

Regulatory and personality predictors of the reliability of professional actions

Morosanova V.I.

Psychologial Institute of Russian Academy of Education Moscow

Gaidamashko Ig.V.

Institute of Cybernetics, Moscow Technological University (MIREA), Moscow, Russia Chistvakova S.N.

Department of Professional Education, Russian Academy of Education, Moscow, Russia Burmistrova-Savenkova A. V.

Laboratory of Self-regulation, Psychological Institute of the Russian Academy of Education, Moscow, Russia

Kondratyuk N.G.

Laboratory of Self-regulation, Psychological Institute of the Russian Academy of Education, Moscow, Russia

Abstract

Background. The present research is carried out in the context of the conscious self-regulation of professional activity. Objective. It investigates the regulatory and personality predictors of reliability in rescue operations under stressful conditions. Design. The research sample includes 87 rescuers (72 men and 15 women aged from 25 to 50 years). Respondents were asked to complete the Morosanova's Self-Regulation Profile Ouestionnaire - SRPOM, the Evsenck Personality Profile - Short (EPP-S), and the expert questionnaire "Professional Reliability of Rescue Operation" designed for this particular study. Results. On the basis of a correlation analysis, the structural model of the predictors of action reliability was constructed using the maximum likelihood method. Consistency indices showed a good agreement between the model and empirical data. The model contains three latent factors: "Self-regulation", "Neuroticism" and "Reliability of actions". As the model displays, the "Self-regulation" factor is a significant predictor of professional action reliability. There are two indicator variables for the factor "Self-regulation": the self-regulation reliability considered as its stability in the stressful situations, and the rescuers' levels of development of professionally critical regulatory features - modeling of conditions significant for the achievement of goals and the programming of actions. The study results also show that personality dispositions (by Eysenck) have only indirect influence on action reliability. As the structural model reveals, the conscious selfregulation is a mediator in the relationship of neuroticism traits and action reliability. Conclusion. The conscious self-regulation is a



significant predictor of professional action reliability under stressful conditions. It is also the mediator of the effects of personality dispositions on the reliability of action.

Keywords: reliability, conscious self-regulation, personality traits, structural model, professional activity



Introduction

In this paper, the impact of self-regulation on action reliability is considered in the context of research on conscious self-regulation in the Russian scientific school of the psychology of self-regulation. O. A. Konopkin, a member of the Russian Academy of Education, was one of this school founders. His theory of the conscious selfregulation of activity and the regulatory model being widely psychologists professional has proved accepted among its applicability for the study of the fundamental psychological problems and has given the basis for solving applied problems in various areas of psychological practice.

The main provisions of Konopkin's theory originally have been put forward, substantiated and proved not only on the basis of theoretical research but also by summarizing the results of the professional activities research on the establishment of engineering psychology and the development of occupational psychology in Russia that was carried out during 60-70 years of the XXth century (Konopkin, 2011).

In psychological studies of human reliability in professional activity, the concept of self-regulation takes one of the central places. Russian and foreign authors emphasize the need to incorporate this concept in the theoretical understanding of the psychological structure of professional activity (Bodrov, 1998; Lomov, 1966; Nikiforov, 1977; Konopkin, 2011; Oshanin, 1973; Shadrikov, 1982) as well as the need to develop special methods of its analysis (French, Simon, Bedford, Soane & Emma, 2011; Morosanova, 1986, 2012).

It is noteworthy that existing studies of professional reliability are mostly focused on the effects of the ergonomic conditions of professional activity, as well as stress and other functional states influencing action reliability. The personal determinants of reliability are examined to a lesser degree.

However, the first results of the professional activity selfregulation research indicated that a professional's personality influences the results of his actions to the extent that it determines his ability to put forward the goals of his actions and take steps to achieve them (Konopkin, 2011; Nersessyan & Konopkin, 1978; Konopkin, Morosanova & Stepansky, 1988).

We have obtained convincing data proving that people with different types of character and temperament can reach equally high professional results due to their individual differences in the



development of a conscious self-regulation, primarily at the expense of subject activity aimed to achieve personally meaningful goals (Morosanova, 2003, 2010b). Individual differences in self-regulation manifest themselves in a way in which a person plans and programs how to achieve his goals, takes into account the significant external and internal conditions, evaluates the outcomes and adjusts his actions to achieve subjectively acceptable results. Their phenomenology is very diverse and is manifested in any professional and educational activity.

Among individual differences, we categorize stylistic features of self-regulation as their narrower class, considering them to be individual characteristics of self-regulation typical for a certain person, steadily manifested in achieving different goals in different life situations. At present, we can speak of the existence of different levels of a subject's individual characteristics that manifest themselves in conscious self-regulation. There is an operational level of subject manifestations in the stylistic features of the regulatory processes that implement major components of the self-regulation system. This level can be described as regulatory profile indicating the development of regulatory processes such as objective planning, modeling of significant conditions, programming, and adjusting the activity and its results. Personality levels and personality traits such as responsibility, perseverance, flexibility, and reliability can be described as regulatory. Finally, the integrative level of selfregulation characterizes the general development of a person's subject activity (Morosanova, 2010 a, b).

Professional activity in extreme situations requires high reliability of a professional's self-management and self-regulation abilities.Therefore, a special place for their contribution to the success of professional activity takes regulatory reliability as a key quality in forming a person's style, ensuring fault-free operations in psychologically stressful conditions (Morosanova, 2010b, 2012).

In our studies of psychological reliability of athletes (shooters of the highest gualification), we have demonstrated that regulatory reliability, measured as sustainability of the conscious self-regulation system, is actually the basis of the faultless performance and accuracy of corrections in the competitive situations of different tension (Morosanova, 1986). Another study has revealed that a high level of development of conscious self-regulation increased the psychological reliability of professional rescuers compensating for adverse impact of the stress manifestations their the on performance. It also prevented fixation on the negative functional



states (e.g., stress) in the form of stable behavioral and personal deformations (Morosanova, Leonova, Kondratyuk & Kachina, 2009).

In the present article, the problem of personal reliability in professional activity is considered from the standpoint of a differential-psychological approach to the conscious self-regulation of human activity, which is now being developed in the Laboratory of Self-Regulation Psychology of the Psychological Institute of the Russian Academy of Education under the guidance of Prof. Varvara Morosanova. Numerous studies of laboratory colleagues have displayed that any activity (regardless of its content) is a specific kind of deliberate and purposeful activity, the efficiency of which is largely determined by the overall perfection characteristics and the individual characteristics of conscious self-regulation (Morosanova, 2010b; Morosanova, 2011).

The theoretical basis also includes a representation of the stylistic features of self-regulation as the psychological tools of a person in achieving his professional, educational and life goals.

On the one hand, the differential, natural side of this resource is actually a person's temperament – in particular extroversion and neuroticism – which largely determines the individual specifics of self-regulation features (Morosanova, 2003). On the other hand, the efficiency of using this resource in many ways depends on the conscious self-regulation of achieving goals, the development of which may compensate for disadvantageous traits of temperament, and, in particular, the ability to improve the efficiency and reliability of educational and professional activity (Morosanova, 2014).

This article, which is based on the results of our empirical research, is intended to answer a series of questions. What are the roles of conscious self-regulation and the stability of the self-regulation system in ensuring the reliability of actions under the stressful conditions? Can we say that the reliability of self-regulation is a predictor of the reliability of actions under stress? Which of the self-regulation features appear to be psychological resources ensuring the reliability of a professional's performance? In which way are the self-regulation and personality traits related to the reliability of actions? And, finally, is self-regulation mediating the influence of personality characteristics on the reliability of human action under stressful conditions?



Method

The main objective of the study was to examine the regulatory and personality predictors of the reliability of human action in demanding conditions of professional activity. This study was conducted on a sample of professionals with an extreme profile – rescuers. The choice of profession was determined by the fact that rescuers' activities involve the elements of danger and stress. In addition, their activities are structured in a way that allows us to get real results of the reliability and effectiveness of each participant, which can be evaluated by professional colleagues.

Based on the analysis of the documents regulating the professional activity of the rescuers and observations of their activity, it was revealed that the reliability of the rescuers actions must be considered separately in regular and emergency situations, as their operations in these different situations has substantial differences in their form, purpose and degree of psychological tension. The rescuers consider as regular situations those that do not constitute a menace to human life: opening premises or other objects at the request of citizens and organizations, providing technical assistance to individuals and organizations, working with animals, addressing utility failures, maintenance work, and situational assessment, as well as the daily activities of rescuers in the unit. Emergency situations include emergencies and accidents representing a direct threat to human life and situations that may lead to the loss of human life or to other health hazards, such as explosions, collapsing buildings, fires, suicide threats, lost children, threats of a terrorist attacks, and opening rooms with a child inside.

Sample

The study involved 87 rescuers (72 men and 15 women aged from 25 to 50 years). Their work experience as rescuers ranged from 1 to 11 years (M=4 years 6 months).

Procedure

The study was conducted individually with each participant during a working day. All the tests and the questionnaire were filled in the same order in the presence of the researcher. The average execution time was 1 hour 20 minutes. The researcher obtained measures of personality characteristics and regulatory features, as well as



estimates of action reliability for each participant. All the data obtained in the survey were recorded and processed anonymously.

Methods

The diagnostics package included two methods for assessing personality and regulatory parameters, as well as the expert questionnaire to obtain the estimates of the participants' action reliability.

- To scrutinize individual features of self-regulation, we used 1 Morosanova's Self-Regulation Profile Questionnaire (SRPOM), modified release of 2011 (Morosanova & Kondratyuk, 2011). The 52-item questionnaire includes 8 scales assessing basic regulatory processes: goal planning, modeling of significant conditions, programming of actions, evaluation of results and personal regulatory features: flexibility, independence, and regulatory reliability. The questionnaire also includes the integrated indicator characterizing the overall development of the conscious self-regulation system. The general level of selfregulation is calculated as the total sum score. Participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 to 4 («strongly agree» to «strongly disagree»). This version of the guestionnaire went through all the psychometric procedures and standardization based on a sample of 820 subjects aged 18 to 66 years (Morosanova & Kondratvuk, 2011).
- 2. Eysenck Personality Profile Short (EPP-S) (Russian version adapted by «Kogito-centre», 1998) is a 200-item questionnaire including 3 basic bipolar scales to assess extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. The Russian release went through all the procedures of psychometric validation.
- 3. The expert questionnaire «Professional Reliability of Rescue Operation», which had been designed for this particular study to get independent scores of each participant's actions reliability in terms of faultless and effective operation in situations of different levels of stress. Estimates of the rescuers' operation are obtained separately for regular and emergency situations according to three basic criteria: understood accurateness (Ac). faultless operation; as effectiveness (Ef), measured as precision in the performance of required actions, tasks, instructions and guidelines; and the reliability of group interaction (RI).



For expert evaluations, all subjects were asked to rate operation of all the members within the group, except themselves (an average of 25 people in each team) according to the above-mentioned criteria, regardless of their personality characteristics. For each rescuer, an average score on a 5-point scale was calculated for all three criteria.

Results

Correlation analysis has been carried out, which allowed us to identify and describe the significant relationships between the characteristics of self-regulation (on the scales of the SRPQM), personal characteristics (on the scales of EPP-S), and expert assessments of professional reliability of rescuer action in regular and emergency situations. Correlations of variables included in the study, the mean values and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

In the analysis of descriptive statistics, attention is drawn to the fact that integrative indicators of the reliability of rescue operations in emergency situations in the group average are significantly higher than in regular situations (indicators 7, 8 in Table 1 when compared with Student criterion at p< 0.005). At the same time, the variability of these parameters is higher for emergency situations compared that for regular situations.

Correlation analysis has revealed no statistically significant relationships between indicators of action reliability in regular situations and personal-regulatory features, except the relationship between the indicators «Modeling of significant conditions» and «Accurateness (faultless operation)».

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Table 1. Mean values, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables of the study



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bil ity												
1 Ac. R	4. 28	0 .67	1 .00									
2 Ac. E	4. 33	0 .74	48 **	1 .00								
3 Ef. R	4. 36	0 .63	50 **	38 **	1 .00							
4 Ef. E	4. 73	0 .53	26 *	51 **	33 **	1 .00						
5 RI R	4. 30	0 .63	41 **	35 **	40 **	37 **	1 .00					
6 RI E	4. 63	0 .63	31 **	52 **	31 **	82 **	49 **	1 .00				
7 RA R	1 2.9 4	1 .51	82 **	50 **	79 **	38 **	75 **	45 **	1 .00			
8 RA E	1 3.6 9	1 .70	44 **	86 **	41 **	79 **	47 **	84 **	53 **	1 .00		

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S elf- re gu lat ion										
9 . Pl	6. 13	2 .34						1 .00		
1 0. Pr	7. 26	1 .55			29 **	25 *	0 24 *		1 .00	
1 1. M	7. 23	1 .38	24 *	24 *	35 **	30 **	0 31 **	28 **	39 **	1 .00
1 2. RE	6. 03	1 .73							47 **	37 **
1 3. I	4. 13	2 .11				 22 *				37 **
1 4. F	7. 53	1 .34					0 27 *			 27 **
1 5. RR	7. 01	1 .55			28 **	31 **			43 **	50 **
1 6. GL	3 7.0 2	5 .40			22 *			61 **	66 **	54 **
P er										

							25		
so na lity Di sp osi tio ns									
1 7. E	2 5.0 4	4 .84						30 **	
1 8. N	6. 22	5 .38						 36 **	 49 **
1 9. P	1 6.9 8	5 .96					 45 **	 25 6*	 33 **

Note. * $p \le 0.05$; ** $p \le 0.01$

1 - Accurateness (faultless operation) in regular situations, Ac.R; 2 - Accurateness (faultless operation) in emergency situations, Ac.E; 3 - Effectiveness as precision of the required actions, tasks, instructions performance in regular situations, Ef. R; 4 – Effectiveness as precision of the required actions, tasks, instructions performance in emergency situations, Ef. E;

5 - Reliability of group interaction in regular situations, RI R; 6 - Reliability of group interaction in emergency situations, RI E; 7 - Reliability of action in regular situations, RA R;

8 - Reliability of action in emergency situations, RA E; 9- Goals planning, Pl; 10- Action programming, Pr; 11 - Modeling of significant conditions, M; 12 - Results evaluation, RE;

13- Flexibility, F; 14 - Independence, I; 15 - Regulatory reliability, RR; 16 - General level of self-regulation, GL; 17 - Extraversion, E; 18- Neuroticism, N; 19 - Psychoticism, P.

In contrast, the analysis of emergency situations shows that regulatory processes and personal-regulatory features, including the general level of self-regulation, significantly correlate with the reliability of rescue actions (r in the range of 0.28 to 0.35 at $p \le 0.01$ and r in the range of 0.21 to 0.24 at $p \le 0.05$). It is likely that for the rescuers (as professionals), their actions in emergency situations are



more important, as they demand mobilizing all available psychological resources.

This result does not contradict the findings made in observations and personal communication with the rescuers in the process of conducting a survey in the units for several months and confirmed by psychologists of the rescue services. Apparently, in emergency situations, the pressure and suspense are higher, which suggests that action reliability in this case largely depends on the personality and regulatory characteristics of each individual.

As for the indicators of self-regulation, we found that various parameters of action reliability in emergency situations significantly correlate with indicators of «Modeling of significant conditions» (at $p \le 0.01$) and «Action Programming» (at $p \le 0.01$), as well as personal-regulatory features «Self-regulation Reliability» (at $p \le 0.01$) and «Independence» (at $p \le 0.05$).

In terms of professional reliability, among the personal-regulatory features, the indicator «Personal-regulatory reliability» is of the most interest for us. Based on the understanding of the self-regulation reliability as the sustainability of the mental activity self-regulation in psychologically stressful situations, an existence of relationship between «Self-regulation reliability» parameters and indicators of «Action reliability» seems to be guite natural and expected. Surprisingly, there were no statistically significant relationships between the indicators of «Action reliability» and «Results assessment». Evidently, the conscious assessment of one's own action results in rapidly changing emergency situations is difficult and is likely to occur after the event, when it is possible to analyze the operation. The indicator of «Goals planning» also did not show statistically significant relationships with any of the parameters of the reliability of rescue actions. The explanation of this result is related to the specifics of the rescue activities, excluding advance planning of professional tasks by virtue of their rapidly changing circumstances in emergency situations, and to the «paramilitary» nature of rescue services regulated by instructions and superiors.

As for the personality dispositions, extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism were not related directly to the action reliability. They were significantly associated with various components of conscious self-regulation (positive correlation in case of extraversion and negative correlation in case of high scores on neuroticism and psychoticism).

Thus, based on the correlation analysis we can say that the relevant personality traits are associated with the characteristics of



self-regulation rather than operation reliability. These results are largely consistent with the findings of our previous studies showing that personality traits have an indirect impact on the productive aspects of human activity, and their impact is mediated by the conscious self-regulation (Morosanova, 2003, 2010a). With regard to the relationship of self-regulation and personality traits, it was shown in our earlier research that the individual characteristics of self-regulation are determined by the properties of temperament and character of the person. (Morosanova, 2003, 2010 a, b). This view is consistent with the data of foreign researchers. Thus, R. Hoyle notes: «The characteristic means by which people self-regulate and the routine success or failure they experience are reflected in personality traits. Many of these traits are rooted in temperament...» (Hoyle, 2010, p 2.).

On the whole, the results of correlation analysis correspond to our idea that personal dispositions do not directly determine the reliability of action – they do it indirectly, through the relationship with conscious self-regulation. In addition, the results of correlation analysis suggest an existence of self-regulation features that are professionally significant for rescue action reliability. Among them we attach special importance to the regulatory processes of «Modeling significant conditions» and «Programming of actions», as well as the personal-regulatory feature of «Self-regulation reliability».

Structural equation modeling

We used the structural equation modeling method to analyze the personality and regulatory predictors of rescue operation reliability in stressful conditions. We aimed also to investigate the role of self-regulation as a mediator between personality traits and action reliability. The resulting structural model is presented in Figure 1. We constructed the model using the method of maximum likelihood, implemented in the program EQS 6.1.

The model contains three latent factors: «Self-regulation», «Neuroticism» and «Reliability of actions». As expected, the indicator variables for the «Self-regulation» factor are «Modeling of significant conditions», «Actions programming», and «Self-regulation reliability».

It should be noted that the factor loading of the modeling process is slightly larger compared to the programming, which supports an assumption that the modeling of conditions significant for the achievement of goals and the development of the regulatory process



of modeling is of high importance for the rescuers and generally for rescue operation as a professional activity.

For the factor «Reliability of actions» the indicator variables are the following: «Effectiveness», which measures precision in performing requiredactions, tasks, instructions, and directions, «Accurateness», which is defined as faultless operation, and «Reliable interaction within a work shift».

For the factor «Neuroticism», the indicator variables are all three traits presented in the Eysenck Profile: «Anxiety», «Inferiority» and «Unhappiness».

The results indicated that our model provided adequate fit indices. Chi-square (df=17.25)=22; p=0.75; CFI=1.00; SRMR=0.03; RMSEA=0.00 (90% interval from 0.000 to 0.065). All the factor loadings and regression coefficients were statistically significant and in the expected direction.

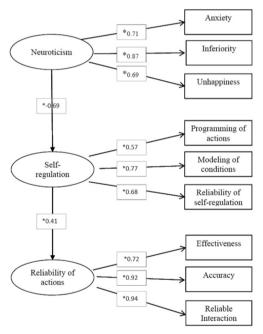


Fig. 1. The structural model of the psychological predictors of the action reliability (* - load is significant at p<0.05)

Notes. Effectiveness - precision in performing required actions, tasks, instructions and guidelines. Accurateness - faultless operation. Reliable Interaction - within a work shift

The model demonstrates that self-regulation plays an important role in reliability of rescuers' actions. A significant fact by the analysis is that rescuers' degree of development of self-regulation is determined primarily by the indicators of modeling significant conditions (MC), programming of actions (PA), and reliability of self-



regulation (RS). We hypothesize that the aforementioned selfregulation characteristics are critical (professionally significant) for rescuers. Neuroticism, however, has negative indirect effects on the reliability of actions mediated by self-regulation (z=2.87, p<0.05).

Although there were no significant correlations between extraversion, psychoticism and scores of actions reliability in regular and emergency situations, the significant correlation between extraversion and self-regulation reliability (r=0.26; p=0.05) allows us to suggest that extraversion will affect the reliability of actions indirectly. However, with the introduction of this parameter into the model, the model parameters deteriorated significantly. An additional study of the relationship of extraversion with the reliability of rescue actions (both direct determination and indirect one through mediators) using the path analysis method has not identified any significant effect.

Similarly, there was no evidence of a psychoticism-mediated relationship with indicators of the rescuers actions reliability. These data indicate that both extraverts and introverts, as well as individuals with different levels of psychoticism, can be reliable in stressful situations when they possess professionally important regulative characteristics.

Discussion

The analysis results give grounds to say that indicators of conscious self-regulation serve as predictors of professional operation reliability. These findings highlight the importance of self-regulation in addressing the problem of human reliability under stressful conditions of professional activity. The revealed facts correspond with the results of other studies showing that the degree of development of self-regulation and its features determine achievements in the educational process (Morosanova, 2010a; Morosanova et al., 2015; Morosanova et al., 2016), as well as in professional activity (Morosanova & Kondratyuk, 2012; Morosanova, 1986, 2014; Gaidamashko et al., 2015). All these research papers support Baumeister and Alquist's statement that «self-regulation is an important human capability and one that contributes to success and well-being in a broad variety of spheres» (Baumeister & Alquist, 2009, p.31).

Another important result of our study is the data testifying that the rescue action reliability in more complex and stressful situations varies to a greater degree and is even slightly higher than in the



regular situations regulated by instructions and in less stressful situations where rescuers' activities are carried out as part of routine procedures and do not require extensive thinking over the action program.

The so-called emergency situations involving dangerous elements and potential threats are likely to enhance rescuers' subjective activity due to the high individual significance of these situations, and in addition, are likely to promote a more definite expression of individual differences in self-regulation that are not so obvious under normal conditions. As Konopkin underlined, «as soon as a person is faced with the need to solve a new problem personally meaningful to him, the process of conscious regulation appears very clearly. Problem situation, potentially associated with the implementation of something subjectively important, with achievement of the result, which embodies one of the fundamental value orientations, usually causes and reveals the detailed conscious regulation...» (Konopkin, 2011, p.244).

Therefore, the obtained data constitute a new empirical argument in favor of our earlier-developed concept that conscious selfregulation in new, unexpected and unusual situations is one of the main means of overcoming them.

Our research has identified the regulatory features serving as predictors of the reliability of rescuers' operations in difficult and unexpected situations. These professionally significant regulatory features are actually special psychological resources that promote mastery of the emergency rescuer profession, and, from this point of view, can be used as prognostic indicators of a person's success in mastering this profession. The most significant of them are the selfregulation reliability, modeling of significant conditions and action programming. These data confirm and develop our previous research results, which revealed that the development of the regulatory significant conditions» processes «modeling of and «action important psychological programming» component is an of resources for rescuers (Morosanova, Leonova, Kondratvuk & Kachina, 2009).

The results of this study show that the impact of personality dispositions on the productive aspects of an activity is not imminent, and largely mediated by the development of professionally significant regulatory features. On the basis of the obtained results, we can say that the reliability of self-regulation manifested in the stability of conscious self-regulation features (specified by the



activity requirements) serves as the psychological basis of the reliability of operation in stressful conditions.

A new and important result of this study is an empirical argument (found with the help of structural modeling) in favor of the mediating role of conscious self-regulation in the relationship between the personality dispositions and the rescuers' performance reliability.

A growing interest in the mediating role of self-regulation appears currently. As a mediator, self-regulation is primarily and actively studied in the context of the learning activities and self-regulation problems (Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman, 2008; Taura, Abdullah, Roslan & Omar, 2014; Morosanova, Fomina & Bondarenko, 2015). As noted Pintrich: «self-regulatory activities are mediators between personal and contextual characteristics and actual achievement or performance»(Pintrich, 2000, p. 453).

On the whole, self-regulation as a mediator is treated in the solution of various practical problems, such as child-parent relationships (Padilla-Walker, Harper & Jensen, 2010), relationship of domestic violence and adolescent mental health (Perkins, Cortina, Smith-Darden & Graham-Bermann, 2012), and intrinsic motivation of teachers (Hanfstingl, Andreitz, Müller & Thomas, 2010).

The data obtained in our studies are important in carrying out professional orientation in accordance with the principles of differentiation and individualization. Applying professionally important psychological resources can positively affect the students' professional choices and their professional self-determination (Chistyakova, 2015).

We consider the perspective of our research in identifying professionally important regulatory resources specific for various kinds of activity and in designing technologies of their development for ensuring the reliability of professional action of people with different personality dispositions.

Conclusion

- 1. Conscious self-regulation of professional activity is a predictor of the reliability of human action in terms of occupational stress.
- 2. Conscious self-regulation mediates the influence of personality dispositions (by Eysenck) on the reliability of professional action under stressful conditions.
- 3. Rescue operation reliability in psychologically stressful emergency situations largely depends on therescuers' degree



of development of professionally significant regulatory features, primarily the stability of conscious self-regulation, the modeling of significant conditions and actions programming.

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