Forced-Choice Measurement Models of Behavioural, Social, and Emotional Skills: Theory, Research, and Development

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Abstract : Introduction: The realisation that personality can change over the course of a lifetime has led to a new companion model to the Big Five, the behavioural, emotional, and social skills approach (BESSA). BESSA hypothesizes that this set of skills represents how the individual is thinking, feeling, and behaving when the situation calls for it, as opposed to traits, which represent how someone tends to think, feel, and behave averaged across situations. The five major skill domains share parallels with the Big Five Factor (BFF) model creativity and innovation (openness), self-management (conscientiousness), social engagement (extraversion), cooperation (agreeableness), and emotional resilience (emotional stability) skills. We point to noteworthy limitations in the current operationalisation of BESSA skills (i.e., via Likert-type items) and offer up a different measurement approach: forced choice. Method: In this forced-choice paradigm, individuals were given three skill items (e.g., managing my time) and asked to select one response they believed they were "worst at" and "best at". The Thurstonian IRT models allow these to be placed on a normative scale. Two multivariate studies (N = 1178) were conducted with a 22-item forced-choice version of the BESSA, a published measure of the BFF, and various criteria. Findings: Confirmatory factor analysis of the forced-choice assessment showed acceptable model fit (RMSEA<0.06), while reliability estimates were reasonable (around 0.70 for each construct). Convergent validity evidence was as predicted (correlations between 0.40 and 0.60 for corresponding BFF and BESSA constructs). Notable was the extent the forced-choice BESSA assessment improved upon test-criterion relationships over and above the BFF. For example, typical regression models find BFF personality accounting for 25% of the variance in life satisfaction scores; both studies showed incremental gains over the BFF exceeding 6% (i.e., BFF and BESSA together accounted for over 31% of the variance in both studies). Discussion: Forced-choice measurement models offer up the promise of creating equated test forms that may unequivocally measure skill gains and are less prone to fakability and reference bias effects. Implications for practitioners are discussed, especially those interested in selection, succession planning, and training and development. We also discuss how the forced choice method can be applied to other constructs like emotional immunity, cross-cultural competence, and self-estimates of cognitive ability.

Keywords : Big Five, forced-choice method, BFF, methods of measurements
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