

TEST TAKING ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR - IS IT IMPACTED BY TEST ADMINISTRATION?

A REVIEW OF TEST TAKING ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOUR, AND AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF TEST ADMINISTRATION METHOD (ONLINE/PENCIL & PAPER, SUPERVISED/UNSUPERVISED)

There has been longstanding debate as to whether the conditions under which candidates complete psychometric assessments impacts their assessment results. In late 2017, the SafeSelect Risk Prediction Index (RPI) was made available for candidates to complete online, in an unsupervised environment such as in their own home. This was a significant shift from traditional pencil and paper assessments which were completed under supervised conditions. Questions were raised as to whether this change in assessment administration would impact candidate's assessment results.

Our current research examines what, if any impact test administration has on candidate's test taking attitude when completing the RPI.

Will candidates respond differently if they complete an assessment online and unsupervised compared to pencil and paper?

TEST TAKING ATTITUDE (RESPONSE BIAS)

The mindset or attitude of a candidate when completing a psychometric assessment can impact their overall personality profile. Most psychometric assessments have inbuilt scales to detect a candidate's test taking attitude, looking at behaviours such as impression management, social desirability and consistent responding. Essentially, these are the "lie scales" and are designed to make sure that a personality profile is a valid representation of the candidate who completed the assessment, at the time they completed the assessment.

The Risk Prediction Index (RPI) has three scales that measure approach to testing (our lie scales). These are:

1. Fake good (impression management) - This is when a candidate responds to the questions in a personality assessment in a socially desirable or self-favouring manner. In these cases, the candidate is attempting to create an overly positive impression, which isn't considered realistic.
2. Careless responding (consistent responding) - Items in a personality questionnaire often appear more than once, or when measuring the same behaviour or trait items can be both positively worded and negatively worded. Careless responding measures how consistently a candidate has responded to different items that measure the same behaviour or trait.
3. Guardedness (central tendency) - On a 5-point Likert scale, this measures the degree to which a candidate has used the middle or neutral option (central tendency) versus the extreme ends of the scale. Candidates who respond in this manner tend to be "sitting on the fence", not willing to show their true preferences one way or another.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH - TEST ADMINISTRATION AND RESPONSE BIAS

Impression Management (Fake Good)

Pencil and Paper vs Computer / Supervised vs Unsupervised

There have been mixed findings about the impact of test administration (pencil and paper vs computer / supervised vs unsupervised) on test taking attitudes. Some studies have found greater socially desirable responding (fake good) for computer assessments than paper, whereas others have found no difference.

Some research has found that fake good was higher for candidates who completed under supervised conditions, suggesting the presence of a supervisor can affect a candidate's motivation to make a positive impression. Conversely, other studies have found no difference for the presence of a supervisor.

Consistent Responding (Carelessness)

Studies have shown that a candidate's tendency to respond in a consistent vs careless manner is more a factor of individual differences such as attention to detail and motivation to read questions thoroughly rather than test administration method (online or vs paper format) and presence of a supervisor.

Central tendency/Extreme Responding (Guardedness)

Previous research has found mixed results regarding the impact of test administration (paper vs online / supervised vs unsupervised) and Fake Good

There is limited research regarding central tendency as a test taking attitude and no research could be found about the impact that test administration type has on this response style.

Careless responding is more a factor of when candidates fail to or are not motivated to carefully read assessment questions and does not appear to be impacted by whether the assessment is online or in paper format

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OUR CURRENT RESEARCH

In the current research we examined the relationship between test administration of the RPI and test taking attitudes. We looked at:

Test Administration Variables	Test Taking Attitude Measures
Pencil and paper (supervised)	Fake good (impression management)
Online (unsupervised)	Careless responding (consistent responding)
Online (supervised)	Guardedness (central tendency/ extreme responding)

Our research was based on a sample size of over 31 000 candidates who completed the RPI in various test conditions. The data was analysed using a one-way ANOVA.

RESULTS

Fake good

The results showed that Fake Good was higher for unsupervised online tests than both forms of supervised assessments (online and pencil and paper). This indicates that when candidates are given the opportunity to complete the assessments in their own environments without the presence of a supervisor, they were more likely to attempt to portray an overly positive impression of themselves.

Careless responding

The results showed that Careless Responding was higher for online assessments than paper and pencil. However, this difference was very small. As found in the previous research it's likely that careless responding is more of an outcome of the candidate's attention to detail and motivation to complete the assessment thoroughly, rather than test administration method.

Guardedness

The results showed that the mean Guardedness score was higher for unsupervised (online) than supervised (pencil and paper, online) assessments. This indicates that when candidates complete the assessment in their own environment without a supervisor, they are slightly more likely to be guarded in their responses, relying more on the centre of the scale rather than committing to either end of the scale.

For more detail about the research results access the analysis [paper](#).

"We found that candidates were more likely to answer in a socially desirable way, be more careless and rely more on the midpoint of a scale when completing assessments online and unsupervised"

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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our analyses have shown that test administration does impact a candidate's test taking attitude with fake good (impression management), careless responding and guardedness (central tendency) all higher for online unsupervised administrations of the Risk Prediction Index (RPI) than for the supervised pencil and paper and online (computer) administrations. This suggests that candidates are more likely to answer in a socially desirable way, be more careless and rely more on the midpoint of a 5-point Likert scale when completing the assessments online and unsupervised than when completing them supervised either via pencil and paper or on computer.

To minimise the impact of this response style on selection decisions we recommend the following:

- Pay attention to these test-taking variables when interpreting the RPI profile as they are good indicators of how the candidate has approached the assessment. Explore these variables in interview with targeted questions such as:
 - How they manage the impression they make on others (fake good)
 - Their attention to detail when reading instructions (careless responding)
 - Their willingness to commit to one definite course of action versus another (guardedness)
- Exploring these variables in interview will help ascertain whether the candidate's test taking attitude was unique to the RPI or is representative of their behaviour on the job. E.g. are they going to be careless and lack attention to detail (careless responding)? Are they going to find it difficult to commit to one definite action (guardedness)?
- Ask the candidate whether they had any difficulties completing the assessment, particularly if they have high careless responding. This will help ascertain whether their careless responding was due to lack of motivation, or whether they were impacted by factors such as distractions, internet problems or reading or language difficulties.
- When communicating with candidates before they take the online unsupervised assessments let them know that open and honest answers to the test questions are preferred.
- Refer the candidates to the Informed Consent Form that they need to sign before they commence the test (both supervised and unsupervised) that outlines the penalty for cheating or faking a test.
- Consider how these variables may have impacted their RPI profile. If they had a high fake good remember that some of the candidate's 'strengths' in the profile may be inflated.
- Consult with SafeSelect if there are still questions or concerns about how these variables impact on the interpretation of a candidate's RPI profile.

While test-taking attitudes such as fake good, careless responding and guardedness are slightly higher for online, unsupervised administration than pencil and paper these effects can be mitigated through the above strategies. All assessment data gathered is valuable and understanding how a candidate is likely to respond when given the opportunity to work independently in an unsupervised environment also offers insight about the candidate's suitability to different work environments.

