



Faking for real? Facets of political skill moderate adjustments of self-report and performance to job re- quirements.

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ABSTRACT

Participants ($N = 78$) were told that a company wished to optimize their recruiting strategy in one of two attractive fields in order to get the best candidates for attractive student jobs. Social astuteness and interpersonal influence as relevant facets of political skill were assessed, before participants learned more about the jobs that were said to require high (controlling department) vs. low levels of conscientiousness (health promotion). Finally, conscientiousness was measured via a self-report scale and actual performance in a concentration task. Moderated regression-analyses show three of four predicted interaction effects: participants high in social astuteness adjusted their self-description and their task performance according to job-requirements, that is, they reached higher conscientiousness scores in both measures if the position required high conscientiousness rather than low. Participants high in interpersonal influence only adapt self-report, but generally show better performance in the concentration task, unaffected by requirements. Participants with lower values either relevant facet did not show this pattern, neither self-reported conscientiousness nor performance differed across experimental conditions. Thus, a high degree of facets of political skill not only lead to self-descriptions conforming to the desired profile, but also tuned corresponding task performance. Implications for the "faking" discussion in personnel selection are derived.

Keywords: conscientiousness, personnel selection, social desirability bias

1 Introduction

When it comes to personnel selection, employers have a vital interest in choosing the right person for the right position (Kahlke & Schmidt, 2004). Although normative socialization and adaptation processes substantially contribute to increase person-organization fit of new members, it obviously makes sense to ensure that candidates bring along not only professional skills, but also traits and work-orientation as conforming to requirements. However, the use of psychometric tests, such as personality or performance tests, is still the exception rather than the rule in personnel selection (Schuler, Hell, Trapmann, Schaar & Boramir, 2007). One important reason, among others, is their proneness to social desirability biases or faking: Target constructs and goals of personality tests seem particularly easy to figure out for applicants, offering an excellent opportunity to present ideal self-descriptions (Schuler, 2006). Thus, although most common personality scales meet up entirely satisfactorily with diagnostic reliability and validity criteria under standard conditions, it is well-known that explicitly instructing participants to fake on personality scales heavily affects their construct validity (Stark, Chernyshenko, Chan, Lee & Drasgow, 2001): correlations between unrelated traits increase (Ellingson, Sackett, & Hough, 1999), while correlations to observer ratings decrease (Ballenger, Caldwell-Andrews, & Baer,

2001), and similar findings are reported for applicant settings (Collins & Gleaves, 1998; Schmidt & Ryan, 1993).

Social desirability bias, in general, refers to the phenomenon that individuals "try to present themselves in a way that they are meeting up the requirements and norms of the social group that supposedly gets to know the measurements results" (Hussy, Schreier & Echterhoff., 2010, p. 85) in order to receive credit by the group. Potential credit in the context of personnel selection would be getting hired for the aimed-at job position – and thus a valuable goal to pursue. Therefore, effects of social desirability must be considered to heavily affect suitability diagnostics in general (Schuler, 2006).

On the other hand, meta-analyses have shown that trait measures do reliably predict job performance almost as accurately as complex assessment centre procedures (Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001; Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Other studies report substantial correlations between extraversion or conscientiousness and work-related constructs such as perceived leadership, perceived self-efficacy, and general job satisfaction (Judge, Heller & Mount, 2002; Judge, Bono, Ilies & Gerhardt, 2002; Judge & Ilies, 2002). How can this be the case, if personality scales are so easy to be seen through, and so likely to be faked?

2 Faking as an ability

Following Pauls and Crost (2005; see also Mersman & Shultz, 1998; Viswesvaran & Ones, 1999), we wish to argue that in situations with high demand characteristics, such as application procedures, personality questionnaires measure the ability to respond "in line with the expectations of others or the ability to fake on questionnaires" (Pauls & Crost, 2005, p. 195) – rather than the original target construct. Thus, correlations between trait measures and job performance may go back to a spurious correlation, that is, to common variance with an underlying third variable. Pauls and Crost (2005) report impressive experimental evidence that the ability to fine-tune faking on Big Five scales according to different and very specific job profiles is strongly associated with general mental ability – in turn a good predictor for job performance. Thus, general mental ability is associated with job performance on the one hand, and with the degree of faking "good" profiles in personality scales on the other hand, statistically leading to an association between these measures. In fact, to adjust one's trait profile according to situational requirements is a rather complex task: it requires to accurately assess which degree of which trait is desirable in a given context, to recognize the according dimensions in the test items provided, and to transform and map the "ideal" profile onto concrete response behaviour. Hence, the degree to which trait profiles are faked clearly requires general mental ability, and successful job performance usually does so, too.

Similarly Marcus (2003) shows effects of social desirability in personality scales to not reduce criterion-related validity and therefore notes that there has to be an underlying construct which not only enables applicants to perform adequately in application situations but as well in actual occupational behaviour. According to his results, he appraises the ability to respond according to situational demands to be trait of its own and evaluates it as a "legitimate form of interaction in application situations and even beyond an expression of social competency" (Marcus, 2003, p. 147). Responding to this view, others disagree in certain points of these conclusions and note that faking does not qualify as a desirable trait in every professional context. Nevertheless it is affirmed that certain forms of self-presentation may hold promising potential regarding the prediction of professional capacity (Kanning, 2003).

In the present work, we wish to go beyond these considerations and findings in two ways. First, following Kanning (2003), we believe that the concept of faking as ability is better reflected by more specific measures of social effectiveness (Ferris, Perrewé & Douglas, 2002), such as political skill (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas & Ammeter, 2004; Blickle et al., 2008; Ferris et al., 2005;). Political skill can be defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ahearn et al., 2004, p. 311). According to prior research, individuals who provide high levels of political skill are able to identify precisely how to act in different social situations and are able to transform this knowledge into actual behaviour in a way

that it comes across as honest (Ferris et al., 2005). Furthermore other findings confirm political skill to enhance the effectiveness of impression management's tactics and evoke better evaluations by supervisors when applying them (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska & Shaw, 2007). We therefore believe political skill to be especially suitable to operationalize faking. It subsumes four sub-facets: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity (Ferris et al., 2005), which all contribute to playing "social games" successfully and to building a good reputation (Johnson & Hogan, 2006). Up to now, the construct of political skill has mainly been explored on a global level. However, studies of validation (Ferris et al., 2005, 2008) as well as other findings (Blickle, John et al., 2012; Gansen-Ammann, 2014; Todd, Harris, Harris & Wheeler, 2009) were able to show promising differential effects of single facets of political skill. Therefore the presented study follows suggestions to individually examine effects on the level of facets more closely (Ferris, Treadway, Brouer & Munyon, 2012).

According to Ferris et al. (2005), social astuteness enables people to "comprehend social interactions and accurately interpret their behavior, as well as that of others, in social settings." (p. 129). It was supposed that social astuteness provides the strongest association to employee evaluations provided by supervisors. Further research has shown this assumption to be correct: persons high in social astuteness receive better job evaluations than those with lower degrees of political skill (Blickle et al., 2008; Johnson & Hogan, 2006). We therefore assume the facet of social astuteness to be particularly relevant to this work's issue: Being sensitive to the particular demands of a social interaction is an essential prerequisite for applying interpersonal influence, another central facet relevant to proactive impression management.

In the present study, we seek to conceptually replicate the findings by Pauls and Crost (2005, cf. Konradt, Syperek & Hertel, 2011) by presenting our participants with two different job descriptions requiring high vs. low levels of conscientiousness. We predict that the degree to which participants will describe themselves accordingly as highly vs. moderately conscientious in a self-report scale will be moderated by political skill. Within this frame of reference, however, networking ability and apparent sincerity don't seem applicable. The items assessing these dimensions are tailored to assess guiding values and the use of particular networking skills in real interactions, rather than more general abilities to sense demands and expectations, plus influencing others' impression formation. As the latter matter most in the present context, we will restrict to the sub-facets social astuteness and interpersonal influence as moderators.

The second aspect in which the present study substantially goes beyond prior work is that we seek to show effects of situational demand characteristics on real task performance. Since suitability diagnostic's main goal is to "predict aptitude-related success and be helpful when making decisions in an occupational context" (Schuler, 2006, p. 102), the likelihood to show a specific behaviour can be considered as the most relevant measurement goal. Performance according to demands is actually the best an

employer can expect from his employees – and if the degree of “faking” in a test profile reflects the skill to sense demands plus the ability to conform to them, test validity were actually given, though not in its original diagnostic meaning. Faking performance, however, seems very different from faking self-reports, if not paradoxical in itself. Research nevertheless lending support to such a hypothesis is briefly reviewed in the next section.

3 Faking performance? Priming performance!

Not everything is fakable: Even if participants were able to sense, say, that a position requires high levels of analytic reasoning, and thus claim to be good at reasoning, this does of course not mean that they will solve all kinds of logic puzzles correctly. If this was what a job requires, the best way of assessment would obviously be actual task performance in an achievement test, not self-report. Political skills may no doubt promote a good reputation and positive performance evaluations by others. But they seem quiet unlikely to affect “hard” performance data.

Nevertheless, we assume that situational demands may also have an impact on actual behaviour, including performance in achievement tests, and that social astuteness and interpersonal influence may again moderate these effects. Numerous studies from the area of basic social cognition research demonstrate that stereotypes, environmental cues, and specific goals serve as primes for spontaneous behaviour, even and in fact particularly outside of the individual’s conscious awareness (Wheeler & Petty, 2001). For example, people have been shown to behave more aggressively towards the experimenter after subliminal exposure to members of stereotypically aggressive groups (Bargh, Chen & Burrows, Exp.3), to talk more quietly when thinking about – and long before – going to the library (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003; Aarts, Dijksterhuis & Custers, 2003), and the like. These studies conform to Bargh’s (1989) theory of goal-dependent automaticity and demonstrate that as soon as a goal is cognitively activated – with or without awareness – according concepts and behaviour patterns are co-activated via spreading activation (see Dijksterhuis, Chartrand, & Aarts, 2007, for a review). For instance, the general goal to go to the university has been shown to activate the concept “bicycle” as a habitual means to reach that goal (Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2000). Comprehensive neuropsychological evidence on mirror neurons and the common mental representation of perception, conception and action further support these findings (Jacoboni, 2009; Jeannerod, 1994; Prinz, 1997).

One of these many studies is particularly relevant to the present research: Dijksterhuis and van Knippenberg (1998) primed their participants by letting them write an essay about a typical day in the life of a professor, and found them to out-perform control groups in a subsequent quiz-game of trivial pursuit, whereas those who wrote an essay about a typical day in the life of a soccer hooligan performed worse than controls. Of course, stereotypically priming the concept of knowledge in the professor condition did not suddenly let people know all of a sudden who painted *La Guernica*, or how long the Amazonas River was. “They did not know things they did not know before merely because they were primed with the word ‘profes-

sor” (Dijksterhuis & Van Knippenberg, 1998, p. 874). But priming obviously activated knowledge retrieval which was already part of their mental repertoire, and turned it into action – possibly by setting a performance standard, i.e., activating corresponding goals and motivating participants to invest more effort, or use better strategies.

Thus, stereotypes, environments, and a host of other priming cues have been shown to activate associated behaviour, even without participants’ awareness. We believe that job descriptions affect candidates’ overt behaviour in a very similar way. In fact, since an application context should be rather powerful in evoking goal-directed behaviour, and since trait concepts (such as conscientiousness) are usually made rather explicit, priming effects on associated performance seem likely. However, participants high in social astuteness and interpersonal influence are supposed to be much more competent to sense and respond to goal-related demands and , thus more likely to co-activate and show appropriate ways of behaviour. Thus, the effect should again be moderated by these two facets of political skill. That is, we expect participants showing high levels of the considered constructs to not only adjust their self-report according to the demands of a job description, but also their effort and thus their performance in a relevant task – within the range of their behavioural repertoire, naturally.

To sum up, the following hypotheses are to be tested in the present study: We expect participants reporting high degrees of social astuteness and interpersonal influence to show “adequate” levels of self-description as well as of actual performance: They should describe themselves as more conscientious and perform better in a concentration task in a context requiring high levels of conscientiousness (controlling department) as compared to a context making no particular requirements regarding conscientiousness (health-promotion department). Participants low in social astuteness and interpersonal influence should not show this pattern, that is, neither self-report nor performance should differ as a function of context.

To our knowledge, the present study is the first to test these assumptions in this context.

4 Method

4.1 Overview

The aim of the present study was to test the hypothesis that participants adjust their self-description as well as task performance according to the demands of one of two job profiles, and that these effects will be restricted to participants high in social astuteness, and high in interpersonal influence, respectively. Participants were told that a renowned company wished to optimize their recruiting strategy for attractive student jobs in one of two departments: controlling (explicitly requiring high levels of accuracy and conscientiousness) vs. health promotion (explicitly requiring high levels of openness and communicative skills). We assume test persons high in social astuteness and interpersonal influence to be more sensitive towards demand profiles, and to present themselves as more conscientious for the position allegedly referring to

controlling than for the one referring to health promotion in both dependent measures, self-description and actual performance.

4.2 Material and Procedure

Questionnaires included a first instruction informing participants about the alleged purpose of the survey. It was stated that the study was conducted within the context of a bachelor thesis, helping a prestigious company to find out whether universities of applied sciences (allegedly better practical orientation) or colleges (allegedly higher level of academic education) provide a better workforce of student employees. The purpose was chosen to generally motivate participants to provide "good" self-description and performance. After reading the experiments' first instruction social astuteness and interpersonal influence were assessed by the Political Skill Inventory (PSI), which was developed and validated by Ferris and colleagues in 2005, consisting of 18 Items. As mentioned earlier, it contains four sub-facets, and as argued above, we assume the facets 'social astuteness' and 'interpersonal influence' to be particularly relevant for the hypothesized association of political skill and the ability to fake good in the situation created here. A sample item of the social astuteness scale would be "I always seem to instinctively know the right things to say or do to influence others.", while items such as "I am good at getting people to like me." refer to the sub-facet of interpersonal influence. The social astuteness' scale usually provides a Cronbach's alpha value of $\alpha = .79$ (Ferris et al., 2005; Oerder, Blickle & Summers, 2013), that was even slightly higher in the present study with $\alpha = .81$, for interpersonal influence, Oerder et al. report an α of .78, here we yield $\alpha = .75$.

To avoid causing distortions in the self-description of political skill, participants learned more about the student jobs the company wished to recruit for (as defining experimental conditions) only after filling-in the PSI. Following the procedure used by Pauls and Crost (2005), participants were given a fair chance to sense the particular demands: The controlling-related job-description used traits like 'trustworthy', 'patient', 'convincing', 'well-structured', 'careful' and 'professional', while the job-description for health promotion contained terms such as 'open', 'communicative', 'dynamic', 'autonomously', 'inter-active', 'friendly', and 'convincing'. According to the first

job profile a conscientiously shaped self-presentation can be considered appropriate, while the second one does not put a lot of emphasis on conscientiousness of student employees.

Self-description of conscientiousness was measured via a self-report scale including 19 items provided by the International Personality Item Pool (www.ipip.ori.org). According to the website's information, their internal consistency ranges around $\alpha = .88$, while Cronbach's alpha in the present study turned out to be marginally lower ($\alpha = .84$). Both scales, political skill and conscientiousness, were translated to German and responses were required on a 7-point Likert Scale.

To measure demand effects on actual behaviour, conscientiousness was additionally assessed by means of a concentration task, which is part of Lufthansa preparation training for flight attendants and requires accurate information processing. Participants have to mark a certain word occurring 42 times in a list of 285 very similar looking words, similar to the popular d2 attention test by Brickenkamp (1972). They were told this was the last part of the survey and that they could leave after working on it. Thus, they were not set a time limit but were free to choose whether to elaborate on it exhaustively or in less detail, i.e., more or less conscientiously.

Finally demographical data were assessed and test persons were thanked for their participation. The entire procedure took about 15 minutes.

4.3 Participants

$N = 78$ participants were recruited at the campus of Hochschule Fresenius Cologne University of Applied Sciences and randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions ($n = 39$ each). The test person's age ranges between 18 and 26 years and amounts to an average of $M = 21.45$ ($SD = 2.05$) years. The sample consists of $n = 46$ female and $n = 32$ male students of diverse business and media programmes. Table 1 reports the means and standard deviations of demographic and study variables in total and in both experimental conditions. No statistical significant differences could be found between both groups.

Table 1: Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) of demographic and study variables in both experimental groups and in total.

	Health Promotion Condition ($n = 39$)	Accounting Condition ($n = 39$)	Total ($N = 78$)
Age	21.38 (2.20)	21.53 (1.91)	21.45 (2.05)
Social Astuteness	4.91 (1.00)	4.99 (0.86)	4.95 (0.93)
Interpersonal Influence	4.90 (0.99)	4.75 (0.88)	4.82 (0.93)
Self-reported Conscientiousness	4.35 (0.56)	4.59 (0.76)	4.47 (0.67)
Performance Conscientiousness	35.69 (7.19)	37.92 (4.23)	36.81 (5.97)

Note: No statistical significant differences could be found between groups.

Table 2: Hierarchical moderated multiple regression analyses for the interaction effect of experimental condition and social astuteness for self-reported and performance conscientiousness

	Self-reported Conscientiousness		Performance Conscientiousness	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Experimental Condition (A)	.16	.16	.18	.18
Social Astuteness (B)	.32**	.37**	.14	.19
A x B		.34**		.32**
R ²	.13**	.24	.06	.16
ΔR ²		.11**		.10**

Note: N = 78; Experimental condition: -1 = health promotion condition, +1 = accounting condition. ** p < .01, * p < .05

5 Results

Hierarchical moderated multiple regression analyses (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003) were conducted to examine the predicted interaction of experimental condition and either facet of political skill. Self-report and performance data should be affected by experimental condition among participants high, but not among those low in social astuteness, and the same pattern is expected for interpersonal influence.

5.1 Effects of Social Astuteness on Conscientiousness and Performance

The social astuteness scale was centred, experimental conditions were effect coded (accounting condition = +1, health promotion condition = -1). We analysed the data in the following way: First, we entered the effect coded categorical variable experimental condition and the continuous predictor social astuteness. In the second step, the cross-product terms of the experimental condition and social astuteness was entered. If the model including the cross-product term explains incremental variance in the criterion over and above the main effects entered in Step 1, the interaction effect between both predictors can be considered significant.

Results of the regression analyses are presented in Table 2. As indicated by Model 1, the direct effect of experimental condition on self-reported conscientiousness is not significant ($\beta = .16, p = .13$) whereas social astuteness does have a main effect on the criterion ($\beta = .32, p < .01$). In other words, participants with higher social astuteness reach higher levels of self-reported conscientiousness, independent of experimental condition. As hypothesized, it needs contextual cues to adapt performance to situational affordances, so that social astuteness moderated the effect of the experimental condition on self-reported conscientiousness. This interaction effect is significant, as tested in Model 2 ($\beta = .34, \Delta R^2 = .11, p < .01$). A similar pattern emerges for our performance measure of conscientiousness: Experimental condition does not have a main effect on performance in Model 3 ($\beta = .18, p = .11$), nor does social astuteness ($\beta = .14, p = .21$). Model 4, however, reveals that, as predicted, both predictors significantly interact and can thus explain substantial amount of variance in performance in the conscientiousness task ($\beta = .32, \Delta R^2 = .10, p < .01$).

The form of both interaction effects is illustrated in Figures 1 and 2: Participants low in social astuteness remain

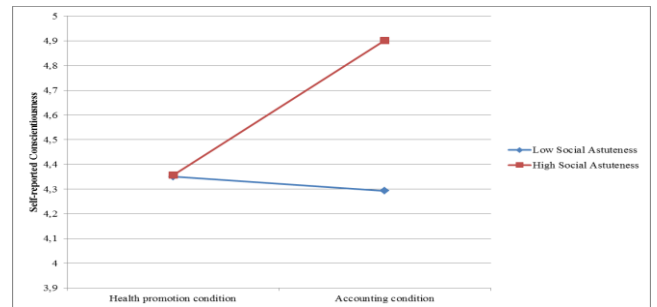


Figure 1: Interaction of Experimental Condition x Social Astuteness on Self-reported Conscientiousness

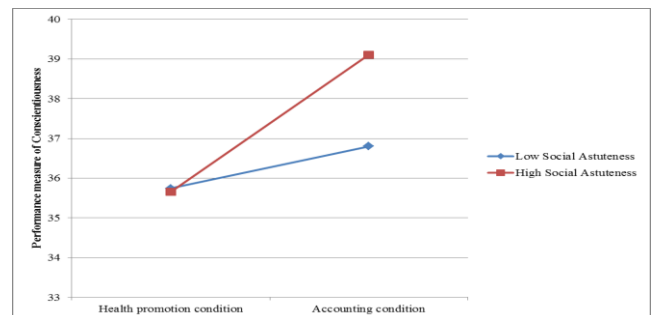


Figure 2: Interaction of Experimental Condition x Social Astuteness on Performance Conscientiousness

unaffected by our experimental manipulation, they neither adapt their self-report nor their performance to the demands at hand. Participants high in social astuteness, in contrast, report higher levels of conscientiousness and show better performance in the concentration task when, but only when conscientiousness is required in the job profile provided.

5.2 Effects of Interpersonal Influence on Conscientiousness and Performance

Table 3 presents the results of the regression analyses for interpersonal influence as predictor and moderator for self-reported conscientiousness and performance as criterion variables. Results of these analyses (Model 5) indicate no significant direct effects of experimental condition ($\beta = .19, p = .09$) nor of interpersonal influence on self-reported conscientiousness ($\beta = .21, p = .06$).

Table 3: Hierarchical moderated multiple regression analyses for the interaction effect of experimental condition and interpersonal influence for self-reported and performance conscientiousness

	Self-reported Conscientiousness		Performance Conscientiousness	
	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Experimental Condition (A)	.19	.20	.21	.21
Interpersonal Influence (B)	.21	.24*	.26*	.28*
A x B		.23*		.14
R^2	.08	.13	.11*	.13
ΔR^2		.05*		.02

Note: $N = 78$; Experimental condition: -1 = health promotion condition, +1 = accounting condition. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

As hypothesized, again, the interaction of experimental condition x interpersonal influence is significant ($\beta = .23$, $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $p < .05$; Model 6). On the other hand, for the performance measure, the interaction term experimental condition x interpersonal influence is not significant ($\beta = .14$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p = .20$; Model 8), while the main effect of interpersonal influence is ($\beta = .26$, $p < .05$; Model 7). This means that participants with higher levels of interpersonal influence performed better in the concentration task than participants with lower levels of interpersonal influence, but in this case, performance was unaffected by experimental condition.

The form of the interaction effect is illustrated in Figure 3: Participants low in interpersonal influence remain unaffected by our experimental manipulation, they do not adapt their self-report to the demands at hand. Participants high in interpersonal influence, in contrast, report higher levels of conscientiousness when conscientiousness is required in the job profile provided.

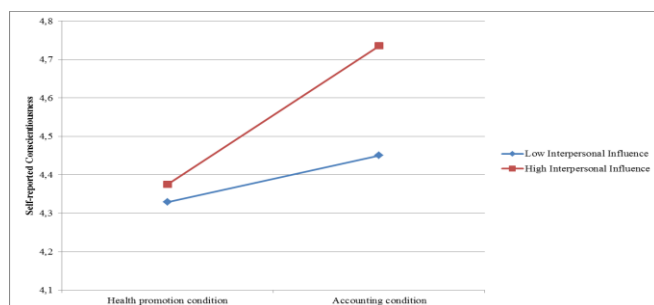


Figure 3: Interaction of Experimental Condition x Interpersonal Influence on Self-reported Conscientiousness

6 Discussion

The aim of the present study was to determine the effects of sub-facets of political skill, namely social astuteness and interpersonal influence, on the ability to fake good in an application context. To sum up, one could say that participants high in social astuteness presented themselves more adequately with regard to the requirements implied by our two imaginary job-profiles. They described themselves as significantly more conscientious when the supposed goal of the survey was to find student employees for controlling, but showed average levels of conscientiousness when student employees in the section of health promotion were of alleged interest. In addition to that,

actual behaviour in a concentration task requiring a conscientious work style was adjusted accordingly, that is, participants performed better in the controlling condition. Neither self-description nor performance of participants low in social astuteness differed across experimental conditions. Accordingly, we conclude test persons high in social astuteness sense what kind of self-presentation is adequate in which context and to thus be able to adjust to requirements. Social astuteness moderated the effect of job profiles on self-presentation, as shown by the corresponding interaction term in the regression analysis being significant.

Those participants characterized by lower values in social astuteness presented themselves in a very similar way regardless of experimental condition. Thus, they seem not to recognize in which way they would have to tailor their self-description as well as their performance to appear suitable with regard to requirements implied by either job profile. Moreover, individuals low in social astuteness presented themselves as generally less conscientious than those scoring higher in the preceding measurement.

When it comes to the sub-facet of interpersonal influence a slightly different pattern of self-presentation emerged:

Participants high in interpersonal influence give adequate self-descriptions of conscientiousness meeting contextual demands, while those low in interpersonal influence described themselves similarly and less conscientious across both conditions.

However in contrast to social astuteness, participants high in interpersonal influence did not tailor their concentration task performance with regard to experimental conditions. Those who reported higher levels of interpersonal influence performed better than participants low in the sub-facet across contexts, controlling as well as health-promotion. Whereas social astuteness seems to moderate both, self-description and performance of conscientiousness, interpersonal influence may indeed significantly affect how participants describe themselves regarding different job profiles, but does not have similar effects when it comes to performing analogously. Before elaborately speculating about potential underlying differential processes, it may be advisable first to see this pattern of findings replicated in future research.

Summarising the present study's results: Yes, political skill, or to be precise, its facets of social astuteness and interpersonal influence, do have a positive association with the ability to fake good in a context similar to an application situation. As Pauls and Crost (2005) demonstrated, general mental ability is strongly associated with this faking ability, but the present study shows a construct of social effectiveness to contribute as well to adequate self-description in personality measures in a demanding context. Again (Mersman & Shultz, 1998; Pauls and Crost, 2005; Viswesvaran & Ones, 1999) faking turns out to be a competence. What is new and of particular relevance in the context of personnel selection is that participants high in social astuteness not only describe themselves adequately but as well show adequate task performance, even though analogous effects do not show for the facet of interpersonal influence. Similar to Dijksterhuis' and van Knippenberg's finding (1998), participants who report high levels of social astuteness seem to activate a behavioral performance pattern that is already part of their repertoire, and potentially primed by concepts associated with the job profile.

Although we consider this work's findings to be highly notable, its limitations have to be acknowledged. Since social astuteness and interpersonal influence were assessed between the first instruction and the experimental manipulation, both measures may have been influenced, because participants already knew that there might be a reason to give "improved" self-presentations. However, since PSI scores did not differ across experimental conditions, potential distortions must have occurred to similar degrees. Furthermore the participants of this study represent a quite homogenous sample. All participants are students at Hochschule Fresenius Cologne, aged between 18 and 26. The presented findings are thus based on a rather young population, while application situations, especially for highly complex job positions, mostly refer to older individuals. Thus, although instructions and cover story were designed in a way meant to prevent it from some typical shortcomings of typical scenario studies, e.g., by not asking participants to imagine an application situation, or the like, the results' external validity is obviously limited.

Anyway, hiring an applicant who is not sufficiently suitable for a position does involve several risks for the company as well as the individual that is being offered the specific position, and it may lead to adverse consequences on psychological, physiological, economic and social levels (Steinmann & Schreyögg, 2005, quoted after Treier, 2009; Kauffeld & Grohmann, 2011). On the one hand one could say: whether the applicant indeed "truly" holds the desired trait profile, or doesn't, but is able to show the desired behavior – either way hiring this person must not be seen as a mistake. On the other hand, prior research has shown the positive influence of psychological authenticity and self-consistency for psychological subjective well-being (Lynch, La Guardia & Ryan, 2009; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne & Ilardi, 1997). It is important to note that not all kinds of behaviour can and should be faked. If a person's conscientiousness is increased, most people would speak of a desirable effect – but what about other traits, such as extraversion? Sheldon et al. (1997) found

self-concept differentiation to positively and psychological authenticity to negatively correlate with the risk to suffer from depression or low self-esteem. Especially taking into account that job positions per se require performance on a long-term perspective, faking behaviour seems not to be too recommendable for all kinds of traits. Nevertheless adapting to different situational roles and the demands they bring along can not only be considered essential for several components of social life, but is as well a natural way of human behaviour (Ryan, 1995). Accordingly, political skill has been found to buffer negative affect (Zellers, Perrewé, Rossi, Tepper & Ferris, 2008) and negative effects of conflict (Harvey, Harris, Harris & Wheeler., 2007, Hochwarter et al., 2009; Hochwarter, Summers, Thompson, Perrewé & Ferris, 2010) and thus to foster psychological well-being. Yet, in how far positive or negative effects of tailored self-presentations on subjective well-being may emerge in the context of personnel selection remains a question for future research.

Finally, experts in Human Resource repeatedly emphasize problems resulting from the ongoing so called 'War for Talents', which addresses problems in finding and hiring qualified employees (Ritz & Thom, 2010). Staff is stated to be "the most valuable asset" a company can "own" (Kahlke & Schmidt, 2004, p.1). Despite the evident urge to discover eligible employees, a big majority of employers makes use of biographical methods of suitability diagnostics (e.g. job interviews) relying on intuition or savvy rather than scientifically sounded techniques (e.g. psychometric tests) (Schuler et al., 2007) when it comes to assessing applicants' traits. This harbors risks of being misled by tendencies of perception errors as well as not meeting up the applicable DIN standards (33430) requirements for personnel selection (Treier, 2009). As already mentioned, effects of social desirability bias are repeatedly criticized by employers and invoked as a reason to not use them in personnel selection (Schuler, 2006). Personality tests as standardized measures do not only provide a valid, objective and economic way of selecting employees, they meet up with all kinds of psychometric criteria, plus, they measure relevant work-related constructs. At first glance, they may be distorted by social desirability biases – but those biases become less relevant if they reflect a skill that enables participants to present themselves in the required way. Just because participants have a reason to respond and act in a socially desired way, it does not mean they are all able to do so – and those who are, obviously even show better performance in an according achievement task.

Following the general benefits of psychometric tests and this study's results, their application in the process of personnel selection appears most recommendable, that is, in combination with other measures. Since social abilities once more turned out to be relevant for job-related contexts, training of employees' interpersonal skills, such as social astuteness or interpersonal influence style, should be further promoted. Moreover, systematically analyzing requirements and clearly defining the traits of matter may be a way to make sure the applicants selected really provide the desired qualities – or other qualities, which enable them to perform accordingly. If astuteness should in part really be sensitive to priming effects, a concise de-

mand profile would also help candidates to activate the appropriate concepts, goals and associated competences – as already part of their repertoire and thus not endangering authenticity. Moreover exploring the construct of political skill more closely may be promising, considering e.g. its effect on incremental validity regarding other methods of suitability diagnostics.

Whereas to our knowledge this study is the first to examine effects of social effectiveness (Ferris et al., 2002) on actual task performance, the findings reported here need to be replicated, and the role of other facets of political skill might be analyzed more in detail. In addition, it would be interesting to explore whether other traits besides conscientiousness, e.g. creativity, can be triggered on levels of actual behavior. Since there are only few studies about how stable vs. malleable the construct of political skill and its facets are (cf. Ferris et al., 2012), another question of relevance lays in the stability of the construct of political skill.

During the entire process of evaluating applicants and potential future employees, avoiding the mentioned adverse consequences and therefore preserving the individual's well-being needs to be the major priority. We hope the presented findings to contribute to this goal and lead to a win-win-situation on both sides – employer and employee.

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