

for reformed criminals, no matter how long ago or the nature of the offense, banned from employment.⁴⁷ Such questions are difficult to answer.

Finally, many labor unions have historically resisted background checking. In 2007, Major League Baseball owners clashed with the Umpires Union about background checks.⁴⁸ Conversely, in 2010, the Air Line Pilots Association, which represents UPS pilots, backed increased use of background checks.⁴⁹

One way to ameliorate some of these problems is to limit background check information that is job related (it may be difficult to establish that a spotty employment history is important to jobs that mostly involve manual labor) and to use multiple sources to verify problems for exclusionary information (i.e., if an applicant is excluded because of what a background check uncovered, it would be prudent to independently verify the information).

Evaluation of Recommendations, References, and Background Checks

The empirical data that exist suggest that the validity of reference checks is low to moderate. A meta-analysis of a number of studies revealed that the validity coefficients of reference data ranged from $\bar{r} = .16$ to $\bar{r} = .26$. Another study suggested that when reference reports are structured (the same questions were asked about every applicant), their validity was $\bar{r} = .25$. To some degree, the validity depends on who is providing the information. If it is the personnel officer, a coworker, a relative, or even the applicant himself or herself, the information is not very valid. On the other hand, reference reports from supervisors and acquaintances are somewhat more valid. The information from personnel officers may be less valid because they are less knowledgeable about the applicant (their past employee); reports of coworkers and relatives are likely less valid because these individuals are positively biased toward the applicant.

Although references do not have high validity, we need to take a cost-benefit approach. In general, the quality of the information may be low, but in the few cases where reference information changes a decision, the payoff can be significant. For example, an executive with the US Postal Service once told one of the authors that many of the acts of violence by Postal Service employees would have been avoided if a thorough background check had been conducted. Thus, since references are a relatively cheap method of collecting information on applicants, screening out the occasional unstable applicants or, in a few cases, learning something new and important about an applicant may make reference checks a good investment. As with unweighted application blanks, using reference checks requires employers to turn elsewhere to obtain suitable information for making final decisions about applicants.

Finally, because they are difficult to quantify, we do not have validity evidence for letters of recommendation and background checks. The one exception is the credit score, as a recent study found that those with higher credit scores were more conscientious and were rated as higher performers ($r = .57$) and "good organizational citizens" ($r = .30$) by their supervisors. Although these are subjective assessments, they do suggest that credit scores as one form of background check have