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Does Changing Items' Contexts Impact a Scale's Psychometric Properties? A Comparison Using the PERMA-Profiler and the Workplace Wellbeing Survey

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Abstract

Scales are often adapted for the context in which they are used, which may involve simply adjusting items to orient the respondent to the study's focal context. However, if a scale's items are adapted to be context-specific (e.g., moving from general to workplace), will its psychometric properties change? This study aimed to investigate this question by evaluating measurement and structural equivalence of the PERMA-Profiler (PP) and its workplace adaptation, the Workplace Wellbeing Survey (WWS).

Both scales were administered online via MTurk (N=601), and single-group measurement and structural invariance were assessed. First, configural invariance was established by placing both scales into a single model and re-evaluating model fit using Comparative Fit Index (CFI>.90) and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR<.08). Metric invariance was assessed by constraining like-item loadings on the factors equivalent between each scale and evaluating decrement in model fit between this and the configural model via chi-square test. Scalar invariance likewise was assessed by constraining like-item intercepts equivalent between each scale and evaluating model fit decrement between it and the metric invariant model via chi-square test.

Partial metric and scalar invariance were supported, indicating that the PERMA constructs were measured equivalently across scales (except for the relationships factor). Structural properties (covariances, means) were not invariant, indicating distinct utility for each scale in their respective contexts. It is important to include a workplace distinction if researchers are interested in measuring flourishing at work. The measurement of PERMA is relatively stable across scales, and the constructs themselves are distinct, supporting the utility of both the PP and the WWS. When adapting a scale for a particular context, researchers should consider comparing their adaptation's psychometrics to the parent scale.