

# Does the Use of Personality Inventory Cause Bias on Assessment Center Results Because of Social Desirability?

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# Introduction

- According to the guidelines, in an assessment center (AC) using multiple assessment techniques such as tests, interviews, personality inventories, and simulations is a must.
  - Although the overall judgments about employee behavior should be built on the results obtained from job specific simulations, we can use self-report tools such as personality inventories in ACs.

(International Task Force on Assessment Center, 2009)

# Introduction

- Research shows that self-report personality inventories are affected by one's social desirable responses (Morgeson et al., 2007; Goffin & Christiansen, 2003; Pauls & Stemmler, 2003).
  - Thus, when such inventories are involved in ACs, the question whether there is any possibility of self-report bias caused by social desirability affecting the AC results arises.

# Social Desirability

- Socially desirable responding is typically defined as the tendency to give positive self-descriptions that match with current social norms and standards (Paulhus, 2002).

# Social Desirability

- According to Paulhus' earlier work (1984) socially desirable responding can be explained by a two-factor model:
  - **Self-Deceptive Enhancement (SDE)** is an honest but biased personality trait, stable across situations, associated with self-esteem and defensive mechanisms.
  - **Impression Management (IM)** which is a deliberate over and under-reporting which varies by situation, associated with lie scales.
    - The IM items were developed involving overt behaviors (e.g. I never swear), and any distortion was assumed to be a conscious lie.

# Social Desirability

- Paulhus (1984) recommended that the effects of IM on self-reports should be controlled, whereas SDE should not be controlled.
  - However, further research showed that not only SDE but also IM was more than just a “response style”, that is, the tendency to bias one’s responses on questionnaires (Pauls & Stemmler, 2003).
  - Thus, whether socially desirable responding represents «faking» or is a non-deliberate consequence of a personality trait, the meaning of self-report tools may be biased.

# Research Goals

- We seek to reveal whether the use of self-report inventories impacts the results of an AC. Accordingly, we frame our study hypotheses as below:

**Hypothesis 1.** There is no significant relationship between participants' social desirability tendencies and AC results which are solely based on job specific simulations.

**Hypothesis 2.** There is a significant relationship between participants' social desirability tendencies and AC results which are evaluated together with self-report inventory.

Method



# Participants

- We conducted our research on the employees (N = 213) who were candidates for managerial positions in a retail company operating in Turkey.
  - Demographics
    - 68% male
    - 100% bachelor graduate
    - Mean age 27.1

- The AC
  - 3 different exercises were used: Group Discussion, Analysis Exercise, and Role Play. Personality inventory was also used for the purpose of research.
  - Each participant was assessed by two highly-qualified and trained external assessors throughout the exercises.
  - Eight competencies which were identified based on the job analysis carried out for retail manager position were assessed. Each competency was assessed in two different simulations by different assessors.
    - Commercial Awareness, Problem Analysis, Result Orientation, Customer Orientation, Influence & Persuasion, Planning & Organization, Managerial Skills, Continuous Learning

- Self-Report Inventory

- In order to assess the eight criteria used in the AC, we utilized a self-report measure developed by Assessment Systems -a leading assessment company in Turkey.
- The scale consists of 60 items to which participants respond using a 5-point Likert scale (5=strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree).
  - Cronbach's Alpha values for all the multi-item constructs were also calculated and were found to be above .70.
  - The findings from exploratory factor analyses conducted in this research confirmed the factorial structure and dimensionality of the scale.

- **Impression Management Scale**
  - The scale consists of 5 items to which participants respond using a 5-point Likert scale (5=strongly agree, 1=strongly disagree).
    - Cronbach's Alpha value for the scale was above .70.

# Procedure

- During the wash-up session the assessors discussed the results of the participants and decided on two overall assessment results for each criteria.
  - The first one was solely based on the results that were obtained from the simulation exercises.
  - The second one based on both on the results that were obtained from the simulation exercises and the results obtained from the self-report inventory.

Results

# Results

- To test the relationship between AC results which were solely based on simulation exercises and social desirability, we conducted correlation analyses.

It is revealed that when AC results are taken into account separately from inventory results, they were not affected by self-promotion efforts of participants.

Hypothesis #1 Accepted

	r	p
Commercial Awareness	.01	>.05
Problem Analysis	-.02	>.05
Result Orientation	-.01	>.05
Customer Orientation	.04	>.05
Influence & Persuasion	.02	>.05
Planning & Organization	.01	>.05
Managerial Skills	-.01	>.05
Continuous Learning	.04	>.05

# Results

- Another correlation analyses was conducted to test whether the self-report inventory results were affected from social desirability.

The results showed that 5 dimensions of the inventory were correlated with the social desirability scale.

	r	p
Commercial Awareness	.04	>.05
Problem Analysis	.22	<.01
Result Orientation	.22	<.01
Customer Orientation	.21	<.01
Influence & Persuasion	.22	<.01
Planning & Organization	.04	>.05
Managerial Skills	.09	>.05
Continuous Learning	.24	<.01



# Results

- Finally another correlation analyses was conducted using the AC results based on both simulation exercises and self-report inventory results, and social desirability.

AC results especially for the criteria which were affected by social desirable responses in the inventory were also affected by the social- desirability.

Hypothesis #2 Partially accepted

	r	p
Commercial Awareness	.04	>.05
Problem Analysis	.19	<.01
Result Orientation	.18	<.01
Customer Orientation	.22	<.01
Influence & Persuasion	.20	<.01
Planning & Organization	.04	>.05
Managerial Skills	.04	>.05
Continuous Learning	.23	<.01

Conclusion

# Conclusion

- This study showed that practitioners should be careful when they incorporate inventories that are self-evaluated by AC participants.
  - Findings revealed that when results of AC were evaluated separately from self-report competencies, social-desirability bias was not associated with the competencies measured in AC.
  - However, when the results of AC were evaluated together with the self-report inventory, results especially for the competencies which were affected by social desirable responses in the inventory were also affected by the social-desirability.

# Suggestion

- An advisable recommendation would be to not to integrate self-report inventory results to overall AC results. AC results should be solely based on the results obtained from simulation exercises.
  - If any self-report inventory is used in the process, its results might be employed only in the feedback session in order to be helpful for increasing participant's awareness by showing him the gap between the observed ratings and his own evaluations.

Thank you.

