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DISSERTATION DEFENSE

Text-Based Unethical Behavior Forecasting:
The Hidden Information Distribution and Evaluation (HIDE) Model

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One of the biggest problems facing organizations is unethical employee behavior such as cheating and stealing. One way to effectively mitigate unethical work behavior is to identify unethical individuals during the selection process. However, it is currently unknown whether, or how, we can detect peoples' tendency to behave unethically when we do not know the person well. This research is designed to remedy this dearth in our understanding of unethical behavior predictions in settings where people need to make prompt judgments based on the limited information they obtain from strangers.

In Chapter 1 of this dissertation I develop a new theoretical framework, the hidden information distribution and evaluation (HIDE) model. This model predicts that judges, who do not know the target individuals of evaluation, can detect aspects of unethical behavior tendencies that targets incorrectly know (misconstrue) and/or are unaware of themselves. Using this model, I developed a novel tool to predict the unethical behavior of people from their spontaneous written responses to specially designed questions.

In Chapter 2, I conducted laboratory experiments and a field survey to investigate the wisdom of crowds in forecasting unethical behavior from written interview responses of targets. I show that groups of naïve judges can predict the unethical behavior of targets by evaluating their moral character using this text-based interview method.

In Chapter 3, I investigate what aspects of moral character are revealed in each interview question with an aim to further increase the predictive power of unethical behavior using the text-based interview method. To increase the predictive validity, I found that certain evaluation dimensions should be matched to particular interview questions because each question revealed different aspects of moral character. Across three studies, the judges' evaluations of more specifically defined moral character traits (i.e., Conscientiousness, guilt proneness) had better convergent validity and stronger predictive powers than the judges' evaluations of moral character as a whole. Additionally, I found that the judges' evaluations of Honesty-Humility were not as predictive as other dimensions.

In Chapter 4, I investigated the predictive validity of the judges' evaluations with varying levels of the targets' impression management motivation when answering the interview questions. The relative predictive powers of the judges' ratings, compared to self-reports, increased as the targets' impression management motivation increased. When high levels of impression management were employed, only the reports by the judges were predictive of the unethical behavior by targets. In Chapter 4, I also investigated how judges form an impression of the Honesty-Humility of targets. I found that the judges' evaluations of the four elements of the Honesty-Humility factor (i.e., sincerity, fairness, greed-avoidance, and modesty) do not form one factor as the greed element was somewhat positively perceived in judging others and was positively correlated with Conscientiousness evaluations.

In Chapter 5 I conducted text analyses to explore how human judges utilize linguistic cues in written responses to form an impression of moral character and how linguistic cues predict the unethical behavior of targets. The goal of this final chapter is to detect the linguistic cues that human judges failed to correctly detect or utilize. I introduced the future direction of this research program using exploratory text analyses.

Key words: unethical behavior; interviews; text-analysis; person perception.