness

This involves unhesitatingly taking control of situations in a calm and appropriately assertive manner, even under dangerous or adverse conditions. It includes the ability to:

- Confront suspects
- Act assertively and without hesitation
- Not be easily intimidated
- Use force, including deadly force, when necessary
- Assert ideas and persuade others to adopt desired course of action
- Command respect
- Emanate professional pride and demeanor

Note: Extreme dominance and over-aggression are not part of this dimension; rather, they are included as anger control in EMOTIONAL REGULATION AND STRESS TOLERANCE, and as overbearing insensitivity in SOCIAL COMPETENCE.

Decision-Making & Judgment

This involves common sense, "street smarts," and the ability to make sound decisions, demonstrated by the ability to size up situations quickly and take the appropriate action. It also involves the ability to sift through information to glean that which is important, and, once identified, to use that information effectively. It involves:

- Thinking on one's feet, using practical judgment and efficient problem solving
- Prioritizing competing demands
- Developing creative and innovative solutions to problems
- Basing decisions on the collection and consideration of important information
- Applying deductive and inductive reasoning, as necessary