UNDERSTANDING WITHIN-JOB TITLE VARIANCE IN JOB-ANALYTIC RATINGS

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the correlates of within-job title variance in job-analytic ratings. Q-factor analyses of SMEs' ratings for two jobs (i.e., Sales Representative \(n = 26\) and Felony Assistant Public Defender \(n = 141\)) yielded two and four factors, respectively. These factors represented shared views of the importance of the job tasks. Factor membership was related to sales performance for sales representatives. Previous professional experience and district of employment were related to factor membership for Felony Assistant Public Defenders. The implications of these studies of within-title variance in job-analytic ratings for human resource programs are discussed.

Traditional job analysis is occasionally portrayed as a “legalistic nuisance” that interferes with new management philosophies demanding broad, cross-functional job descriptions, and flexible work assignments (Drucker, 1987; Olian & Rynes, 1991). The dramatic increase during the last decades in employment-related litigation might have contributed to this widely held opinion. Thus, organizations often see the job analysis process as merely an insurance policy against potential allegations of unfair treatment raised by disgruntled applicants or employees.

Preoccupation with employment-related litigation has obscured the primary goal of job analysis, namely to contribute meaningful information to human resource programs like selection, training, and career de-

An abridged version of this paper was presented in M. M. Crosby (Chair), Who do you ask: Finding Expert Job Experts. Symposium presented at the Annual Conference of The Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Orlando, FL, May 1995.

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development. It is argued herein that job analysis data contain fruitful information that still remains untapped. The present manuscript illustrates how differences in ratings of the same job title (hereafter referred to as within-job title variance) may provide useful insights into the effectiveness of employees' performance processes. This novel application of job analysis data should serve to increase awareness of the need to shift the focus of job analysis from a documentation process towards a management tool for innovation (Sanchez, 1994).

Differences in Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) ratings of the same job are a pervasive phenomenon in job analysis (Harvey, 1991). When SMEs are asked to rate tasks and Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) on the same job, individual differences are normally observed. There are two theories concerning the treatment of within-job rating differences: (a) they represent spurious variance resulting from unreliability and other sources of error or (b) they represent real differences concerning the manner in which SMEs approach their job tasks. Researchers endorsing the first approach have warned about the risks inherent in data analyses of within-job title ratings, cautioning that these analyses capitalize on spurious variance and often render uninterpretable results (Cranny & Doherty, 1988).

Researchers endorsing the second approach have questioned the presumed spuriousness of within-job title variance, suggesting that such differences hide meaningful information. Indeed, job analysis researchers (Friedman, 1990; Green & Stutzman, 1986) have pointed out that SMEs holding the same job title might reasonably differ in the manner in which they perform the job. Thus, between-SME differences in job task ratings may reflect not only error but also true variance. In their search for the sources of within-job title variance, researchers have identified correlates of job-analytic ratings like job experience (Avolio & Waldman, 1989; Landy & Vasey, 1991; Mullins & Kimbrough, 1988; Sanchez & Fraser, 1992; Schmitt & Cohen, 1989). The presence of within-job rating differences as a function of demographics like gender or ethnicity may empirically justify the need to form demographically diverse panels of SMEs in job analysis. However, gender or ethnicity effects do not enhance our theoretical understanding of the meaning of such within-title differences (Goldstein, Zedeck, & Schneider, 1992; Harvey, 1991).

We maintain that within-title variance reflects differing SME approaches to the same job and that such approaches (a) are related to differences in experience and training of job SMEs and (b) lead to variability in employee outcomes like job performance. In other words, a full understanding of within-job rating differences requires identification of not only the antecedents but also the consequents of these differences. This understanding should lead to innovative applications of job anal-