

Chapter 4

A Five-Factor Model Inventory for Use in Screening Police Officer Applicants: The Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R)

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ABSTRACT

The Five Factor Model (FFM) is widely accepted as a valid descriptor of normal personality and commonly used as a framework for prediction of job performance. As an inventory that operationalizes the FFM, the NEO PI-R is often utilized in personnel selection. The California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training has identified ten dimensions that increasingly serve as a template for the screening of police officer applicants. These screening dimensions are based on the FFM. The NEO PI-R thus appears well suited to serve as an inventory used for screening police officer applicants. A literature review is provided and strengths and weaknesses of the inventory discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The federal government has long supported the use of psychological evaluations to screen police officer candidates (National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, 1973) and police departments have been held responsible for selecting a capable and healthy workforce (*Bonsignore v. City of New York*, 1981; *Woods v. Town of Danville, WV*, 2010). The psychological screening of police officer applicants has thus become a widespread practice (Cochrane, Tett, & Vandecreek, 2003; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010). Guidelines for preemployment psychological evaluations have been promulgated

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0813-7.ch004

by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (2014) and recommend that a written test battery be relevant to the purpose of the evaluation and that test instruments possess documented empirical reliability and validity supporting their use for police officer selection (Guideline 7.1). The California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (CA POST), in the largest applied research project of its kind to date, identified 10 dimensions associated with both effective and counterproductive police officer job performance and mapped these dimensions against the Five Factor Model (FFM) personality domains, facets, and compound personality traits using a taxonomy created by Hough and Ones (2002). CA POST mandates assessment of police officer applicants according to the following FFM oriented job-related dimensions: Social Competence, Teamwork, Adaptability and Flexibility, Conscientiousness and Dependability, Impulse Control, Integrity and Ethics, Emotional Regulation and Stress Tolerance, Decision Making and Judgment, Assertiveness and Persuasiveness, and Avoiding Substance Use and Other Risk-Taking Behavior (Spilberg & Corey, 2014). These screening dimensions represent validated, behaviorally-defined police officer work behaviors associated with FFM psychological factors and serve as a standard template for police officer applicant evaluation findings across departments and examiners. Consequently, FFM-based objective personality inventories appear especially suited for the screening of police officer applicants; the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO PI-R), in particular, has empirical evidence that supports its use for this purpose.

Five-Factor Model and Job Performance

The Five-Factor Model (FFM) is a hierarchical structure of personality traits representing five fundamental domains: Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Openness. Although the FFM and “Big Five” have differing origins, these labels are commonly used interchangeably (De Fruyt, McCrae, Szirmak, & Nagy, 2004). There is general agreement that the FFM is a valid descriptor of normal personality (Mount & Barrick, 1998; Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998). It also has been widely used as a framework for the prediction of job performance (Barrick & Mount, 2005; Hogan, 2005; Hough & Oswald, 2005; Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Dilchert, 2004).

FFM personality traits have demonstrated validity for a wide array of work performance measures (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Mount & Barrick, 1995; Salgado, 1997; Tett, Jackson, & Rothstein, 1991). Neuroticism and Conscientiousness predict work motivation and performance across most job functions, while Extraversion, Openness, and Agreeableness are characterized as “niche” traits predictive of performance in specific occupations and according to particular job functions (Barrick & Mount, 2005). Contextual job performance, including citizenship behavior that supports, maintains, and enhances task performance, has also been associated with FFM traits (Chiaburu, Oh, Berry, Li, & Gardner, 2011).

FFM Meta-Analyses and Police Officer Job Performance

Several meta-analyses report associations between FFM assessments and police officer job performance. As one aspect of a pioneering meta-analysis of FFM measures as indicators of job performance on a wide array of jobs, Barrick and Mount (1991) found Conscientiousness to possess the strongest esti-

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