

INTRODUCTION

Origins of and Reactions to the PTC Conference on *The g Factor in Employment Testing*

LILLIAN MARKOS AVERY

California Test Development Field Center, Inglewood, California

For over 30 years the Personnel Testing Council of Southern California (PTC) has served as a forum for the growth and development of professionals in the field of personnel research, selection, and testing, through published materials, workshops, and semi-annual conferences. This article describes the interest and concern of the membership in what may be the most critical issue in personnel testing today—the implications of using or not using *g*-loaded tests. It further describes the events that led to the scheduling of a major conference on the *g* factor. Audience reactions to the conference are also described. © 1986 Academic Press, Inc.

Early in 1985, the Personnel Testing Council of Southern California (PTC) selected the subject of *The g Factor in Employment Testing* as its 1985 Fall Conference topic. Since its organization in Los Angeles, California, over 30 years ago, PTC has served as a forum for persons in the field of personnel research, selection, and testing. In addition to workshops and monthly luncheons, semi-annual conferences are offered to provide a continuing flow of information, and to apprise professionals in the field with current practices, new ideas and techniques, legal developments, and solutions to selection problems. Typical PTC conferences held within the last 4 years offered topics such as Validity Generalization, The Job Analysis Challenge, and Measuring Performance: Implications for Employee Productivity.

The topic for the 1985 Fall Conference evolved from ongoing lively and animated discussions among personnel selection and testing staffs of the Los Angeles Unified School District, Classified Employment Branch. The discussions and interest spilled over into the general PTC membership.

The author served as coordinator for the 1985 Fall Conference of the Personnel Testing Council of Southern California, *The g Factor in Employment Testing*, Newport Beach, California, October 10-11, 1985. Request for reprints should be addressed to Lillian Markos Avery, Cooperative Personnel Services, California Test Development Field Center, 9920 La Cienega Blvd., Suite 717, Inglewood, CA 90301.

The implications of using *g*-loaded tests were perceived to be one of the most critical issues in personnel testing today. Concern was expressed particularly in the consideration of individual differences and the degree to which mental ability tests might be biased in favor of one group over another.

When Arthur Jensen served as invited speaker at the 1983 APA conference held in Anaheim, California, PTC members were well represented in his audience. There is no doubt that his remarks at that conference further sparked the discussions among research and selection staffs not only at the Los Angeles Unified School District, but in the California Test Development Field Center (one of four field centers participating in the Department of Labor test development program), as well as personnel research and selection staffs of organizations such as the Southern California Edison Company, the Los Angeles City Personnel Department, and various personnel management and selection firms in Southern California. Issues and questions were being raised. Interest in a full and open discussion of the extent to which *g* plays a part in employment testing mounted, and *The g Factor in Employment Testing* was selected as the topic for the 1985 PTC Fall Conference held October 10–11, 1985, in Newport Beach, California.

Selection of Speakers

Helen Lewis, PTC 1985 Vice President of Conferences, and the author, who served as 1985 Conference Coordinator, undertook the task of identifying speakers and arranging for their participation in the conference. In planning the conference it was hoped that different points of view would be presented, and that practical information concerning the use of mental ability tests as the primary selection tool would be offered.

Immediately, the names of Arthur R. Jensen and Robert L. Thorndike, both outstanding contributors to the field, came to mind. They were contacted and both agreed to participate. Names of other leading researchers in the field of testing and employment selection were also gathered. In addition to Arthur Jensen and Robert Thorndike, our final panel of speakers included John Hunter, Linda Gottfredson, and James Crouse. All had investigated differing areas of *g*. John Hawk, who is responsible for directing the Department of Labor test development and testing program, agreed to serve as conference moderator.

Responses to the Conference

As anticipated, those attending the conference found it informative, enlightening, and thought-provoking. Reactions, elicited from a short evaluation completed by many of the participants, centered around new information gained, implications for the uses of *g*-loaded tests, and the social impact of such uses.

PTC members attending the conference were generally impressed by the magnitude of new research findings with respect to both the existence and correlates of *g*. They found the data regarding the pervasiveness of *g*, including its broad predictive utility and its relationship to nonintellective variables such as choice reaction time and evoked electrical potential, especially persuasive. Many individuals were previously unaware of the strong possibility of biological bases or, at least, correlates of *g*, for example, electrical potentials in the brain. Participants were also impressed with the long history of both the concept of and research on *g*, as reviewed by Thorndike.

A second area of reaction concerned the implications for practice. Many of those attending reported being reassured concerning their use of mental ability tests in educational and occupational settings; others reported a greater willingness to use such tests in the future based on the data reported in the conference papers. Not surprisingly, however, the implications of such uses for minority group members were of great concern. Other practical concerns included implications of the research on *g* for the use of special ability data and job knowledge in occupational decisions.

Related to the concerns about uses of *g*-loaded tests were concerns about the more general societal impact of such practices. Issues regarding affirmative action and, for many respondents, concerns about the fairness of using in selection a relatively fixed characteristic over which the individual has little control, that is, *g*, versus such characteristics as effort, motivation, and persistence, over which the individual may have more control.

To summarize, the information conveyed was viewed with interest and respect, but the questions regarding uses and social impact were left unresolved. PTC members were hopeful that a second conference on this topic, following up the issues raised herein, would be planned. Before concluding this section, an individual response to the evaluation, written in the form of a letter, will be presented. This letter illustrates the sense of many of those attending that the conference left unresolved a number of important questions and issues. The letter is reproduced here with permission of the author.

I found the Fall Conference to be the best conference I have attended in years, yet, in some respects it was shallow and disappointing. I thought it was exciting that, finally, a professional personnel association addressed what may be the most critical issue in personnel testing today—the implications of using (or not using) *g*-loaded tests. Having someone with the stature of an Art Jensen addressing the issue formally during the conference and casually in the evening was a fascinating experience. The disappointment came about as a consequence of there being so many speakers and so little time. None, and especially Jensen, had time to fully develop their thoughts. Furthermore, and most disappointing, was the fact that there was no controversy.

We had a classic dilemma, complete with the markings of a Greek tragedy, sitting in the wings, waiting to be introduced and no one acknowledged its presence. On the one hand, a nation rediscovers how to regain its leadership role as the most productive industrial country in the world, but it is unable to use this knowledge because it conflicts with their unshakable conviction that something called *g* is and must be distributed in precisely the same manner amongst all of its ethnic groups. Further the Galileo syndrome is operative: since the findings are not in accord with cherished beliefs, they must be ignored or condemned. For evidence, did anyone, as a consequence of the conference, go back to their employing organization, and order the use of intelligence tests as the primary selection process for any job classification? And why not? Perhaps it was because of a reluctance to risk facing charges of intentional discrimination by the federal government.

If there is another conference on this topic, I would hope that attention would be given to the social and economic consequences of the findings that were discussed at the Fall conference. It would be interesting to have a recognized authority share his/her opinions regarding possible relationships between using *g*-loaded tests in selection (or the non-use of such tests) and the diminishing GNP—i.e. the effect on productivity of using less valid or non-valid selection methods. If a Schmidt or a Jensen were to present one side of the issue, it would be essential to have an equally eloquent authority commenting on the consequences of the adverse effect such an approach would have on affirmative action and our society in general. Then we could have a conference that has it all—information, education, controversy, excitement—heat *and* light. . . .

If my comments seem primarily critical, please understand that this is the only conference I have attended in recent years that I have found worthy of critiquing. I was interested in the *g* factor in testing long before it became fashionable to discard it. My beliefs were sustained through the years through my own observations and experience, even though I lacked the sophistication to deal effectively with the critics. Understandably, I have found the work of Jensen, Schmidt, and Hunter, etc., rejuvenating. Even though I wished the Fall conference had delved into the subject more deeply, and even though it did not provide me with new insights, it was reassuring to have my beliefs and opinions confirmed by reputable psychologists able to provide the scientific rationale for those opinions and beliefs. That's not to say that I did not learn some new facts. There were many. Among other things, I was not familiar with the work that Jensen had done showing the relationship between *g* and reaction time. The pervasiveness of *g* is fascinating and potentially invaluable.

I look forward to the time when we human resource specialists can once again have the confidence and social support to behave more rationally and more excellently. (I. A. Ryanen, Personal Communication, March 19, 1986)

Summary

Without a doubt, the PTC conference on *The g Factor in Employment Testing* was exciting. Indeed, it had many of the elements mentioned in the letter above—information, education, controversy, excitement—heat and light. It is hoped that the articles which follow will prove stimulating and informative to the readership of the *Journal*. Perhaps some of our readers will be encouraged to pursue some of the issues raised.

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