Summary

This paper presents results of a meta-analysis investigating ability and personality measures’ operational validities for predicting work performance, focusing on the extent to which these differ when criteria are measured as overall job performance compared to more specific distinctions. We found validities for both predictor types to be considerably higher when performance was measured specifically rather than through generic measures, suggesting assessment decisions can be facilitated through a thorough mapping and subsequent use of predictors and (specific) criteria.
**A meta-analytical investigation of predictor-criterion relationships**

Although the performance construct is of fundamental importance for both research and practice in Occupational/Organisational Psychology and related areas, our knowledge pertaining to its conceptualisation and measurement in the workplace is insufficient (Deadrick & Gardner, 2008). The present study aims to further our understanding of performance by taking a criterion-centric approach (Bartram, 2005). As such, employing psychometric meta-analysis procedures \( (k = 67) \) (Hunter & Schmidt, 2004), we examined criterion-related validities of ability and personality measures as established predictors of individual workplace performance. We focused hereby on determining whether type of criterion measurement acts as a moderator of the predictive validities, comparing three levels of granularity/specificity on the criterion-side: a) overall job performance as the least specific, b) the slightly more specific, but still relatively broad distinction between task performance and contextual performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; 1997) and c) the more specific eight-factor taxonomy postulated by Campbell and colleagues (e.g. Campbell, McHenry & Wise, 1990).

Whilst measures such as ability tests and personality assessments (Five-Factor Model, e.g. Costa & McCrae, 1990) were found to be generally predictive of performance, both in previous research (e.g. Barrick, Mount & Judge, 2001; Salgado & Anderson, 2003) and in our study, results of the meta-analyses indicate that the predictive validity of such measures can be increased when individual workplace performance (the criterion-side) is measured more specifically, that is through specific performance dimensions of interest that are matched to those predictor dimensions that are most predictive. In other words, the degree of granularity/specificity on the criterion-side moderates the predictive validities of established predictors. In this context, certain predictor dimensions were found to display higher predictive validities than others when mapped onto specific criterion measures. Conscientiousness for example, which can be characterised by the adjectives efficient, organised, planful, reliable, responsible and thorough (McCrae & John, 1992, p. 178) was found to be a good predictor of the criterion dimension ‘Demonstrating Effort’, which seems plausible as this is understood to be ‘a direct reflection of the consistency of an individual’s effort day by day’ (Campbell, 1990), thus pointing to a similarity in how these two constructs are conceptualised. We can therefore say that
‘it pays’ to be specific about performance; knowing which predictors work best with what criteria and matching the constructs accordingly, when warranted, can enhance the predictive validities. This suggests that practitioners and researchers would benefit from using specific performance measures. Moreover, knowing what types of predictors are most predictive of certain criteria is useful since it can facilitate and improve assessment decisions when the criteria of interest are matched up with those predictors research has shown to be most effective.

Our meta-analysis presents an initial attempt at directly comparing operational validities for predictors of overall job performance versus criterion-specific performance measurements. Future research should take up on this; further examinations are required concerning the validities of alternative predictor measures (e.g. motivation) and also concerning alternative, possibly even more specific criterion representations/conceptualisations.
References


