Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology xxx (2017) xxx–xxx

Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos de Madrid

Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology

www.elsevier.es/rpto

Moderator effects of job complexity on the validity of forced-choice personality inventories for predicting job performance

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 31 May 2017
Accepted 6 July 2017
Available online xxx

Keywords:
Big Five
Job complexity
Meta-analysis
Forced-choice inventories
Personality

ABSTRACT

Research has demonstrated that job complexity moderates the validity of general mental ability (GMA), the relationship between personality and job satisfaction, and the relationship between GMA and job satisfaction. However, no published research has investigated whether job complexity moderates the criterion validity of the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality for predicting job performance. This paper reports a meta-analytic examination of the moderator effects of job complexity on the criterion validity of the FFM of personality as assessed with forced-choice inventories. In accordance with the hypotheses, the results showed that job complexity moderates negatively the validity of conscientiousness and emotional stability and that it moderates positively the validity of openness. The implications for personnel selection research and practice are discussed.

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Efectos moderadores de la complejidad del puesto sobre la validez de los cuestionarios de personalidad de elección forzosa para predecir el desempeño

Palabras clave:
Los cinco grandes
Complejidad del puesto
Metaanálisis
Cuestionarios de elección forzosa
Personalidad

RESUMEN

La investigación ha demostrado que la complejidad del puesto de trabajo modera la validez de la capacidad mental general (CMG), la relación entre la personalidad y la satisfacción en el trabajo y las relaciones entre la CMG y la satisfacción en el trabajo. Sin embargo, no se ha publicado ninguna investigación que haya examinado si la complejidad del puesto de trabajo modera la validez de criterio del modelo de los cinco grandes factores (MCGF) de personalidad para predecir el desempeño en el trabajo. Este artículo presenta un metaanálisis sobre los efectos moderadores de la complejidad del puesto en la validez del MCGF de personalidad cuando se emplean cuestionarios de elección forzosa (CEF). De acuerdo con las hipótesis planteadas, los resultados muestran que la complejidad del puesto modera negativamente la validez de criterio de los factores de responsabilidad y de estabilidad emocional y positivamente la validez del factor de apertura a la experiencia. Finalmente, se plantean algunas posibles implicaciones para la teoría y la práctica de la selección de personal.

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Recent surveys have shown that personality inventories are popular instruments for making personnel decisions in the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) (Alonso, Moscoso, & Cuadrado, 2015; Tett, Christiansen, Robie, & Simonet, 2011; Zibarras & Woods, 2010) and research on personality at work has also shown they are very useful procedures for predicting important organizational criteria. For example, personality measures predict job performance, training proficiency, counter-productive behaviors, well-being, accidents, productivity data, salary, promotions, and occupational attainment, among other work criteria (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001; Clarke & Robertson, 2005; Gilar, De Haro, & Castejón, 2015; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993;

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.rpto.2017.07.001
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Poropat, 2009; Raman, Sambasiva, & Kumar, 2016; Salgado, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2003; Salgado, Anderson, & Tauriz, 2015; Salgado & Tauriz, 2014). They also predict expatriate cross-cultural adjustment and effectiveness (AlDosiry, Alkhadher, AlAqraa, & Anderson, 2016; Mol, Born, Willemsen, & Van der Molen, 2005; Salgado & Bastida, 2017).

In the domain of personality at work, the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality (i.e., emotional stability, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) has received more attention than any alternative model. The extant meta-analytic evidence has demonstrated that conscientiousness and emotional stability generalized validity across samples, criteria, occupations, and countries, and that the other three personality dimensions were valid predictors for specific criteria and specific occupations. For example, openness to experience predicted training proficiency, and extraversion and agreeableness predicted performance in occupations characterized by a large number of interpersonal relationships (e.g., Barrick et al., 2001; Judge, Rodell, Klinger, Simon, & Crawford, 2013).

Nevertheless, agreement is not unanimous about the relevance of personality measures for personnel selection. For example, Murphy and Dzieweczynski (2005) posited that the theories linking personality constructs and job performance were often vague and unconvincing, that little was known about how to match personality dimensions and occupations, and that some of the most valid personality-related measures (e.g., integrity tests) included poorly defined constructs. On the other hand, researchers suggested that the validity of personality measures was small and that the measures based on self-reports can be faked, independently of the administration mode (Grieve & Hayes, 2016; Morgeson et al., 2007a, 2007b; Salgado, 2016).

In part, these criticisms have been contradicted by recent research that showed that (1) the format of the personality inventories is an important moderator of the criterion-related validity of the Big Five dimensions (Salgado, Anderson et al., 2015; Salgado & Tauriz, 2014), (2) the facets of the Big Five do not show evidence of criterion-related validity for predicting job performance when the variance of the facets is residualized (Salgado, Moscoso, & Berges, 2013; Salgado, Anderson et al., 2015), and (3) there is robust evidence of the construct validity of the FFM (e.g., Judge et al., 2013). With regard to the first issue, Salgado and Tauriz (2014) and Salgado, Anderson et al. (2015) found that criterion-related validity increased noticeably when quasi-ipsative forced-choice (QIFC) formats are used. For example, the operational validity of conscientiousness was found to be .39 when a QIFC format was used. In addition, some empirical evidence showed that the forced-choice (FC) format can be more resistant to faking than the most frequently used formats, such as Likert's (Jackson, Wroblewski, & Ashton, 2000; Nguyen & McDaniel, 2000).

Therefore, there is currently empirical evidence that the FC personality inventories are valid predictors of job performance and that they are also widely used in organizations for making personnel decisions. However, no previous research has examined the potential moderator effects of job complexity on the FC inventories as a unique category, nor have the moderator effects for the particular types of FC inventories (i.e., normative, ipsative, and quasi-ipsative) been examined.

The objective of this study is to shed light on this issue that has been ignored in the meta-analytic research conducted to examine the validity of the FC personality inventories. Consequently, the main goal of this study is to meta-analytically examine whether job complexity is a moderator of the criterion validity of FC inventories. The second goal is to check whether job complexity has similar effects for the three types of FC personality scores which can be obtained from FC inventories. Thus, the main contribution of this paper lies in highlighting the role that job complexity plays in the validity of FC personality inventories for predicting job performance.

Forced-Choice Personality Inventories

The first FC personality inventories were developed during the 1940s and 1950s (Hicks, 1970) and the FC models used in those days have remained relatively unchanged until now. Usually, the FC method asks the individual to make a choice between several alternatives, most frequently three or four. In order to make the decision the individual must indicate what alternative he/she likes most and what alternative he/she likes least when those alternatives are applied to the individual. The alternatives are paired in terms of similar levels of social discrimination and preference. Therefore, the FC method distinguishes from the most typical personality assessment methods, such as Likert, True-False, Agree-Indecisive-Disagree (collectively called single-stimulus [SS] methods), in that the individual has to make a choice between two or more alternatives rather than to rate each single statement or phase as is typically done with SS personality inventories.

Even though the FC method always consists of a choice between alternatives, the FC inventories can produce three types of scores depending on how the choice is made (Cattell, 1944; Clemans, 1966; Hicks, 1970). The FC personality inventories can result in normative, ipsative, and quasi-ipsative scores (see Salgado, Anderson et al., 2015, and Salgado & Tauriz, 2014, for a detailed account of these three scores). This contrasts with the SS personality inventories which always produce normative scores. Therefore, it is important to take into account the score type produced by the FC inventory because each of them has important psychometric characteristics.

The normative scores allow comparisons among individuals and groups on each personality variable. Therefore, they are inter-individual scores. The ipsative scores are dependent on the individual level in the other variables included in the choice. Consequently, ipsative scores permit the comparison of one individual across different personality factors. In other words, the ipsative scores are intra-individual ones. The quasi-ipsative scores allow comparisons between individuals and between groups, but produce simultaneously some degree of dependence among the variables assessed.

Several characteristics of the FC personality inventories which are relevant for personnel assessment have to be mentioned. First, they appear to correlate with general mental ability (GMA) when individuals respond as job applicants (Vasilopoulos, Cucina, Dyomina, Morewitz, & Reilly, 2006), so they can be more cognitively loaded than the typical SS personality formats (e.g., Likert, Yes, No). Therefore, the validity of the FC personality measures might be moderated by job complexity, as this variable also moderates the validity of GMA. Second, the FC-based measures may produce gender differences in some cases and, consequently, equal opportunities may also be negatively affected (Anderson & Sleap, 2004). Third, FC personality inventories showed stronger resistance to faking than SS personality inventories, although they are not totally unaffected by faking (Jackson et al., 2000; Nguyen & McDaniel, 2000). Fourth, recent advances in IRT methodology have produced methods for recovering normative scores from ipsative scores (Brown & Maydeu-Olivares, 2011; Chernyssenko, Stark, Drasgow, & Roberts, 2007; Heggestad, Morrison, Reeve, & McCloy, 2006; Maydeu-Olivares & Brown, 2010; McCloy, Heggestad, & Reeve, 2005; Stark, Chernyshenko, & Drasgow, 2005; Stark, Chernyshenko, Drasgow, & Williams, 2006). Fifth, they are currently used in around 30% of organizations, according to a survey conducted by Tett et al. (2011).

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