Job Desire and Response Distortion in Personality Assessments

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to assess whether individuals engage in response distortion when applying for which they are highly motivated by job desire.
Design/Method/Approach: Participants completed questionnaires regarding scenarios of different jobs to assess the level of job desire and personality dimensions. Personality dimensions were assessed using the 50 item IPIP to determine a representation of the Big Five factor framework commonly relied upon by HR managers. The data was analysed by the use of t-tests to determine statistical significance.
Findings: Response distortion was found to be significantly higher for all personality variables in the high job desire than in the low job desire.
Implications: The results indicate that merely applying for a job can not be assumed to mean that every applicant has the same level of motivation, job desire, and that consequently, the responses to the personality dimensions may be distorted.

Key words: Job desire; personality testing.

Introduction

While the importance of personality testing and assessment gain momentum, concerns regarding the validity and reliability of personality assessments, within the personnel selection process, remain (McFarland & Ryan, 2000). Many factors can affect how an individual responds to the personality assessment and items within. These factors include test-taking motivation, anxiety, stress levels, perceptions and reactions to assessments, situational cues, and personal characteristics (George, Lankford, & Wilson, 1992; McFarland & Ryan, 2000; Templer & Lange, 2008; Wiechmann & Ryan, 2003). This suggests that individuals' feelings, attitudes and motivation could affect their responses to personality assessment items. As such, a person's motivation towards a particular job may have implications within their test taking. Some individuals could feel either feel highly motivated or highly unmotivated towards a job position they are applying for, having implications for personality testing at the recruitment stage.

Within this study an individual's motivation for a job is described as Job Desire. The proposed definition of Job Desire for this study is the level of passion, desire and motivation an individual has for the particular job they are applying for. It is suggested that individuals are assumed more motivated to intentionally distort their responses to personality assessments, to be viewed more attractively, if they are presented with a job that they "desire" rather than "need" (Ellingson & McFarland, 2011). That is, the preconceived idea that a position advertised will satisfy the individual's needs or full desires will subsequently enhance their desirability judgments. This paper makes the following contributions. Firstly it asses individuals Job Desire in relation to a particular scenario of high and low preferred job, and confirm the role of Job Desire in recruitment. Secondly, using an experimental design (in order to manipulate job desire – and conducted four weeks apart), it examines the role of desire in personality testing. Overall, using an experimental design, testing is conducted for Job Desire (high and low) and the influence of this (high and low desire) on subjects personality ratings. Ultimately, the aim is to determine the extent that individuals may engage in response distortion within a personality measure, based on their perceived desire for a job.

Job Desire

An individual's desire for a particular job is a very important concept to consider as the lack of desire can have costly consequences in regards to organisational commitment and turnover rates (Barrick & Zimmerman, 2005; Lee, Ashford, Walsh, & Mowday, 1992). If Human Resource (HR) managers could identify unmotivated applicants prior to organisational entry, this could lead to more accurate hiring decisions. However, there is an assumption amongst HR managers that when applicants apply for a role within an organisation they have a desire to hold that position. However this may not always be true. When applying for a position an individual may have no real desire or interest for either the job or to work for that organisation. Individuals may have been unemployed for a lengthy period, or they may want to find out more about the organisation but not intend to work there. Also, due to fluctuating unemployment rates in New Zealand, finding a job has become more difficult. Within the last ten years the unemployment rate has increased. In March 2007 the unemployment rate was 3.7%, which is the lowest in the previous ten years. In 2012 the unemployment rate rose to 6.9% and in December 2016 the unemployment rate was at 5.2% (Labour Market Statistics: December 2016 quarter, 2017, February; Quarterly Labour Market Report, 2014, February). Not only are individuals finding it harder to find a job, but organisations are finding it difficult to locate and retain skilled workers (Quarterly Labour Market Report, 2014, February). Thus Job Desire is not always a pre requisite for job applications.

Personality Assessments and Response Distortion

Previously there has been much debate over the validity of personality assessments within personnel selection. In the 1960's personality assessments were not supported as a credible source of decision making as studies found personality assessments added little to the prediction of job performance (Hogan, Barrett, & Hogan, 2007; Morgeson, Campion, Dipboye, Hollenbeck, Murphy, & Schmitt, 2007; O'Neil, Goffin, & Gellatly, 2010). As researchers

investigated the effects of personality assessment scores, they found that the true predictive validity lacked a common personality framework (Hurtz & Donovan, 2000).

A paradigm shift occurred during the 1990's as an increase in empirical evidence and common frameworks found numerous personality assessments that are reliable and valid (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Morgeson et al., 2007). One model of personality that is widely used and presents a robust framework, that will be used to assess participants within the present research, is the Five Factor Model of personality (FFM) or alternatively known as the Big Five personality dimensions (Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001; Barrick & Mount, 1991; de Jong, van der Velde, & Jansen, 2001; Gatewood, Feild, & Barrick, 2011; Goldberg, 1992; Gow, Whiteman, Pattie, & Deary, 2005; McCrae & Costa, 1983).

The FFM includes openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and emotional stability. Each dimension represents a range between two extremes. Individual differences are situated between the two ends of each dimensional continuum. These differences are important within personnel selection as they offer in-depth knowledge about an individual's current and potential patterns of behaviour (Gatewood et al., 2011). HR managers are in search of a set of characteristics that are associated with the 'ideal candidate' for the position and the organisation.

Personality assessments are based on self-reporting which can lead to response distortions (Birkeland, Manson, Kisamore, Brannick, & Smith, 2006; Viswesvaran & Ones, 1999). All individuals are believed to engage in response distortion and the FFM dimensions are susceptible to forms of response distortion within the personnel environment (Birkeland et al., 2006; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003; Viswesvaran & Ones, 1999). Distortions within personality assessments can affect the fairness and quality of the HR manager's decision. The responses given may either represent an altered view of the individual or mirror predictions of what the HR manager is searching for (Galić, Jerneić, & Kovačić, 2012; Woods & West, 2010).

Many researchers have examined the extent to which individuals distort their responses within a personnel selection environment (Birkeland et al., 2006; Goffin & Boyd, 2009; Griffith, Chmielowski, & Yoshita, 2007; McFarland & Ryan, 2006) . Social desirability is a form of response distortion where applicants distort personality factors in a favourable direction (McCrae & Costa, 1983; West & Woods, 2010). Paulhus and Hogan (1984) divided social desirability into two separate components; self-deception and impression management. Self-deception can be explained by how positively individuals already view themselves. This does not change due to condition manipulations and "is related to true personality variance" (McFarland & Ryan, 2006, p. 1007). Impression management however, is influenced by different situational cues (Paulhus & Hogan, 1984). Situational cues can motivate individuals to effectively engage in response distortion when they are motivated to fake for their own self-interest (Douglas, McDaniel, & Snell, 1996). An individual's Job Desire may influence responses in a favourable way to fulfil their self-interest of seeming more attractive to a HR manager. Individuals who engage in response distortion leads the HR manager to erroneous decisions (Rosse, Stecher, Miller, & Levin, 1998). Within situations where there is strong incentive to make a positive impression, response distortion can be a major issue (Ones, Viswesvaran, & Reiss, 1996). This suggests that when Job Desire is high, individuals may engage in socially desirable behaviour to enhance their personality dimension scores. Individuals with low Job Desire may distort their responses to downplay their strengths and increase their weaknesses.

Researchers are aware that applicants distort their responses and believe this is due to job-specific bias. Job-specific biases suggest that applicants portray specific behaviours and attributes that would be desirable for that specific job (Kluger & Colella, 1993; Kluger, Reilly & Russell, 1991). In addition, Kluger and Colella (1993) assessed item transparency in regards to job desirability. Items that are considered transparent suggests that there are obvious correct responses to items. In a personality assessment some items could be seen as more transparent within a personnel selection environment, for example "*Shirk my duties*" and "*Have frequent mood swings*" (Goldberg, 1992). Applicants would assumingly, answer the two items less favourably. Transparent items make it easier for individuals to distort their responses (Kluger & Colella, 1993). Thus Job Desire could affect individuals' responses regarding personality

assessments. Individuals who have high job desire may tend to distort transparent items the most.

If HR managers are able to determine an applicant's Job Desire prior to organisational entry, this may enhance recruitment of applicants who truly desire the position while decreasing unemployment and turnover rates.

Measures of Personality

This study examines an individual's Job Desire to determine if this concept has an effect on individuals' responses to the Big Five personality dimensions between a scenario of high Job Desire and a scenario of low Job Desire. As background to the hypothesis, participants were examined twice with an alternative scenario of Job Desire at separate times, four weeks apart. Participants were presented with one of two conditions (see methods and Appendix A) that created a situation of high or low Job Desire and were then presented with a Job Desire measure and a personality assessment.

The first personality variable examined was, openness to experience. Individuals high in openness to experience are found to be more acceptable to change and are broadminded. Individuals who are high in openness to experience tend to have a vivid imagination, are open-minded are intellectually curious and prefer variety over routine (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Costa & McCrae, 2010; Barrick et al., 2001). Openness to experience has been found to have a weak but positive correlation to job performance, and openness to experience was also found to be positively related to learning (Barrick et al., 2001; Barrick & Mount, 1991). This means those high in openness to experience are motivated by a need for understanding, creating a greater need for learning and variety within their routine. Assumingly individuals who are open to experience, and thus the learning and challenge that go with a new position, are likely to engage in responses that reflect their desire (Barrick & Mount, 1991; de Jong et al., 2001).

> *Hypothesis 1:* Openness to experience will be significantly higher within the high Job Desire condition compared to the low Job Desire condition.

Conscientiousness is a beneficial dimension within potential applicants because it has been found to have moderate association to job performance with correlations found between .20 and .22 (Gatewood et al., 2011; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Salgado & Moscoso, 2003; Ones et al., 1996). This dimension can be described by traits such as achievement striving, ability to plan, competence and dependability. Those high in conscientiousness are considered more goal oriented, self-disciplined and organised (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Costa & McCrae, 2010).

Individuals are more likely to distort responses to conscientiousness items to a higher degree compared to the other personality dimensions (Graziano & Tobin, 2002; McCrae & Costa, 1983). Individuals who are high in conscientiousness are more likely to set and commit to their goals, which is linked to greater productivity in jobs (Cooper & Robertson, 1995; Tsaousis and Nikolaou, 2001). Thus high Job Desire will motivate them to behave accordingly to be offered the position.

> *Hypothesis 2*: Conscientiousness will be significantly higher within the high Job Desire condition compared to the low Job Desire condition

Individuals high in extraversion are considered dominant, gregarious, assertive, ambitious and pursue excitement (Barrick et al., 2001; Barrick & Mount, 1991). Those applying for sales positions have been found to distort extraverted items the most (Birkeland et al., 2006; Galić et al., 2012). Extraversion was also found to be related to learning, thus individuals will excel within the learning environment due to motivation to learn and understand (Barrick & Mount, 1991). The difference between the two extremes for extraversion is important to note. Introversion is not described as the opposite to extraversion in this instance, i.e. unfriendly or experience social anxiety. Introverted individuals are more reserved and prefer to be alone even though they may be fine within larger groups (Costa & McCrae, 2010). Individuals who have high

desire for a job will tend to portray themselves as more social and cheerful than reserved and quiet.

> *Hypothesis 3:* Extraversion will be significantly higher within the high Job Desire condition compared to the low Job Desire condition.

Agreeableness is a predictor of social conformity and teamwork because they are affected by relationships at work (Barrick et al., 2001; Costa & McCrae, 2010). Agreeableness includes traits such as co-operation, trustworthiness, compliance and friendliness (Barrick et al., 2001). Those high in agreeableness present themselves as likeable and are more willing to help others without expectations seem to please everybody (Graziano & Tobin, 2002). Individuals seem to please everybody as they are motivated by maintaining positive relations with others (Graziano and Tobin; 2002). Thus within a personality assessment, applicants would answer agreeable questions in a more favourable light. Hence agreeableness is considered a socially desirable dimension and therefore individuals will respond with distortion (Costa & McCrae, 2010). Individuals high in agreeableness will show high social desirability within their responses because they want others to like them and to appease other people. Thus those who are agreeable will respond more positively within a high job condition because this dimension reflects interpersonal relationships. The pattern of responses within a high desire job will reflect that they have relatively good relationships with people.

> *Hypothesis 4:* Agreeableness will be significantly higher within the high Job Desire condition compared to the low Job Desire condition.

Those high in emotional stability are considered composed, calm and can monitor their emotions (Costa & McCrae, 2010). Low emotional stability (also referred to as Neuroticism) tends to impede effective and successful behaviour within the working environment (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Barrick et al. (2001) described neuroticism as including traits such as anxiety, hostility, depression and personal insecurities.

Applicants are assumed not to portray themselves as insecure or emotionally unstable within a job they have a great desire for. In addition, emotional stability is also considered a valid predictor of job performance (Gatewood et al., 2011). Dilchert, Ones, Viswesvaran and Deller (2006) stated that response distortion measures have been highly correlated with emotional stability.

> *Hypothesis 5*: Emotional stability will be significantly higher within the high Job Desire condition compared to the low Job Desire condition.

This study examined an individual's Job Desire to determine if this concept has an effect on individuals' responses to openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability between the two conditions. The response distortions hypothesised assume that there will be significantly higher responses in the high Job Desire condition than the low Job Desire condition.

Methodology

Participants were required to complete a questionnaire including a Job Desire measure and a personality assessment in both a high Job Desire and low Job Desire condition. From the 116 participants who completed the first survey, only 94 completed the second survey resulting in an 81% response rate. Only participants who had completed both surveys could be used so that individual response distortions between the conditions could be analysed.

The final sample consisted of 57.4% females and 42.6% males. Participant's age ranged from 18 to 63 years (*M*= 27.15, *SD*= 10.15). The majority of participants indicated they were New Zealand/European (71.3%). The second largest ethnic group was European (4.3%), followed by Chinese (3.2%). In addition, 67.9% of participants stated they had some form of University qualification, whilst 32.1% stated they had received University Entrance within their last year of

high school. Among the 94 participants, 72.3% were currently employed whilst 27.7% were not employed. Among those who stated they were employed, the mean period of employment was 7.39 years (*SD* = 8.80).

Participants were alternately allocated to one of two groups (Group 1 and Group 2). This was to ensure that the allocation process was random and that each group had equal participants until an appropriate number of completed questionnaires was achieved. Appropriate independent sample *t*-tests and chi-square tests were conducted on the demographic information. There were no significant differences between the two groups in regards to demographic information.

Participants were instructed to read one of two scenarios (Scenario H and Scenario L – refer to Appendix A) and then respond to a questionnaire. Scenario H illustrated a situation of their 'dream job', whereas Scenario L created a situation with an unattractive job but one which the individual would apply for anyway. The scenarios were designed to influence the participants' motivation, passion and determination for a hypothetical job. At Time 1, Group 1 received Scenario H and Group 2 received Scenario L. After four weeks at Time 2, Group 1 received Scenario L and Group 2 received Scenario H. This was to reduce bias that could result from the order in which the scenarios were presented within the experimental design (Breakwell, Hammond, Fife-Shaw, & Smith, 2006; Field, 2009).

Measures

The questionnaire measures included Job Desire and the Big Five personality dimensions. General demographic information was also gathered. Prior to analysing the data, mean imputation and factor analysis were conducted. Principal axis factoring (PAF) and reliability analyses were used to determine the integrity of each scale within the questionnaire.

Job Desire Scale

The Job Desire measure was used to determine if the appropriate scenario that was presented had the desired effect on the participant. A version of a job motivation scale was adapted (Rodriguez, 2001). The Job Desire scale was based on three items on a five-point likert scale which had different descriptive labels. Item one, "*How motivated are you to get the job?*" was scored from 1 "*Extremely unmotivated*" to 5 "*Extremely motivated*". Item two, "*How strong is your desire to get the job?*" was scored from 1 "*Very weak desire*" to 5 "*Very strong desire*". Lastly, item three, "*If you were unable to fulfil your desire to get the job, how would you feel?*" was scored from 1 "*Not at all frustrated*" to 5 "*Extremely frustrated*". The three items of the scale were presented so that participants consciously thought about the scenario and altered their mind frame of applying for a job that was either desirable or undesirable. Participant's Job Desire score was calculated by averaging their responses on the three items. Factor analysis illustrated that one factor loaded onto the three items at both Time 1 and Time 2, thus the three items measured Job Desire.

Personality Measure

Personality dimensions were assessed using the 50-item IPIP representation of the Big Five factor framework (Goldberg, 1992). Each personality dimension was measured by ten items and assessed on a five point scale from 1"*Very accurate*" to 5 "*Very inaccurate*". As the personality assessment was used twice, both scales had to be identical, which meant running factor analysis until both scales had factors loading onto the appropriate items. This resulted in the removal of 14 items from the combined personality assessments from Time 1 and Time 2. All 50 items were part of a sentence which started with, "*I believe I…*". The appropriate ending to the sentence was presented as the item which depended on the dimensions being measured. Openness to experience was measured by four items including "*Have a vivid imagination*" and "*Have excellent ideas*", and conscientiousness was measured by six items including "*Leave my belongings around*" and "*Follow a schedule*". Extraversion was measured by 9 items including "*Am the life of the party*" and "*Don't talk a lot*", and agreeableness was measured by eight items including "*Am interested in people*" and "*Feel others' emotions*". Emotional stability was

measured by 9 items including "*Am relaxed most of the time*" and "*Get irritated easily*". PAF from both Time 1 and Time 2 confirmed that it was appropriate to continue with a five factor solution.

Results

To account for the order effect, the two groups received a different order of scenarios (Breakwell et al., 2009). Independent sample *t*-tests were conducted on each scale for each condition to determine if the order effect was significant. There were no significant differences between responding to the scenarios due to the order effect. This indicated that the order of the scenario presented to the participants did not have an effect on the responses of the variables.

A manipulation check was conducted to determine if the participants were reading the instructions, and thus provided an indirect measure of their Job Desire (Oppenheimer, Meyvis & Davidenko, 2009). A paired sample *t*-test was conducted between the responses in the high and low Job Desire conditions. On average, participants reported greater Job Desire within Scenario H compared to Scenario L. The mean difference between the two conditions was found to be significant ($t(93) = 25.48$, p < .001) illustrated in Table 1.1 (page 13). Since the scenarios had the desired effect, participant's perceived Job Desire could be confirmed.

Paired sample *t*-tests were conducted on the entire sample, comparing the responses to Job Desire and the Big Five personality dimensions when presented with a high and low Job Desire scenario; illustrated in Table 1.1.

Openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability were found to have significantly different responses between both conditions (($t(93) = 2.12$, *p* < .05), ($t(93) = 3.36$, *p* < .01), ($t(93) = 2.77$, *p* < .01), *($t(93) = 2.56$, *p* < .05), and ($t(93) = 3.52$, *p* < .01), respectively). There were significantly higher responses within the high Job Desire condition compared to the low Job Desire condition for all of the above variables. Therefore, Hypothesis 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 were supported.

Table 1:
Mean, Standard Deviation and t Value Within Each Condition

	Low Job Desire		High Job Desire		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
Job Desire	2.42	.61	4.46	.45	25.48***
Openness to experience	3.79	.64	3.90	.64	2.12*
Conscientiousness	3.49	.65	3.72	.70	3.26**
Extraversion	3.13	.68	3.26	.64	2.77**
Agreeableness	3.86	.70	4.00	.63	2.56*
Emotional stability	3.42	.75	3.61	.70	3.52**

Notes: *p < .05, **p < .01 and ***p < .001.

Discussion

This study sought to determine the extent individuals engage in response distortion within a personality measure based on their perceived Job Desire. Given the assumption that HR managers may presume that all applicants have a desire for the job they are applying for, it is suggested that the motivation or the desire for the job may not always be present in job applicants. The Big Five personality dimensions are regarded as the core dimensions of an individual's personality (Costa & McCrae, 2010). These dimensions are also predictors of certain workplace outcomes including, avoiding counterproductive behaviour, reducing turnover and absenteeism, exhibiting more teamwork and leadership, providing more effective customer service, contributing more citizenship behaviour, influencing job satisfaction and commitment to the firm, and enhancing safety (Gatewood et al., 2011, p. 506). Thus the Big Five personality measure is a well established framework, and has significant relationships with job performance. However until now it had not been associated with Job Desire. While some research has briefly examined Job Desire, this research has not examined the influences of Job Desire on personality

response distortion (Ellingson & McFarland, 2011; Kluger & Colella, 1993; McFarland & Ryan, 2000; Snell, Sydell, & Lueke, 1999).

Kluger and Colella (1993) believed that individuals engaged in job-specific bias. Individuals respond in a way specifically suited to a particular position, which ultimately is a form of response distortion. This suggests that participants may respond in accordance to a job that they desire, for a higher chance of being offered the position. The findings of the study indicated that participants did engage in response distortion between the two Job Desire conditions.

Job Desire

The present research illustrated that within the high Job Desire condition participants responded more favourably to the Big Five personality dimensions. Participants increased their dimension scores potentially to seem more attractive to the HR manager. Hence Job Desire could be considered as the influencing motivator that led to socially desirable responding. When applicants engage with response distortion it has an effect on the validity and fairness of the pre-employment personality assessment. Thus, will affect the HR manager's decision of who is hired, an erroneous decision can lead to high turnover rates and low organisational commitment (Barrick & Zimmerman, 2005; Lee et al., 1992).

Personality

As expected participants were found to have distorted their responses to the five personality dimensions between both conditions. Significant response mean differences between the two conditions were observed in relation to openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and emotional stability. The pattern of responding indicated that participants responded more favourably to the personality items within the high Job Desire condition than the low Job Desire condition.

Both conditions had the same order of traits from highest scored to lowest scored (agreeableness, openness to experience, conscientiousness, emotional stability and extraversion, respectively). Conscientiousness and emotional stability had the largest mean differences in responses between the two conditions. In the two conditions, the dimensions that participants responded the highest to were openness to experience and agreeableness. Extraversion was the lowest scored and the least distorted dimension between the two conditions. This suggests that participants inflated their responses consistently between the two conditions. Also placing more emphasis on items belonging to openness to experience and agreeableness as these traits refer to interpersonal relationships.

Conscientiousness and Emotional Stability

Participants whose perceived Job Desire was high tended to respond more favourably on conscientiousness and emotional stability and less favourably when their perceived Job Desire was low. This suggests that when participants' perceived Job Desire is high, they are more likely to portray a well prepared, organised, calm and composed disposition. The results are in accordance with previous research that states that conscientiousness and emotional stability are the most distorted dimensions because they are valid predictors of successful work place behaviours, such as job performance, within a wide range of jobs (Graziano & Tobin, 2002; McCrae & Costa, 1983).

A possible reason for conscientiousness and emotional stability having the greatest variation within their responses in the two conditions is because of the five personality dimensions they are considered the better predictors of certain work place behaviours. Those who are high in conscientiousness and emotional stability are considered to possess traits and behaviours that predict successful workplace behaviours.

Costa and McCrae (2010) defined individuals who are high in conscientiousness as determined and goal oriented. These individuals are well prepared, organised, able to complete

tasks, not easily distracted and engage in thoughtful thinking before they act (Costa & McCrae, 2010). Viewing emotional stability from the other end of the continuum, neuroticism is the presence of personal insecurities and negative emotions (Barrick et al., 2001). Traits that low emotional stability (i.e. high in neuroticism) encompasses are considered not ideal for the workplace. These traits could make it difficult to meet deadlines and/or to deal with responsibilities. Individuals may portray themselves as more emotionally stable to demonstrate that they are secure within their own competencies and possess the right skills for the job. HR managers seek applicants who are able to handle stressful situations and cope with responsibilities. Hence participants would respond higher within these dimensions within a high Job Desire scenario to project future workplace behaviours. When individuals are presented with a job that they have high desire for, they will exhibit behaviours that portray themselves as hard working employees. Thus meaning they will respond more positively in conscientiousness and emotional stability.

Openness to Experience and Agreeableness

Not only were openness to experience and agreeableness affected by response distortion, but they were the highest scoring dimensions within the two conditions. Within the workplace those who are more open to experience may tend to grab opportunities and try new things more often. Openness to experience is also related to learning which means a greater need to learn new tasks and a willingness to accept change. In addition, individuals who are high in agreeableness are social people who like to maintain positive relationships with others. Within the high Job Desire condition participants responded more favourably to these dimensions. Participants portrayed themselves as possessing high levels of acceptance of people, ideas and new tasks whilst also being social, friendly and altruistic.

Regardless of the Job Desire conditions, participants responded the most favourably on these two dimensions. This could suggest that participants consider themselves high in openness to experience and agreeableness initially but within a scenario of a job that they desire they inflated their perception of themselves to be more open and friendly. It also illustrates they have a high perception to be liked by others.

Extraversion

The hypothesised pattern of response was supported for the extraversion dimension. Participants responded significantly higher to extraversion within the high Job Desire condition compared to the low Job Desire condition. However, extraversion was scored the lowest in both conditions with the smallest significant mean difference.

However, Researchers have found that extraversion is highly susceptible to response distortions (Birkeland et al., 2006; Galić et al., 2012). Conversely the results within this study do not match previous findings. This may suggest that participants may believe that being extraverted is not necessarily an attractive dimension that HR managers are looking for. In comparison to previous research which participants responded positively to extraversion in comparison to other dimensions (Galić et al., 2012; Hogan et al., 2007). The participants may believe that extraversion is not a trait that is associated with their highly desirable job.

Response Distortion

As mentioned above, there are two possible reasons why participants engaged in response distortion behaviour. The first refers to item transparency which refers to items that have a clear desired response. Secondly, individuals may have a higher sense of functional awareness of what is required of them to answer appropriately to fulfil their own self-interest.

The transparency of particular items suggests that there are obvious correct responses to items when applying for a position (Ellingson & McFarland, 2011; Goffin & Boyd, 2009; Kluger & Colella, 1993; Snell et al., 1999). Item transparency may have been a determinant in personality response distortion when participants' perceived Job Desire was high. This involved participants responding favourably to items associated with certain dimensions to engage in impression

management. Items in these scales could be viewed as more relevant to working conditions and the 'ideal applicant'. Conscientiousness items included, *"Get chores done right away", "Follow a schedule"* and *"Like order".* Emotional stability items included, *"Am relaxed most of the time", "Get irritated easily",* and *"Get stressed out easily.* When participants are applying for a job they have a high Job Desire for, they are most likely to view these items and comprehend the correct response. These items could be considered high in item transparency. Thus when Job Desire is high, participants would be more likely to respond positively to these items to portray themselves as an 'ideal applicant' (Kluger & Colella, 1993).

Not only do individuals view items as transparent but they may associate other traits with the items within the scale. For example, *"Get chores done right away",* is a conscientiousness item that participants may subconsciously relate to good time management skills, lack of procrastination and a determination to finish tasks. Participants assumingly, would respond more favourably to the item within a high Job Desire situation compared to the low job desire condition. More time and effort is thought to be spent on items to determine the desired correct response in high Job Desire situations. This is because the participants may not be engaged in the personality assessment, thus little motivation is used to determine the correct response for the particular item. However within a highly desirable job situation individuals may exhibit more effort into determining the correct response because they are motivated to appear attractive to the HR manager. Ellingson and McFarland (2011) suggested that personnel assessments should include questions that make it harder for the individual to determine the correct response (Baron, 1996). This may mean using ipsative scales within assessing personality. Ipsative scales are also referred to as forced-choice scales which give the applications a selection of a minimum of two statements in which the participants has to choose which they prefer. The use of ipsative scales within personnel assessments produces higher validity than normative item measures (Salgado & Tauriz, 2014). A popular solution would be to use both ipsative and normative items within a personality assessment (Baron, 1996; Salgado & Tauriz, 2014).

The second possibility as to why participants engaged in response distortion due to Job Desire is based on their high functional awareness. Even though response distortion is a concern within personality assessments, Rosse et al. (1998) stated an alternative. Individuals who distorted their responses in a socially desirable way might be self-monitoring or have a higher level of functional awareness of what is needed for the position (Ellingson & McFarland, 2011; Rosse et al., 1998). Ellingson and McFarland (2011) viewed self-monitoring as individuals who change their behaviour to suit certain situations and are aware of underlying social norms that are needed within different situations. Individuals who self-monitor their behaviour are more likely to adapt intuitively to social, situational and environmental cues. When an individual's perceived Job Desire is high their motivation is assumed to increase to exhibit appropriate behaviours for a greater chance of being offered the job. This higher level of awareness relates to a higher level of adaptability to answer in a manner compatible with what is expected. This would be true for jobs that require the individual to understand what is needed and adapt to that situation (Rosse et al., 1998). Future studies would need to assess Job Desire, self-monitoring and outcomes to confirm this.

Thus individuals with high Job Desire, may tend to co engage in response distortion due to the transparency of items – being seen to be contentious and hardworking and because they have a higher social awareness of what is needed to obtain their desired job. Again future research could seek to untangle the response distortions.

Practical Implications

Personality assessments have previously been met with criticism and doubts about their usefulness, validity and reliability within the personnel selection process. Since they are based on self-report measures individuals do engage in response distortion to some degree. There are many factors that influence individuals to distort their personality responses, the present study illustrated that Job Desire was a motivating influence that engaged individuals in response distortion. As individuals distort their responses this can change the rank order of the top applicants which can lead to misconstrued HR decisions. Given the assumption that individuals apply for a job because, to an extent, they have a desire for that particular position, it then

seems logical that those who distort their responses the most may fall within the top of the ranking order.

HR managers need to question whether it is valid to confirm that those within the top ranking positions of potential applicants have, 1) a high desire for the job and 2) resemble their responses on their personality assessment.

The present study demonstrated that an individual's Job Desire does influence their responses within a personality assessment. Job Desire may affect other personnel selection tools. Additionally, determining an individual's Job Desire prior to organisational entry could be possible. The study illustrated that Job Desire is an antecedent of response distortion. This supports previous research however, within previous research there was no empirical evidence found in regards to personality assessments (Ellingson & McFarland, 2011; Goffin & Boyd, 2009; McFarland & Ryan, 2000; Snell et al., 1999). Nevertheless, determining the full strength and weaknesses of Job Desire may aid the HR manager into differentiating individuals with high and low desire for a more accurate and beneficial personnel hiring decision.

Ultimately it is suggested that personality assessments need to be viewed with caution when evaluating a potential applicant. The applicants maybe be revealing manipulated information. Therefore not over emphasising the importance of the results from a personality assessments is important and practitioners should not be using a personality assessment as their only selection method, and assume that Job Desire is present, simply because a person has applied for a job.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of the study was that it provided more evidence that individual's do engage in response distortion and that an individual's motivation such as Job Desire can influence individual responses. The within subject design was advantageous as the statistical power increases and the reduction of error.

A further limitation of this study is the laboratory design of the research. Using participants within a laboratory setting rather than applicants for a specific job suggests that the results may not be generalizable (Griffith et al., 2007; Hogan et al., 2007).

Another possible reason is that extraversion is a valid predictor of successful workplace outcomes within specific jobs. Extraversion is considered a highly sought after dimension within the sales field (Gatewood et al., 2011). The broad description of the scenario presented to participants in the present study meant that they had to visualise their own attractive and unattractive job. The high desire jobs participants envisioned might have related to positions where being extraverted was not seen to be a key dimension to portray.

Future Research

Further research is needed to determine the true nature of job desire and its effect on personality assessments and other personnel selection methods. The effects of job desire and the extent these effects occur within an actual real-life setting are needed. The research could be replicated to determine the strength of job desire on responses and to determine if there are any major differences within response distortion in relation to this study.

Secondly, it may be important in future research to examine each participant's scores individually, to determine how many were affected by the scenarios and how many participants resulted in significant responses between the two conditions. The scenario that was presented to participants in the two conditions included a broad description of general important aspects of a job. However more specific context-based scenarios could be used to determine the extent of Job Desire. This could include an extra study that identifies which aspects of a job are most desirable to participants. Identifying and determining specific aspects of a job that a variety of individual's desire, could be used in one of two ways. Firstly, to create a more specific and desirable job scenario for the participants, as this may enhance the engagement of participants

with the questionnaire. Secondly, determine which aspects of the job correlates with certain personality dimensions.

Summary

Job Desire has previously been stated to be a determinant of response distortion within personnel selection (Ellingson & McFarland, 2011). The findings of the response distortion within this study provide empirical evidence of the effects individual's job desire had on responding to personality items. Participants responded significantly higher on all of the Big Five personality dimensions within the high job desire condition. This illustrates that job desire does influence individuals' thought processes when responding to personality items. Individuals with high job desire are thought to engage in the items to determine the desired response. In addition, the individual's high functional awareness of the situation and understanding of what is needed to reach their goal of obtaining the job they applied for is essential. This study confirms that personality assessments are susceptible to response distortion which HR managers may use in collaboration with other selection tools. Additionally, this study encourages the idea of job desire as it may be more of an influencing factor than previously realised.

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Appendix A

Scenario H: High Job Desire

"Imagine that you have just finished your studies and graduated from University. You are now faced with the reality of finding a job which would, you hope, lead you into your career. Within your job search you come across a job that really appeals to you. Within the job description there are tasks that you believe you are competent in. The area of work is exactly where you see yourself. Also, you find the wage very satisfactory and the benefits that are offered are what you were looking for.

You send your resumé and cover letter to the hiring manager. You are very excited to hear if you are offered to go through to the next part of the selection process. You receive a phone call a few days later and they wish you to come in to complete some assessments. They wish to ask you questions about your personality, your need for growth and the need to accomplish tasks within a job.

You are now sitting down ready to complete these assessments. You are excited, ready and hopeful that you will be the ONE to be offered the job, because this is the job of your dreams."

Scenario L: Low Job Desire

"Imagine that you have finished your studies and graduated from university. You have been searching for a job for a while now. You come across a job that has nothing to do with your qualification or the area that you desire. The wage is not great and the benefits that are offered are small and not important to you.

You find yourself in a place where you need a job as soon as possible. This particular job does not meet your preferences but you apply anyway. You send your resumé and cover letter off to the hiring manager. A couple of days later they phone and wish for you to come in to complete some assessments. They wish to ask you questions about your personality, your need for growth and the need to accomplish tasks within a job. You have nothing else happening and this is the first job prospect that you have had since graduating, so you agree.

You are now sitting down ready to complete these assessments. You complete the assessments because you have not heard from any other job. You are not excited or interested in the job or what it offers you. If you are offered the job you will probably decline it."