

## CONTENT VALIDITY OF THE PERSONAL SELLING ETHICS SCALE: REPLICATION AND EXTENSION

Casey Donoho and Timothy Heinze, Department of Finance and Marketing,  
California State University, Chico, 307 Tehama Hall, Chico, CA 95929;  
cdonoho@csuchico.edu, tcheinze@csuchico.edu

### ABSTRACT

An analysis of the content validity of the Personal Selling Ethics Scale (Dabholkar & Kellaris, 1992) was conducted using an exploratory review of sales texts, popular press, journal articles and codes of ethics. A sample of 194 students was used to replicate the original study as well as test new ethical scenarios as suggested by the literature search. Preliminary results suggest the current ranking of the twenty sales scenarios is highly correlated with the ranking of the original study. Recommendations are presented for improving the content validity of the PSE Scale.

Ethical problems are still with us and are particularly troublesome in sales organizations. Sales managers can provide ethical training and enforce ethical codes of conduct to address these ethical concerns (Rogers, 2007). Dabholkar and Kellaris (1992) developed a set of 20 ethical dilemmas called the Personal Selling Ethics Scale (PSE). The PSE was designed to measure the sensitivity of sales professionals and students to ethical issues. They found that various situations affect the evaluations of these scenarios. Ethical judgments vary widely among individuals, countries, and personal values (Donoho, Herche, & Swenson, 2003) as well as age (Abratt & Penman, 2002)

An exploratory literature search of major ethical topics discussed in today's sales textbooks, popular press books, academic journals, and codes of conduct are summarized. After addressing the relative ethical emphases within today's literature, the paper presents a list of ethical categories (and their respective emphasis) and contrasts the list with the ethical dimensions included in the PSE. Results of a student survey replicating the original PSE scenarios along with 16 additional scenarios suggested by the literature are presented.

Our analysis of the content validity of the PSE Scale used an exploratory review of sales texts, popular press, journal articles and codes of ethics. The study was able to replicate the original study as well as test new ethical scenarios suggested by the literature search.

A new scale, the PSE2 Scale, was constructed to improve the content validity of the PSE. Scenarios were added to expand the ethics scale content in the areas of coercion, defamation, passing blame, price discrimination and withholding information. To maintain the number of scale items, redundant scenarios were deleted. The PSE2 Scale exhibited a similar overall mean and range to the current PSE study. Gender differences were significant. Females perceived the ethical scenarios to be less ethical than their male counterparts. The PSE2's reliability was higher than the PSE in this study (Cronbach alpha = .81 versus .76). We believe that the PSE2 offers a more comprehensive set of scenarios than the original PSE and is more representative of a sales code of ethics. The broader array of sales scenarios should make the scale a better pedagogical tool for the ethics training of both students and salespeople.

Further testing of the PSE2 Scale is warranted. Content validity only represents a first step in scale development, although the PSE2 is an adaption and extension of an existing scale. Future research should evaluate the scale relative to other constructs. For example, the List of Values (Kahle, 1983) has been used to predict PSE evaluations across countries (Donoho, Herche, & Swenson, 2003), and the PSE has been used as a deontological norm in partial testing of the Hunt-Vitell General Theory of Marketing Ethics (Donoho, Polonsky, Cohen, Balazs, Herche, Swenson, & Smith, 1999). Ethical positions such as moral idealism and relativism may also predict differences in PSE scores. Generalizability of the PSE2 Scale will require testing with salespeople.

One of the limitations of the PSE and PSE2 is the number of scale items that must be evaluated by the respondent. Although this presents less of a problem for a student population, it may be problematic for busy salespeople. A factor analytic study of the PSE2 may suggest a shorter version of the PSE2 Scale for evaluation by salespeople. This may provide more flexibility in testing the relationships between ethical evaluation, intentions and actual behaviors in the workplace.

**References Available on Request**