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(SINGAPORE)

The development of polygraph examinations in Singapore

Government

The polygraph was first introduced in Singapore in 1976. That year, the Ministry of Home Affairs purchased a four-channel Lafayette analogue polygraph. In 1977, on the recommendation of the polygraph manufacturer Lafayette Instrument Company, Koa Fung Chew, the writer of this article, who was then an Inspector in the Singapore Police Service, was sent to attend a nine-week basic polygraph course followed by a six-week practical attachment at the American Institute of Polygraph Technology and Forensic Psychophysiology in Michigan in United States. The training included specific issue testing and pre-employment screening.

Initially, the Ministry of Home Affairs mainly used the polygraph as an investigative tool for specific investigations into criminal and security cases as well as in pre-employment screening. As a result of polygraph's good track record, its usage

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expanded rapidly from 1989 onwards. More government law enforcement agencies began to employ the polygraph. These agencies included the Criminal Investigation Department of the Singapore Police Service, the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau under the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Defence. All of the training of examiners were trained by foreign polygraph schools, including the Polygraph School of Israel, the American Institute of Polygraph Technology and Forensic Psychophysiology and later, the Maryland Institute of Criminal Justice and the Academy for Scientific Investigative Training. Currently, there are some 20–30 full-time and many more part-time government examiners. The types of cases handled are varied, including specific issue testing related to criminal and security investigations, internal investigations, and pre-employment and periodic personnel screening. A highly publicised recent case is the use of polygraph testing in curbing soccer match fixing in the S League, where players and referees are required to undergo random polygraph tests carried out by the law enforcement agencies.

Private sector

The government sector is the main user of the polygraph in Singapore. The writer of this article is the only private examiner in Singapore. He opened the only private polygraph firm Polygraph Investigative Services in November 2001 after his retirement from government service. The firm is licensed to carry out polygraph examinations and other forms of private investigations. The main users of private polygraph examinations come mainly from private companies in connection with internal investigations into employee theft, leakage of confidential information, sabotage and corruption.

Over the last few years, Polygraph Investigative Services had helped private firms to solve many crimes committed by internal staff. The most common type of cases is what is termed "multiple subject testing". A typical scenario is the theft of a large amount of money or properties from a company. Internal investigations could not narrow down any specific suspect. Any person in a large group of staff, say 20–30 could be the culprit. Reporting to the police at this stage would result in a 'dead end case'. The company decides to engage the services of a private examiner to help pinpoint the culprit. After the culprit is identified from the polygraph tests, the company makes a police report using the polygraph results and other case facts. The polygraph charts and records are forwarded to the police for confirmation when required.

In a recent case, the client was a large US multinational hard disk manufacturer based in Singapore. It has its own Regional Security Manager and team of investigators, who are all ex-police officers. During an annual stock check done, some 50 pieces of a certain platinum alloy component used in the manufacturing of hard disks costing a total of \$1million (Singapore dollars) were unaccounted for. It was believed that they disappeared after they were drawn from the store. Investigations by in-house investigators drew a blank. In the manufacturing process, some 40 staff handled this particular platinum alloy component in the manufacturing chain. Any one of them could have been the culprit. There were no records of the last person who handled the missing parts. It was felt that reporting the matter to the police at this juncture would not be the best option because there were no suspects or evidence. An in-house reward of \$10,000 was offered to staff for information on the case but none came forward.

Polygraph Investigative Services was engaged to find out the perpetrator. One by one, they sent each possible suspect to our office for testing. Everyone agreed to take the test when approached. The tenth person who came for the polygraph test, a machine operator, failed the test. After the test, the in-house investigators brought this particular person together with our test report to make a police report. During subsequent interrogation by the police, he broke down, confessed and provided the police with information leading to the arrest of 3 other conspirators. It turned out that the General Manager of the US Company in Singapore, which supplied the platinum alloy parts was the mastermind behind this theft. He, together with his "number two" man and his company driver (all Singaporeans), conspired with the machine operator to steal the platinum alloy parts. All 4 were subsequently convicted and given prison sentences. The hard disk company managed to recover the \$1million (Singapore dollars) from the US supplier.

The last case we handled recently was a typical case of pilfering by an employee. The client was the owner of one of the boat restaurants. During the month of March 2007, there were 4 instances of cash shortages at the restaurant cash register. Altogether, the sum came to over a hundred dollars, not a very big amount. Each time, the 5 restaurant staff who had access to the cash register had to fork out money from their own pockets to make up the shortages. Although the amount was small, the owner was very upset because it affected the morale of the staff. He wanted to get to the bottom of the matter. Through the Internet, he came to know about our company. When he came to our office, he told us that it was not the amount of money stolen, it was a matter of principle. He wanted to "get rid of the cancer once and for all". After agreeing on the cost, he went back, called up all the 5 staff and gave them a final chance to own up. None came forward. The first staff he brought for the test, the supervisor who was the most senior of the 5, failed the test. On being confronted with the results of the test, he confessed to the thefts. The

owner subsequently sacked him and decided not to make a police report, as the amount stolen was small.

Besides private organisations, defence attorneys also send their clients for private polygraph examinations to assess their truthfulness. Private individuals also seek our assistance to find out whether their maids had stolen their money during their employment.

Singapore Association of Polygraphers

The Singapore Association of Polygraphers (SAP) was formed in 2004. There are currently about 40 registered members who are all trained Singaporean polygraph examiners. The objectives of the SAP are as follows:

1. Set professional standards and ethics in polygraph testing for members
2. Foster unity among polygraph examiners
3. Establish a common identity for polygraph examiners
4. Coordinate and provide training for polygraph examiners through annual polygraph seminars.

The first SAP seminar lasting 2 days was held in February 7 attended by about 30 members.

Polygraph examiners' training

Most of the polygraph examiners in Singapore received their basic and advanced polygraph training from American Polygraph Schools accredited by the American Polygraph Association. Most of these training courses are conducted in Singapore. After the completion of formal training, the examiners work on real cases in their respective agencies and learn the finer points of polygraph testing from their more experienced colleagues.

Legal status

To date, in Singapore polygraph examinations are mainly used as an investigative tool both in the government and private sectors. The polygraph is not tested in our courts of law. Law enforcement agencies and the Office of the Attorney General use polygraph examinations as an assessment tool to help determine whether to charge a person and what charges to file. All polygraph examinations are voluntary and a person has the right to refuse an examination.