Title: Riverside Situational Q-sort (RSQ)

Definition

The Riverside Situational Q-sort (RSQ; Wagerman & Funder, 2009; Funder, 2016) is an ipsative measure of the psychological properties of situations (freely available at http://rap.ucr.edu/qsorter/), which allows situations to be compared with each other on particular characteristics as well as holistically (Sherman, Nave, & Funder, 2010).

Introduction

The RSQ was developed to address the previous lack of measures available to measure situations. Though social psychology is ostensibly devoted to the study of situations and their effects on people, few studies have explicitly examined situations and their characteristics (Rauthmann, Sherman, & Funder, 2015). To underscore this issue, there is no agreed upon definition of a situation, or a consensus regarding how to measure situations (Yang, Read, & Miller, 2009). Focusing on the physical characteristics of a situation – e.g., the number of people present, their position in the room, the time of day – can provide an experimenter with "objective" data, but does not allow researchers to capture less obvious, yet perhaps more psychologically salient situation descriptors. As a more nuanced situational assessment tool, the RSQ seeks to capture the defining, psychologically relevant characteristics of a given situation.

As a Q-sort measure, the RSQ forces raters to place its items (RSQ Version 4.0 has 90 items) into a semi-normal distribution made up of 9 categories, ranging from "Extremely Uncharacteristic" to "Extremely Characteristic." In effect, participants must rank-order items relative to each other. In contrast to Likert-type ratings, the forced-choice nature of the Q-sort may mitigate several types of response bias (Ozer, 1993).

Assessing Situations

The RSQ's items include "situation is potentially enjoyable," "situation contains emotional threats," and "rational thinking is called for." The RSQ's language is intentionally nontechnical and so that the instrument can be administered to a wide range of people, allowing the measurement of diverse perspectives. It can be used for self-reported situational experience (i.e., construal; Morse, Sauerberger, Todd, & Funder, 2015), expert ratings, and observer ratings. The RSQ's versatility in judging both situations and situational experience allows for adaptation to a wide variety of uses. For example, Serfass and Sherman (2013) used the RSQ to assess participants' subjective judgments of TAT cards, and then related those judgements to personality variables.

The RSQ can be administered in several different ways. Originally, Q-sort data were gathered using physical index cards participants placed on a grid with a predefined shape. However, this process is very time consuming and requires the researcher to record participants' responses after they have finished their ratings. To address these issues and streamline the process, a Q-sorting program was developed for computer-based data gathering (http://rap.ucr.edu/qsorter/). An online alternative is also available (Pruneddu, 2013; http://www.qsortware.net), which allows for web-based data gathering and online data storage.

Situational Dimensions

One of the goals of recent RSQ research has been to discover a taxonomy of situational dimensions, similar to existing taxonomies of personality traits (Rauthmann et al., 2014). Though Q-sort measures are intentionally designed to have non-overlapping items and, as a consequence, are generally not amenable to factor analysis, Rauthmann and collegues (2014) found eight distinct dimensions referred to as the DIAMONDS (Duty, Intellect, Adversity, Mating, pOsitivity, Negativity, Deception, Sociality). The DIAMONDS dimensions are closely related to

both the Big Five and HEXACO traits, so examining person-situation interactions with the RSQ can be straightforward, and logically and empirically sound. For example, participants high in conscientiousness were found to perceive their situations as relatively higher in Duty (e.g., "Work needs to be done"; Sherman, Rauthmann, Brown, Serfass, & Jones, 2015). The DIAMONDS can also be measured using the S8, an abbreviated 8-item scale derived from the RSQ (Rauthmann & Sherman, 2016).

Applications

The RSQ has a broad range of potential applications. It has been used in lab environments (Morse et al., 2015), cross-culturally (Guillaume et al., 2016), and could potentially be used in community samples. As previously mentioned, the language of the RSQ is not complex and was specifically developed to be intuitive to nonprofessionals. The measure is currently available in 10 languages and translation is ongoing in several other languages.

Because it can be administered to different types of participants (e.g., self, informant, expert, observer), RSQ rating agreement among data sources may be of interest to researchers. For example, self-other agreement could potentially be used as an indicator of participant accuracy in judging situations. Agreement among multiple observers can be assessed – if there is evidence of low inter-rater agreement, further analyses may investigate what situational characteristics contributed to the discrepancies. Studies have shown that discrepancies between self- and other-ratings of personality may simply be unique contributions of each (Vazire & Mehl, 2008), and this may also be the case for situational ratings.

Conclusion

The Riverside Situational Q-sort allows for the measurement of a broad range of situations and their characteristics, allowing for the comparison of two or more situations. This is

unique in that, rather than looking at a particular phenomenon in a given situation, the RSQ quantifies the situation itself. Studying situations in this way may allow for understanding and classifying situations, as well as identifying potential moderators of effects. In future use of the RSQ, it can be anticipated that the item pool will be further refined to capture a broader, more representative range of situational characteristics

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