

# Is Personality Related to Assessment Center Performance: That Depends on How Old You Are

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# Introduction

Previous studies have concluded that managerial ACs tend to result in task-based role congruency inferences that are largely orthogonal to personality traits


- Nonetheless, managerial AC performance dimensions such as Planning and Organizing and Willingness to Lead represent distinctly trait-like constructs
- It is therefore possible that the personality-AC relationship is being masked by the influence of moderator variables
- The overall goal of the current study was to examine the potential for candidates' **age** to moderate the personality-AC performance relationship

# Choosing relevant personality traits

- On the basis of past research, *Exhibition* and *Dominance* (see Table 1) were chosen as the most relevant variables for investigation due to: (a) their demonstrated relation with managerial performance and (b) the potential for their relation with AC performance to be moderated by age
- Further, behavioural representations of these traits were expected to be strongly conspicuousness in the AC
- The potential for age moderation of the personality-AC relationship was assessed separately for Exhibition and Dominance, respectively

# Masked personality-AC relation as an 'artifact' of AC judgements

- A strong research history suggests that age is a central feature used to define group membership and form expectancies about individuals within the selection/judgement context
- Within this area, expectancies regarding older workers have tended to be negative. As compared to younger workers, older workers are characterized as:
  - Less energetic/enthusiastic
  - Slower
  - Overall poorer performers

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- Individuals who are members of categories that have negative characteristics associated with them tend to be evaluated ***more positively*** in selection/judgement scenarios when they ‘violate’ those category-based expectancies
    - The above may be particularly true if the behaviours underlying the expectancy violations are consistent with behavioural requirements of the job in question (i.e., they display behaviours reflecting Exhibition and Dominance)
  - Therefore, expectancy violations among older AC candidates which are consistent with behavioural requirements of the job will result in more favorable evaluations compared to non-violators whether young or old

# Masked personality-AC relation as a product of aging/maturation

- The expression of certain managerially-relevant behaviours, such as dominance, may be qualitatively different when originating from an older versus younger individual
- This may be due to the fact that older candidates have developed more 'experiential currency' and operate from a richer base of knowledge than younger candidates
- Therefore, the nature of candidates' portrayal of inherently expressive, dominant behaviours may result in more positive evaluations relative to their younger counterparts

# Hypotheses

## Hypothesis 1:


Age will moderate the Exhibition-AC performance relationship such that the relation of Exhibition with AC performance criteria will be stronger for older individuals

## Hypothesis 2:

Age will moderate the Dominance-AC performance relationship such that the relation of Dominance with AC performance criteria will be stronger for older individuals

# Method

- Sample: 391 managers at a large forestry products organization
- Personality: Exhibition and Dominance scales from the Personality Research Form (see Table 1)
- AC exercises and raters: Trained assessors administered and scored the following AC exercises:
  - Leaderless group discussion
  - Situational interview
  - Past-behaviour interview
  - In-basket exercise
  - Role-playing exercise

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- AC performance criteria:
    - An overall consensus rating formed by raters' consensus on overall performance of each candidate
  
  - Procedure:
    - Personality measures and exercises were completed as part of an AC designed for the purpose of both managerial selection and development

# Results

- Hypothesis 1: *Supported*
  - Age was shown to moderate the relation between Exhibition and AC performance (see Table 2)
  - As predicted, the nature of the interaction was such that Exhibition predicted AC performance more strongly for older candidates (see Figure 1)
  
- Hypothesis 2: *Supported*
  - Age was shown to moderate the relation between Dominance and AC performance (see Table 3)
  - As predicted, the nature of the interaction was such that Dominance predicted AC performance more strongly for older candidates (see Figure 2)

# Table 2

Moderated Regression Analysis for Exhibition and Age on the AC Performance Criterion

Variable	OVERALL CONSENSUS RATING		
	R <sup>2</sup>	adjR <sup>2</sup>	<u>F</u>
Exhibition	.04	.04	18.05**
Age	.05	.04	15.83**
Exhibition X Age	.03	.02	5.43*
Overall R <sup>2</sup>	.12		
Overall Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		.10	
Overall <u>F</u>			13.46**

Note. N=371. R<sup>2</sup>= Change in R-squared due to adding variable to equation, adjR<sup>2</sup>=Change in adjusted R-squared due to adding variable to equation. F=F-ratio associated with increment in R-squared.

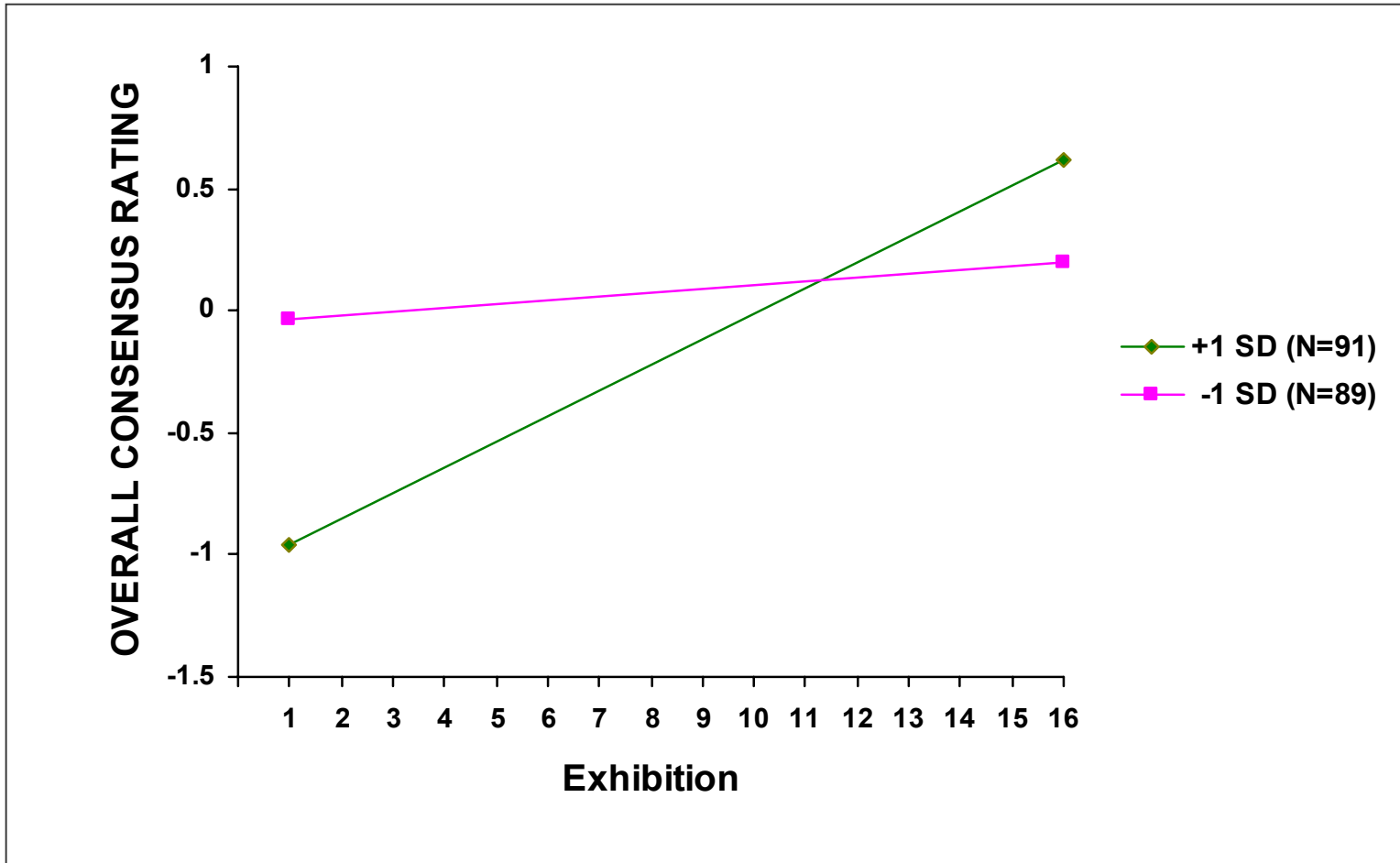
# Table 3

Moderated Regression Analysis for Dominance and Age on the AC Performance Criterion

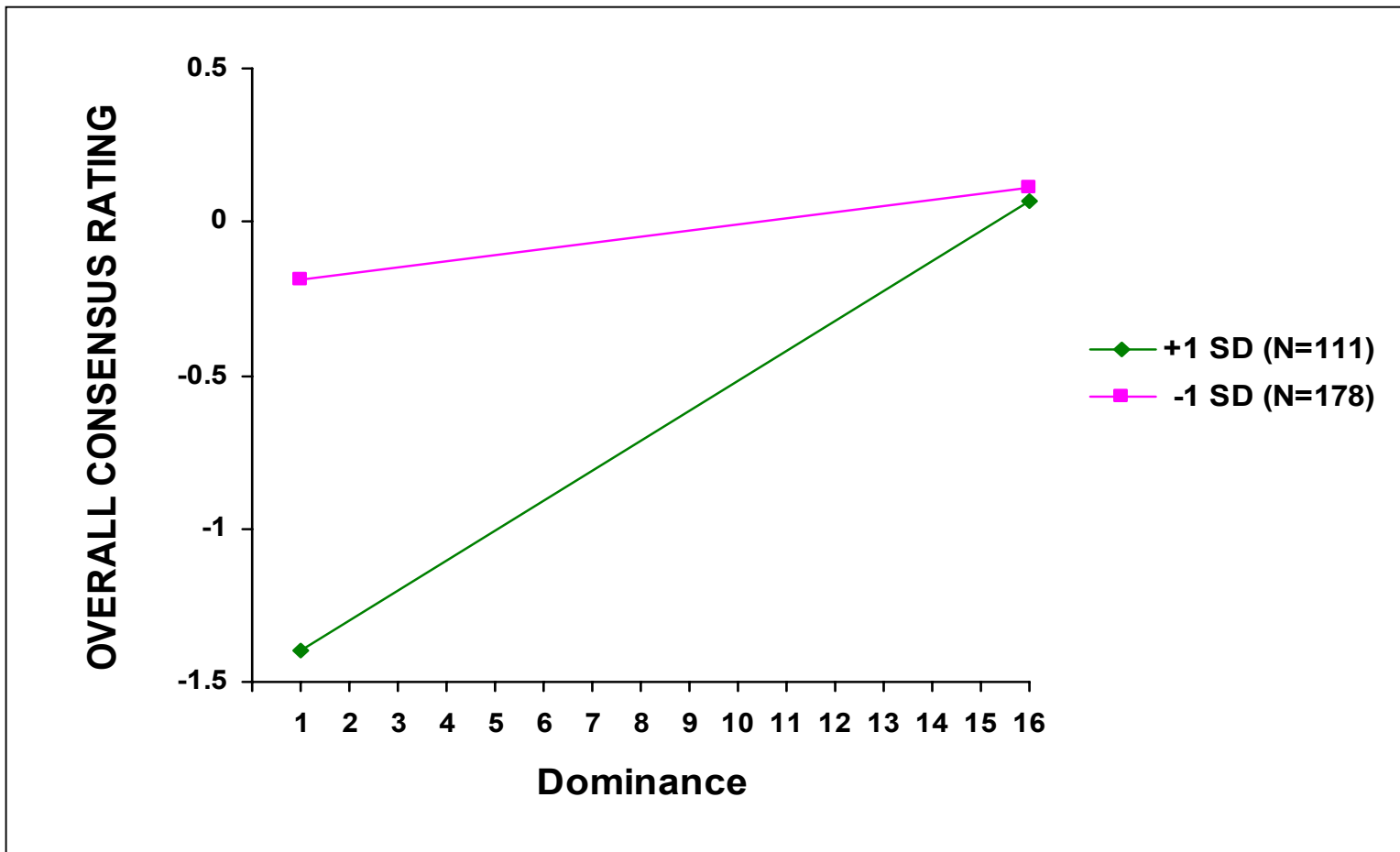
Variable	OVERALL CONSENSUS RATING		
	R <sup>2</sup>	adjR <sup>2</sup>	<u>F</u>
Dominance	.04	.03	13.98**
Age	.05	.04	18.42**
Dominance X Age	.04	.03	10.41**
Overall R <sup>2</sup>	.13		
Overall Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		.10	
Overall <u>F</u>			14.74**

Note. N=371. R<sup>2</sup>= Change in R-squared due to adding variable to equation, adjR<sup>2</sup>=Change in adjusted R-squared due to adding variable to equation. F=F-ratio associated with increment in R-squared.

# Figure 1



# Figure 2



# Discussion

- Managerially relevant personality traits of Dominance and Exhibition are related to AC performance for older managers, but not for younger managers
- Older managers low in Dominance and Exhibition received poorer AC performance ratings than younger managers with comparable personality scores.
- Consistent with both interpretations: expectancy violation and maturation effect on expression of traits.

# Implications

- AC used for selection purposes in conjunction with personality measures should examine potential moderator effects to increase understanding and potentially accuracy of predicting job performance.
- Differences in AC performance based on similar personality levels but differences in age, suggests age-related links at work
  - AC raters should be trained to understand and avoid these potential biases
- Personality testing may not be equally appropriate for selection across all age groups

# Table 1

PRF-E scale	Description of High Scorer	Defining Trait Adjectives
Exhibition	Wants to be the center of attention; enjoys having an audience; engages in behaviour which wins the notice of others; may enjoy being dramatic or witty	Colourful, entertaining, unusual, spellbinding, flashy, exhibitionistic, conspicuous, noticeable, expressive, ostentatious, demonstrative, showy
Dominance	Attempts to control environment, and to influence and direct other people. expresses opinions forcefully; enjoys the role of leader and may assume it spontaneously.	Governing, controlling, commanding, domineering, influential, persuasive, forceful, leading, directing, assertive, supervising.

Note. Descriptors were taken from Jackson (1984, p. 6).