Reasoning ability and performance:

A study of New Zealand corrections officers

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Abstract

The performance of frontline staff is one of the most central elements of an effective correctional system. This thesis reports findings related to the organisational psychology of the correctional environment, with special attention to person characteristics that may predict job performance of corrections officers. The empirical study investigated components of reasoning ability (abstract, verbal, numerical reasoning) on a sample of officers (*N* = 88) working in seven prison facilities throughout New Zealand. Overseas research repeatedly identified cognitive abilities as a predictor of job performance across a range of occupational settings, including jobs similar to corrections officers. The current study sought to examine this relationship on a New Zealand officer sample, to provide evidence for criterion-related validity of psychometric assessment of reasoning ability, with implications for use in personnel selection procedures. An analysis of internal relationships among ability components was also undertaken. Consistent with theoretical models and extant empirical findings, abstract, verbal, and numerical reasoning were found to be positively related to one another. However, the given components of reasoning ability were unrelated to job performance in the local occupational setting. Potential explanations for the findings are offered in terms of limitations in the measurement tools and processes (e.g. scope of the performance appraisal tool). It is likely that given the unique job tasks and challenges of the corrections environment, officer performance requires important characteristics outside of reasoning ability, when officers perform affect-laden tasks (e.g. understanding their own and others' emotions and emotion-driven behaviours). Further investigation of potential predictors such as emotional intelligence is warranted, and is expected to assist prediction of performance in a corrections setting.

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