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## **Assessing the Impact of Faking on Job Performance and Counter-Productive Job Behaviors**

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Faking on pre-employment personality inventories is not a problem, according to several researchers, and is a positive indicator of performance for many jobs, according to others, in part because the ability to fake suggests social skills that are functional to job performance. Data from nearly 150 customer service/sales agents refute both notions, and in addition show that faking is negatively related to customer service skills and positively related to counter-productive behavior on the job.

The renaissance of interest in pre-employment personality testing has brought with it a renewed concern about the susceptibility of such tests to intentional response distortion, or faking. Numerous researchers have shown that test-takers can manipulate their responses to present a socially- or job-desirable view of themselves when instructed to do so (Dunnette, McCartney, Carlson & Kirchner, 1962; Furnham & Craig, 1987; Kluger & Colella, 1993). Other studies have shown that socially desirable responding actually occurs in realistic employment settings (Barrick & Mount, 1996; Hough, 1995, 1996; Hunt, Hansen & Paajanen, 1996; Rosse, Stecher, Miller & Levin, 1998). This finding has led to the question of how faking affects hiring decisions that are based on personality inventory scores, and the related question of what, if anything, should be done to control faking.

One set of thinking on these questions has been that faking does not attenuate the criterion-related validity of personality inventories and is thus a “red

herring” (Ones, Viswesvaran & Reiss, 1996).. The conclusion that faking does not attenuate criterion-related validity was originally reached by Hough and her associates (Hough, Eaton, Dunnette, Kamp & McCloy, 1990) in a large-scale study of military recruits. Their conclusion has more recently been supported by a meta-analysis conducted by Ones and her colleagues, who found that criterion-related validities were not significantly affected by the inclusion of various measures of socially desirable responding.

Others have argued that the conclusion that faking is irrelevant is not justified by these data. One criticism is that Ones et al. included a heterogeneous set of social desirability measures in their analyses, many of which don't actually measure intentional response distortion. Others have noted that faking can alter the factor structure of personality inventories, which should in turn affect both construct and criterion-related validity. Still other researchers have pointed out that faking may affect which job applicants are hired, even if

it does not affect criterion-related validity coefficients (Douglas, McDaniel & Snell, 1996; Rosse, Stecher, Miller & Levin, 1998; Zickar, Rosse & Levin, 1996).

We believe that a core issue in this debate concerns the consequences of faking, particularly if applicants with high faking scores are disproportionately hired. Many questions concerning the consequences of faking for subsequent job performance remain unanswered. One perspective is that response distortion—even that which is intentional—may be functional because it reflects individuals' awareness of and facility regarding others' social expectations (Hogan, Hogan & Roberts, 1996). Before one can project oneself in a desirable light, one first needs to be able to assess the kinds of behaviors that are socially acceptable (or desirable for a particular job). According to this hypothesis, people who score higher on faking scales should also be more adept at perceiving and responding to social cues, thus making them more successful in jobs requiring interpersonal skills and customer service.

By contrast, our first hypothesis proposes that applicants who intentionally distort their responses will be less effective performers. The rationale for this hypothesis is that response distortion should reduce the construct validity of the personality inventory. If the personality inventory was chosen to measure job-related characteristics, faking adds variance that is not construct-relevant, and likely not job-relevant. For example, Zickar et al.'s (1996) Monte Carlo analysis showed that test takers with higher faking scores also had lower true scores on the traits being measured. (Importantly, this hypothesis is based on a definition of faking that involves intentional distortion of responses and not simply impression management; see Levin, 1995; Rosse et al., 1998.)

This effect is compounded if faking is more extensive among less qualified applicants. Douglas et al. (1996) suggest that this is likely to be the case, since less qualified applicants have the most to gain by faking their answers, and Levin (1995)

indicated that as the selection ratio becomes smaller, larger magnitudes of faking are rewarded more (approaching a step function). If a disproportionate number of applicants who are hired have engaged in substantial faking (Rosse et al., 1998; Zickar et al., 1996), the average level of competence should be lower than in a comparable sample of applicants who have provided accurate answers.

Our second hypothesis states that applicants who fake their scores are more likely to engage in dishonest and counter-productive behavior after being hired. Our rationale is that most applicants engage in a limited amount of response distortion driven by impression management. However, a smaller number of applicants are likely to engage in heightened response distortion that exceeds conventional, situationally-induced impression management (Levin, 1995). We hypothesize that applicants willing to engage in more extreme forms of response distortion will also be also likely to engage in dishonest and counter-productive behavior after being hired.

## Method

### Sample

The study was conducted with reservation agents at a major resort's inbound call center. The study consists of two separate samples, studied a year apart. The first sample was part of a concurrent validation study, and included approximately 83 incumbent agents. Due to the seasonal nature of the work, there is extremely high turnover of employees, so that most of the sample had been hired shortly before the data were collected. The second sample was part of a follow-up study and consisted of approximately 65 applicants who had been hired without regard to their scores on the personality inventory.

Measures

The PDI Employment Inventory-CS is a 196-item version of the Employment Inventory that is designed to measure Customer Service and Sales orientation. Respondents completed the inventory using an optically scanned answer sheet that was sent to Personnel Decisions International for scoring; scores were returned directly to the

researchers and were not used to make hiring decisions. According to the test manual, the Employment Inventory has acceptable reliability ( $\alpha = .73$ ; test-retest = .86), and has been validated in numerous studies (Paajanen, Hansen, & McLellan, 1993; Paajanen & Hansen, 1998). Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Mean (SD)		Correlations		
	Sample 1	Sample 2	EI-CS	EI-Sales	Frankness
EI-CS	57.1 (9.0)	63.8 (9.2)	--	.44*	-.36*
EI-Sales	80.9 (17.0)	95.1 (14.6)	.20*	--	-.35*
EI-Frankness	8.1 (1.5)	6.0 (1.8)	.01	-.27*	--

Notes: N for sample = 83; N for sample 2 = 65. Correlations below the diagonal are for sample 1, those above the diagonal correspond to sample 2.

The version of the EI-CS used for this study also included an 11-item Frankness scale designed to measure intentional distortion in a socially- or job-desirable direction. This scale is scored so that higher scores indicate *less* faking. However, to simplify interpretation, the scale was reverse-scored and referred to as the “faking scale” for all hypothesis tests.

Job performance was assessed by supervisors, using a specially designed appraisal form that was developed and used exclusively for research purposes. (Supervisors were not aware of subjects’ personality or faking scores at the time they rated subjects’ job performance.) Supervisors were asked to rate specific job behaviors that were chosen on the basis of both an extensive job analysis and theoretical interest. Selected behavior items were then used to create two scales used to test the competing hypotheses about the performance consequences of faking. A *Positive Behaviors* scale was formed of seven items reflecting awareness of and conformance to others’ social expectations ( $\alpha = .87$ ). Sample items include responding to customers with warmth, listening carefully to customers, and questioning

customers to determine their needs. A *Negative Behaviors* scale was formed of 8 items reflecting such counter-productive behavior as lying about mistakes, exaggerating to customers, stealing sales from other agents, and making promises to customers that can’t be met ( $\alpha = .87$ ). The complete set of items is shown in the Appendix.

Results

Our first hypothesis was that faking scores would be negatively related to the positive behavior scale. This hypothesis was supported with the first year data ( $r = -.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Faking scores were particularly strongly related to “Listen carefully and use customer’s response to sell items customer really needs” ( $r = -.26$ ), “Suggest best product for customer’s needs” ( $r = -.21$ ), and “Questions customer to determine their needs” ( $r = -.21$ ). Faking scores were also negatively related to the positive behavior scale in year two, but the correlation was not significant ( $r = -.14$ ). Therefore this hypothesis received mixed support.

Our second hypothesis was that faking would be associated with negative behavior on the job. Looking first at the first year of data, test takers with higher faking scores were subsequently rated higher on the scale measure of negative behaviors ( $r = .22$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Particularly strong correlations were found between faking scores and ratings for “Making promises to customers that can’t be met” ( $r = .34$ ) and “Exaggerate or lie to customers” ( $r = .31$ ). For the second year of data, the correlation between faking and the negative behavior scale was non-significant. Thus this hypothesis also received mixed support.

### Discussion

This study sought to determine the performance consequences of faking behavior on pre-employment personality inventories. Contrary to the suggestion made by Hogan et al. (1996), we found no evidence that employees with higher faking scores performed more effectively, even on a customer service/sales job that requires higher levels of interpersonal sensitivity and “social intelligence.” Instead our data suggest that faking is inversely related to customer service skills and positively related to counter-productive behaviors on the job. These results suggest that employees with higher faking scores are not inherently more socially astute when it comes to working with customers. In fact, they are likely to continue a pattern of misrepresentation and lying once on the job.

Two limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting these results. First, it should be noted that the correlations between faking and subsequent behaviors were modest in magnitude. This should not be too surprising, since the measure of faking is intended to act as a control variable (particularly for more extreme cases of misrepresentation), not as a direct behavioral predictor. Moreover, they are quite sufficient to call into question the alternative hypothesis that faking represents a job-relevant skill.

The other limitation is that the results from the second year of data did not fully replicate the findings from the first year’s data, particularly with regard to negative outcomes of faking. The employing organization reported no significant changes in recruiting practices and felt that the two samples were generally similar demographically. Inspection of Table 1 means shows that the second sample had generally higher (more positive) EI scores, and also had lower Frankness scores (indicating higher faking). Moreover, faking scores were more highly correlated with the substantive scales among applicants than among incumbents. This pattern of results is consistent with other studies that have compared applicants’ and incumbents’ personality inventory and faking scores (see Rosse et al., 1998). But inspection of the standard deviations does not suggest any accompanying restriction of range or a ceiling effect that might have artificially attenuated correlations in the second sample. We are left to conclude that the difference is most likely due to reduced statistical power in the second year’s sample.

It is also worth pointing out that these limitations are accompanied by some significant design strengths. Key among these is that the study was conducted in a field setting under realistic conditions. We also used a commercially available personality inventory, thereby further increasing external validity. Third, we used behaviorally-specific criterion measures that were based on a job analysis of the reservations agent position. Combined with the fact that supervisors knew they were not going to be used for employee reviews, we expect that our criterion measures had higher than typical validity.

Overall, we believe that these results, in conjunction with other studies of faking, show three distinct risks to employers posed by applicant faking. First, higher levels of faking occur among those who rise to the top of the applicant pool (Douglas et al., 1996; Levin, 1995; Rosse et al., 1998; Zickar et. al, 1996). Second, based on these results, faking can and does lead

employers to select lower performing employees. Third, faking can lead employers to select applicants who will demonstrate more negative behaviors after being hired. Faking, then, is not a red herring for employers making hiring decisions, but a great white shark.

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## Appendix

### **Positive Faking Behaviors Scale** ( $\alpha = .87$ )

Suggest add-on services or merchandise to customers  
Respond to all customers with warmth and willingness, regardless of first impression  
Respond "I don't know" to questions without trying to find answer  
Listen carefully and use customer's response to sell items customer really needs  
Question customers to determine their needs  
Obtain the active involvement & hold interest of customer while making sales presentation  
Suggest best product for customers' needs

### **Negative Faking Behaviors Scale** ( $\alpha = .87$ )

Use office phones to make personal, unauthorized calls  
Deny or lie about mistakes  
Exaggerate or lie to customers  
"Snake" or steal sales from other salespeople  
Make promises to customers that cannot be kept  
Hurry or pressure customers  
Use weak excuses to stay home from work  
Speak abruptly or impatiently to customers