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Recruitment and Selection in Europe: One step beyond

Reclutamiento y selección en Europa: un paso adelante

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This Special Issue of the Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology [Revista de Psicología del Trabajo y de las Organizaciones] represents research findings from members of the European Network of Recruitment and Selection Researchers (ENESER) on challenging and timely themes in the field of recruitment/selection. ENESER was established in June 2011 in Athens under the auspices and with the support of the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychologists (EAWOP) and the Athens University of Economics and Business (Nikolaou, Anderson, & Salgado, 2012). One of its goals (ENESER; <http://www.eneser.org>) is to bring together academics that carry out applied research in the areas of recruitment, selection, and assessment in Europe and beyond. Another goal is to act as a community for practitioners that are interested in scientific advances and actually support/conduct research in this area. Inspired by the Mediterranean Sea and the wisdom heritage from the ancient Greeks, Dr. Ioannis Nikolaou successfully organized the first ENESER meeting, thereby paving the way for the second ENESER meeting organized by Prof. Rosalind Searle held in June 2012 in Sheffield (UK), surrounded by the greenness of the British Peak District. More than twenty European participants from Belgium, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the UK, actively took part in the presentations and gave thoughtful feedback to authors, building up an exciting scenario for future research collaborations. Some of the papers in this Special Issue were presented at this second ENESER meeting. In total, we selected one theoretical and four empirical papers (two lab studies and two field studies) from five different countries (i.e., Belgium, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and The Netherlands) that include a variety of topics relevant to both academics and practitioners and consider personnel selection from diverse perspectives.

Perspectives and Contributions

Recruitment, selection and assessment constitute one of the oldest and most respected areas in the field of Industrial and Organizational Psychology. If we pay thorough attention to the pioneer research on personnel selection we become aware of the

scientific and practical European contributions occurring since the beginning of the twentieth century until the current times (Salgado, Anderson, & Hülsheger, 2010).

The longstanding research on recruitment, selection, and assessment has been occupied largely with the evaluation of the psychometric properties of its assessment tools, the predictor-criterion relationship as well as the investigation of the utility of recruitment and selection practices. This orthodox method in personnel selection (Guion, 1976) has been denominated as the traditional paradigm and is based mainly on psychometrics (Herriot, 1992). However, about five decades ago academic researchers started to recognize recruitment and selection as an interactional, social-motivational process (Derous, van der Velde, & Born, 2011). In 1965, Schein already mentioned the impact of changing technology and society on recruitment and selection practices and – as a consequence – the potential danger of any paradigmatic stagnation in the field. One important assumption of the traditional approach concerns the predictability – and hence, the assumption of stability of organizations, functions, and people. Yet, triggered by environmental changes, recruitment and selection specialists are facing ‘new’ dilemmas, such as how best to assess and predict one’s future job performance given the ‘flux’ and ‘transformation’, and the more dynamic and changing performance criteria and settings that individuals are working with. Consequently, the perspectives concerning personnel selection have shifted from the traditional paradigm to a social negotiation/process paradigm (see Herriot, 1989, 1992) in which applicants’ perspectives are taken more in account. Specifically, whereas the traditional approach considers recruitment and selection as one-way directed (from organization to candidate), the social process perspective regards recruitment and selection as more of a two-way communication process – its value not only depending on its utility for the organization, but just as much on the way in which recruitment and selection practices are accepted by different stakeholders. In this sense, new research themes and topics have emerged, such as the selection of a more diverse workforce, investigating applicants’ justice expectations/perceptions and fairness, and selection for change (e.g., including pro-activity, innovativeness, etc.) to name but a few. Although the underlying assumptions of the ‘traditional’ and ‘social process’ approach seem somewhat different and even contradictory, both approaches should be considered as complementary (Derous & De Witte, 2001). This Special Issue addresses some of these concerns

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and clearly illustrates some of the dynamics that are inherent in current practices and research on recruitment and selection. The topics deal with a variety of problems of interest to researchers and practitioners, as follows: the validity-diversity dilemma (De Soete, Lievens, & Druart, 2013), the assessor characteristics in the accuracy of ratings (Wirz, Melchers, Lievens, De Corte, & Kleinmann, 2013), the role of proactive personality over the Big Five (Rodrigues & Rebelo, 2013), the variability of the predictors-criterion relationships (Ramos-Villagrasa, García-Izquierdo, & Navarro, 2013), and the influence of peer evaluations on applicant reactions (Geenen, Proost, Schreurs, van Dam, & von Grumbkow, 2013).

The first theoretical contribution from De Soete and colleagues at the Ghent University (Belgium) considers the diversity-validity dilemma in selection. Specifically, the authors discuss several strategies to maintain criterion-related validity while –at the same time– trying to avoid or reduce ethnic subgroup differences in selection performance. In doing so, they present an updated overview of ‘good practices/strategies’ where strategies such as employing simulation-based assessments, developing alternative cognitive ability measures, and using statistical procedures are identified as holding the most potential for the purpose of reducing the dilemma.

The next contribution comes from Zürich (Switzerland), where Andreja Wirz and her colleagues from Germany and Belgium deal with the effects of assessor team size on the accuracy of ratings in a presentation exercise, and the comparison with the effects of two factors related with assessor expertise (assessor training and assessor background). The results show that both assessor training and the number of assessors in the assessor teams related positively to more accurate performance ratings. Interestingly, the size of the assessor team could compensate a lower level of training if those assessors also had a sound (psychological) background (i.e., a preparatory training in psychology). As such, their findings offer some insight into the trade-off between highly trained and experienced assessors and those with less expertise and exposure. They did this research in the context of a simulated selection setting in an Assessment Center exercise.

Third, ‘selecting for change’ is another theme that emerged late and tends towards bridging the traditional and social process perspectives on selection. This theme has resulted in an increased interest as regards employee competencies such as flexibility, potential to innovate, and pro-active personality. In this line of thought, the validity study of Nuno Rodrigues and Teresa Rebelo (University of Coimbra) investigated the incremental role of proactive personality over traditional Big Five personality factors in the context of an IT company in Portugal. Using a rigorous statistical design, they showed proactive personality to be a valid and important predictor of overall job performance in software engineers. Proactive personality, however, did not seem to show a relevant incremental prediction validity over participants’ organizational tenure, nor over four of the Big Five factors.

The contribution of Ramos-Villagrasa (University of Oviedo, Spain) and his colleagues deals with a very relevant tool: the validity of predictors over time. More precisely, they show how predictions change with the dynamics of different criteria. The authors related the effectiveness of basketball players (as the criterion) to their ‘Big Five’ personality, their job experience, and intrinsic motivation (as predictors). Building further on the promising information theory approach which has been scarcely applied in psychological research (García-Izquierdo, Moreno, & García-Izquierdo, 2010), they detected changes in the predictive validity in the course of a sports season and that fluctuations in effectiveness through time were also determined by the same predictors. Therefore, decision-makers in personnel selection should also consider fluctuations in criteria over time.

Whereas the four aforementioned manuscripts focus predominantly on personnel selection and assessment, the last manuscript deals with peer communication as a potentially powerful recruitment mechanism. Further, and in line with a social process

approach, Geenen and colleagues (The Netherlands) show the indirect effects of peer communication in relation to a simulated hiring procedure on students’ subsequent test-taking motivation and test anxiety through their distributive and procedural justice expectations, respectively. The results showed significant mediating effects, given that peer communication concerning interpersonal justice played a role in the justice expectations and anxiety. Moreover, peer communication additionally played a role in relation to distributive justice expectations and motivation. This scenario study was conducted amongst Dutch students and by preference calls for more field research on the effects of situational context characteristics and recruitment strategies on job applicants’ test-taking reactions and test performance.

To conclude

This Special Issue in the Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology aims to provide an interesting view of some recent and compelling topics and perspectives that European selection researchers and practitioners are dealing with these days. More upcoming research findings and themes will be discussed at the third meeting of the European Network of Selection Researchers to be held at the Ghent University (Belgium) in 2014. We accordingly invite you to share our genuine research interests in recruitment and selection and to participate in this event at Ghent.

We would like to first thank the authors for their contributions which have given us the possibility to compose this Special Issue on Recruitment & Selection and to all reviewers who volunteered to review the manuscripts and whose invaluable and diligent work has helped to improve the quality of the final versions. Finally, we wish to extend a word of gratitude and very special and warm thanks to the Editor of the Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, Dr. Jesús Salgado, who made this Special Issue possible and who trusted and assisted us in our roles as Guest Editors.

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