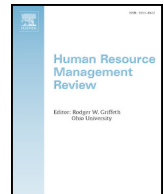




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A quantitative and qualitative review of what meta-analyses have contributed to our understanding of human resource management

Shani Pindek^{a,*}, Stacey R. Kessler^b, Paul E. Spector^a

^a University of South Florida, United States

^b Montclair State University, United States

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we review the contribution that researchers have made to the field of human resource management (HRM) using the method of meta-analysis. First, we summarized results of a content analysis of the most frequently studied HRM topics and topic combinations found in 407 papers published in the major HRM peer-reviewed outlets. Specifically, we found that the most frequently studied topics were performance, attitudes, diversity/demographics, personality, withdrawal, and job characteristics. Second, we used the ISI Thomson Web of Science database to conduct a citation analysis of the 100 most impactful meta-analytic HRM papers. Among the top 10, two focused on justice and two on turnover. Third, we provided a narrative review that noted some important meta-analytic contributions to HRM knowledge. This discussion was organized according to a 2×2 framework depicting whether a paper's purpose was to test a theory or was more descriptive/exploratory, and whether a paper's purpose was mainly to cumulate effect sizes or test moderators. This narrative review provided examples that illustrates the breadth of the many contributions made with meta-analysis.

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For the past three decades, the method of meta-analysis has been a major research tool in the field of human resource management (HRM). This method allows for the quantitative combination of results across samples and studies, thereby achieving greater accuracy in the estimation of the magnitude of relationships (Schmidt, 1992). Meta-analysis can be used in an exploratory way as a means of quantitatively summarizing results in an area or can be used in a deductive way to test a priori hypotheses and theories. Recent statistical advances also allow for tests of more complex relationships, such as the detection of moderators.

This paper will utilize both quantitative and qualitative review methods to summarize what we have learned about HRM from meta-analyses over the past three decades. We begin with a content analysis of papers that utilized meta-analysis, published in major HRM journals, to provide a snapshot of HRM content that has been meta-analyzed. This quantitative summary illustrates the frequency with which topics and combinations of topics have been included in meta-analyses. Second, we relied on the Web of Science to provide a citation analysis of the 100 most cited meta-analyses in the leading HRM outlets. Finally, we took a narrative approach to provide notable examples of meta-analyses that provided important insights into HRM, organized by four categories of contribution. Specifically, we categorized contributions into two dimensions examining whether or not they test theories and by whether they only provide estimates of direct relationships or test for moderators as well.

* Corresponding author at: University of South Florida, Psychology Department, PCD 4118, 4202 East Fowler Ave, Tampa, FL 33620, United States.
E-mail address: shanipindek@mail.usf.edu (S. Pindek).

1. Content analysis of HRM topics that have been meta-analyzed

One way to assess the contribution of meta-analyses to the HRM knowledge base is to consider the frequency with which topics (e.g., job performance) and combinations of topics (e.g., job performance and personality) were examined. Such an analysis provides a global overview of where the field has focused attention and where it has not, at least in terms of meta-analysis. Likely, topics and combinations of topics that have been frequently meta-analyzed are more popular and/or considered to be more important by researchers. Of course, it is possible that there are many topics and combinations that have sufficient primary studies, but have been neglected by meta-analysts. In this section we present results of a content analysis that provides a snapshot of HRM topics that have been meta-analyzed in the major peer-reviewed HRM research outlets. This analysis can be used by researchers attempting to learn how much has been done in each area, as well as the combinations (crossing) of areas.

2. Sample of studies and inclusion criteria

We searched for HRM related meta-analyses in the 14 peer-reviewed journals that we considered the major outlets for HRM research and that publish meta-analyses: Academy of Management Journal (AMJ), Academy of Management Review (AMR), Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ), Human Relations (HR), Human Resource Management Review (HRMR), International Journal of Selection and Assessment (IJSA), Journal of Applied Psychology (JAP), Journal of Business and psychology (JBP), Journal of Management (JOM), Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology (JOOP), Journal of Organizational Behavior (JOB), Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes (OBHDP), Personnel Psychology (PPsych), and Psychological Bulletin (PsychBull). We used the PsycInfo database to search for meta-analyses and validity generalization studies published through March 2015. Included were only papers in which a topic area was subject to meta-analysis and discarded methodological papers about the technique itself. As shown in Table 1, our search yielded 1084 hits based on the keywords entered, with 407 of them meeting inclusion criteria (meta-analysis on HRM topic excluding purely macro-level studies). Table 1 lists the number of hits and papers included from each journal. As can be seen, nearly half of the included papers were from Journal of Applied Psychology, with the next closest contributor being Personnel Psychology. Few meta-analyses (under 6) were published in Academy of Management Review, Administrative Science Quarterly, or Human Resource Management Review. The low number of meta-analysis published in HRMR is not a surprise since for many years by policy the journal only published narrative reviews. Although Psychological Bulletin is a major outlet for meta-analyses, we found only 5 on HRM topics.

3. Coding rules and procedure

Each identified paper was examined to see if it met inclusion criteria, and to determine the meta-analyzed variables. We coded the variable content of each meta-analysis, allowing for a meta-analysis to be placed into multiple categories, as long as relevant variables were included in the analyses conducted (we did not include categories of variables that were only discussed in the paper, but not analyzed). For example, if a meta-analysis was centered on the relationship between the antecedents of job satisfaction and personality and the outcome performance, and had the moderator country/culture, it was coded as belonging to all four categories (performance, attitudes, personality and cross-cultural). We used 26 broad categories that in some cases included many variables (i.e., the attitudes category includes variables such as job satisfaction, perceived support, values, and more). These broad categories, while not informing us whether or not a specific topic has been meta-analyzed, do point to areas in our literature that have been studied and analyzed extensively, and areas that have not been as extensively reviewed (as published in the top journals of our field). We chose broad categories because to include specific variables (e.g., pay satisfaction) would have

Table 1

The number of search hits and papers included from each included journal.

Journal	Search hits	Papers included
Journal of Applied Psychology (JAP)	267	180
Personnel Psychology (PPsych)	107	60
Journal of Organizational Behavior (JOB)	32	25
Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)	470	17
Academy of Management Review (AMR)	9	3
Journal of Management (JOM)	56	26
Psychological Bulletin (PsychBull)	11 ^a	5
Journal of Business and psychology (JBP)	25	19
Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology (JOOP)	32	24
International Journal of Selection and Assessment (IJSA)	31	19
Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes (OBHDP)	25	13
Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ)	2	2
Human Relations (HR)	13	10
Human Resource Management Review (HRMR)	6	4
Total	1084	407

Note. For all journals except AMJ, hits were derived from a PsycINFO search restricted to the specific journal. For AMJ, hits were derived from the AMJ website unless specified differently.

^a The search was also crossed with the Boolean phrase “employee’ OR ‘organization”.

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