The Effects of Presenting Strengths as Weaknesses in a Job Interview

Abstract

The aim of the present research is to explore how people respond when asked about their biggest weakness (e.g., during a job interview) and what are the effects of different response strategies on their evaluation. Using a qualitative survey, we identify response strategies used by participants as well as reasons for their choices. Then, we test how these strategies affect evaluations of various personality characteristics and whether these effects interact with credentials of a job candidate in a survey experiment. First, we show that common strategies are to present a positive characteristic in the guise of a weakness (i.e., to humblebrag), to simply present a weakness, or to present a weakness that is easy to overcome or not important. The experimental results suggest that although there is a negative influence of humblebragging on perceived sincerity, it positively affects perceived competence and flexibility, and it does not affect the hiring decision itself. This holds for candidates with better as well as worse credentials. The results suggests that different impression management strategies might be suitable depending on which characteristics are more important in a given situation.

Introduction

Virtually everyone wants to be viewed positively, regardless of whether it is objectively true or not. Common wisdom therefore dictates that one should refrain from mentioning any negative or unflattering information about oneself. However, sometimes situational circumstances force one to talk about own shortcomings, for example when one is asked about their own weaknesses during a job interview. What is then the correct course of action when an interviewer asks about the candidate's biggest weakness?

Some advice can be found in popular guidebooks offering tips for a successful job interview – most often, there is a recommendation to respond with a "weakness" that is in fact a strength in disguise (e.g., Gray, 2011; James, 2009), such as "*I am a perfectionist*" or "*I tend to work too much*". Other similar publications, however, warn against this approach (Innes, 2009) and recommend other kinds of responses instead – for example, responding with a weakness that is easy to overcome or one that is not particularly important for the job in question (McDonnell, 2005).

Nevertheless, no reliable evidence for the effectiveness of these recommendations, above personal experience, is presented. The evidence is lacking even though since at least from 1980s, a great amount of research effort has been focused on how people consciously or intuitively strive to make good impressions in organizational environment in general and during employee selection in particular (for a review, see Bolino et al., 2016). In the current study, we attempt to fill this knowledge gap; first, by identifying strategies used by potential job candidates when responding to the question about their biggest weakness, and then by evaluating how these strategies affect evaluation of the candidates.

Literature review

The motivation to use impression management is arguably especially high in situations when an appropriate impression can have important and lasting consequences – such as in employee selection and evaluation (Bolino et al., 2008, 2014; Waung et al., 2016). It is therefore understandable that almost all job applicants use impression management tactics to some degree in their interviews and cover letters (Ellis et al., 2002; Stevens & Kristof, 1995; Waung et al., 2016). Impression management tactics can take many forms: for example, they can be verbal or nonverbal, based on highlighting desirable or withholding undesirable information, focused primarily on self-promotion or on ingratiation (Godfrey et

al., 1986; Kacmar et al., 1992). Self-promotion is aimed at communicating attributes and qualities that one is supposed to possess, and includes tactics such as exemplification, entitlement, enhancement, and positive self-description (Ellis et al., 2002; Kacmar et al., 1992). On the other hand, tactics of ingratiation are meant to compliment others (e.g., through flattery) and to signal conformity with others' opinions. Thus, one can, for example, attempt to promote his or her confidence nonverbally by maintaining eye contact while talking with other, or verbally by describing an event during which he or she acted with confidence. Similarly, one can try to appear more likeable by nodding in agreement while the other one is talking, by directly complimenting the other, or by hiding one's disagreement with the other. These tactics are used to increase one's perceived competence, trustworthiness, likeability, and other desirable characteristics (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). The use of specific impression management tactics depends on many factors, such as the nature of a given situation, one's personality traits, and motivation (Bolino et al., 2008).

The success of the used impression management tactic in general depends on its fit to the given situation. Any impression management tactic could have a positive effect on one's image only if it is not recognized as such and is not perceived as inappropriate or insincere (Bolino et al., 2016; Roulin et al., 2015). For example, Stern and Westphal (2010) demonstrated that ingratiation tactics work best when they are not perceived as such. Similarly, people who promote their positive qualities and achievements too intensively risk that they will be perceived negatively as immodest or self-centered (Nguyen et al., 2008). A job interview is, however, a specific situation in this respect, because a relatively high level of self-promotion is tolerated or even expected during it (Lievens & Peeters, 2008) and there is evidence of self-promotion being highly effective in job interviews (Barrick et al., 2009). This suggest that taking the advice from the job interview guidebooks mentioned above and

answering a question about one's weakness with a clearly positive and desirable characteristic could be a good idea.

On the other hand, self-promotion directly following a question about one's weakness could make one look insincere even during a job interview, during which self-promotion is expected in general. This is in line with findings of recent studies of "humblebragging" (Sezer et al., 2018). In their work, Sezer, Gino, and Norton found that disguising a brag about an objectively positive quality as a complaint about something supposedly negative (e.g., "It is really tiresome to be so popular!") leads to lower liking and lower perceived sincerity.

Because the question about one's weaknesses occurs quite commonly in job interviews (Innes, 2009; McDonnell, 2005) and the advice to respond with what is essentially a humblebrag is ubiquitous as well (Gray, 2011; James, 2009), the findings of Sezer et al. (2018), may have important practical implications: it seems that any positive impressions of self-promoting answer may be offset by the negative impression of insincerity and lowered likeability. On the other hand, the desirability of different personality characteristics depends on the job in question – for example, too high levels of conscientiousness and sincerity might actually have a negative impact on performance in leadership or marketing and sales positions (Gunia & Levine, 2019; Wihler et al., 2017). Therefore, there might be positions for which humblebragging is an effective impression management tactic as long as the characteristics and skills self-promoted by the humblebrag are more important for the given job than sincerity.

The current research

Firstly, in Study 1, we explore how participants respond to the question about their weakness in the context of a job interview. As most of the existing research on humblebragging was conducted with participants from the USA, it is not clear whether

participants from Europe will even use humblebragging in nonnegligible percentage of cases – especially considering findings that impression management tactics in job interviews are used much more often by US university students and less frequently by European university students (Sandal et al., 2014). Furthermore, we are interested if there are other types of responses, beside stating an actual weakness, that participants will provide. Because this part is purely exploratory, we do not formulate any hypothesis related to the prevalence of humblebragging. However, we expect that it will be used in a substantial proportion of cases, even though not as often as in the USA. Secondly, we explore reasons that lead our participants to use different types of responses in Study 1. Based on the previous research on humblebragging (Sezer et al., 2018) as well as the practical recommendations (Gray, 2011; James, 2009), we hypothesize that (H1): those who choose to humblebrag would do so in order to increase their chances to get hired.

Based on the results of the first study, in Study 2 we will test how humblebragging during a job interview affects the evaluation of suitability of the candidate for the job in question. Previous research demonstrated that humblebraggers are perceived more negatively than both regular braggers and modest individuals (Grant et al., 2018) and humblebragging is considered misguided impression management technique that usually backfires (Steinmetz et al., 2017). Therefore, we hypothesize that (H2): humblebraggers will be perceived as less suitable for the job than candidates using different types of responses to the question about their weaknesses. In addition, we ask participants to evaluate candidates on a broad spectrum of characteristics to gain a more complex understanding of the influence of humblebragging on candidates' evaluation. Participants will evaluate candidates on characteristics explored in previous studies (such as sincerity, competence, and likeability), but also on characteristics that were not previously studied (such as intelligence, flexibility, dependability, or trustworthiness).

Lastly, we aim to explore the possible interaction between candidates' credentials and a response to the question about their weakness – specifically, based on previous studies of effects of mistakes on likeability of more and less competent agents (Helmreich et al., 1970), we hypothesize (H3): that when a candidate with better credentials (i.e., education and previous experience) admits a weakness, he will be evaluated more positively than when he humblebrags. On the other hand, when a candidate with worse credentials admits a weakness, he will be evaluated the same or even less positively than when he humblebrags.

Study 1

In Study 1, we explored how participants from our subject pool respond to the question about their weaknesses and flaws during a mock job interview. [1]

Participants

One hundred and seventeen participants (80 female, 37 male; 92 undergraduate marketing and business administration students from a large Czech university, 25 students in other fields, mostly humanities; Med_{age} = 21 years) took part in Study 1 in exchange for a partial course credit (in 87 cases) or without any compensation (in 30 cases). The study was conducted using an online survey platform and participants were invited via e-mail sent to our research laboratory subject pool.

Procedure and materials

First, we asked participants to imagine that they are in a job interview and that they have to answer the question: "What is your biggest weakness or flaw?". After they provided

[1] In a working paper version of their published study, Sezer et al. (2015) similarly explored humblebragging in the context of a job interview. Almost 80% of participants answered the question about their weakness by stating a characteristic that was in fact a strength. About two thirds of these humblebraggers responded in such way because they believed it will improve their chances of being hired. However, this study is not presented in the final published version of their article (Sezer et al., 2018).

an answer, we asked them for the reasons why they answered in such way. Afterward, we collected additional demographic information (age, gender, field of study and whether they have been in any job interview before).

Analysis

Both answers were open-ended and were subsequently coded by one of the authors (MV) and two independent undergraduate psychology students who were blind to the aims of the study. Eighteen participants failed to respond to the first question as instructed and were excluded from further analyses. Instead of writing down a direct, specific answer to the question, these participants either commented on the question itself or described their thought processes related to answering it.[2]

The remaining responses from 99 participants were coded as mentioning a characteristic that was in fact positive (i.e., a humblebrag, e.g., "*I am a workaholic"*) or a real weakness (e.g. "*Low self-confidence and tendency to procrastinate*"). Moreover, we distinguished two additional subcategories: an attenuated humblebrag and an attenuated weakness. The former is a combination of a positive and negative characteristic(s) in one reply, for example: "*I am a perfectionist and I am not very good at presenting*". An attenuated weakness is a weakness presented in a way that signals it is not too serious or that one is already working on overcoming it. For example, when one responds: "*I am not very good at presenting, but I am taking a course to improve*".

The reasons why participants responded as they did when asked about their weaknesses were coded by the same three coders either as honest (e.g., "*It is true*") or as strategic (e.g., "*I wanted to make a good impression*"). Every provided reason that mentioned

[2] Four out of 18 wrote that they would not answer such question during a job interview, either because they find it inappropriate or because they feel they do not have any weaknesses. Three participants specifically mentioned the humblebragging response tactic. Only one respondent stated that he would answer truthfully, the rest wrote that they would try balancing being honest on the one hand and making a good impression on the other, without giving any specifics.

impression management was coded as strategic, even if one tried to communicate one's sincerity by answering with a true weakness. For both questions, the coders were provided with short descriptions and examples of all categories of responses, prepared by one of the authors (MV).

Results

Based on agreement of ratings from all three coders, 91 out of 99 replies to the question about weakness were categorized in one of the four categories described above. The remaining eight replies could not be clearly assigned to any category – in these cases participants stated neither a positive characteristic nor a weakness. For example: "*When I do work that I consider pointless, I quickly lose motivation*", "*I do not forgive easily*", or "*I need good atmosphere at work"*. These responses were therefore left uncategorized and were excluded from further analyses.

Out of 91 participants, 26 humblebragged in their responses and 20 stated a positive characteristic in combination with a negative one. Twenty-two participants mentioned only true weaknesses in their responses and twenty-three participants attempted to attenuate their weaknesses by making them look less serious, limiting or permanent. The relative proportions of answer categories stay virtually the same even if only responses from the 84 participants who have experienced a job interview are considered. The same holds when responses from males and females are analyzed separately.

The answers to the second question were judged by all coders clearly as an honest or strategic response in 93 out of 98 cases[3]. The disagreements on the remaining five cases were resolved through a discussion among coders after clarification of the categorization criteria.

[3] One participant failed to provide any answer to the second question, therefore only 98 responses were categorized.

Overall, 43 reasons were categorized to one of the four categories were judged as honest and 47 as strategic (see Table 1). There was a significant relationship between the category of response and provided reasons, $\chi^2(1) = 9.55$, $p = 0.023$ – humblebrags were three times more likely to be motivated by strategic consideration than by honesty. On the other hand, reasons for answering with true weakness were two times more likely to be honest than strategic. For both attenuated categories, honest and strategic reasons were approximately equally likely.

Table 1. Frequencies of response types in Study 1.

Response type		Reason		Total
		honest	strategic	
humblebrag	n	6	19	25
	%	14%	40%	28%
attenuated humblebrag	n	10	10	20
	%	23%	21%	22%
true weakness	n	15	7	22
	%	35%	15%	24%
attenuated weakness	n	12	11	23
	%	28%	23%	26%
Total		43	47	90

Discussion

Results of Study 1 show that a substantial proportion of our participants would respond with a humblebrag when asked about their weaknesses during a job interview. On the other hand, a half of our sample would respond by mentioning a true weakness, with or without its attenuation. This finding is in line with a previous cross-cultural study showing that European university students are less likely to use self-presentation impression management tactics than students in the USA (Sandal et al., 2014).

Supporting our first hypothesis, humblebrags were in fact motivated mainly by strategic reasons, which means that participants believed they will increase their chances of getting hired by humblebragging. A relatively large proportion of true weakness responses motivated by strategic reasons (32%) may seem surprising at first glance. However, "strategic" in this context means that participants explained that they either tried to signal

sincerity and honesty by their truthful response or chose such weaknesses that would not jeopardize their chances.

Study 2

In the second study, we tested the effects of selected response strategies identified in Study 1. Namely, we were interested in whether humblebragging, admitting a true weakness, or replying with an attenuated weakness influences the perceived suitability of a candidate for a given work position. We did not explore the effect of an attenuated humblebrag, because it represents a too heterogeneous category: the relative job-related importance of stated positive and negative characteristic as well as their order (Anderson, 1965) might influence the effect. Furthermore, we were not interested solely in the overall effect, but also wanted to know whether specific characteristics of candidates, such as sincerity, competence, or likeability, are affected differently by different response strategies.

We also hypothesized that credentials of a candidate would interact with the effect of the response strategies: for example, a candidate with better credentials could afford to mention a real weakness and remain being perceived positively. On the other hand, in case of a candidate with worse credentials, a mention of a weakness could deepen the negative impression.

Participants

One hundred and thirty-five marketing and journalism undergraduate students from a large Czech university (Med_{age} = 21 years; 85 female, 48 male, 2 did not state their gender) took part in Study 2 in exchange for a partial course credit. The study was conducted using the Qualtrics survey platform and participants were invited via e-mail sent to students enrolled in introductory Psychology courses.

Procedure and materials

First, we asked participants to read a short description of a company and requirements for a marketing specialist position which the company is currently trying to fill. Afterward, participants were asked to play a role of an HR manager and evaluate three candidates for the job. For each candidate, information about education, previous work experience, creativity test results, English language proficiency, communication skills, driving license, one additional observation regarding the candidate, and an answer to the question "What is your biggest weakness?" were provided. After reading the information, participants evaluated each candidate based on how suitable for the position, competent, intelligent, dependable, likeable, trustworthy, sincere, flexible and similar to the participant the candidate was, using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). All nine evaluated characteristics were presented in a random order for each candidate and all candidates' descriptions and evaluations were presented on a single screen. Finally, participants answered several demographic questions (regarding their age, gender, and previous experience either with being interviewed for a job position or with conducting job interviews).

Participants were randomly divided into two groups: in the "better credentials" group, all three evaluated candidates had degrees from prestigious European universities and several years of relevant work experience. In the "worse credentials" group, the candidates had degrees from dubious higher education institutions and little to no relevant experience. Each of the three evaluated candidates was assigned one type of response to the question about their biggest weakness: humblebrag, true weakness, or attenuated weakness. Every participant was presented with each type of response exactly once. Each response type had two possible wordings, one of which was chosen at random selected by the authors from the actual answers provided in Study 1. The answers were selected to be clear examples of their respective types and not to be directly related to any explicit job requirement stated in the job

description. For the humblebrag, the response was either "*My permanent lack of satisfaction with the outcomes and perfectionism*" or "*My weakness is that I am too enthusiastic about work, I like to take my work home with me*". The true weakness response was either "*My weakness is that I am too indecisive and I postpone unpleasant duties until it is almost too late*" or "*Sometimes I unnecessarily stress about things that would later show to be unimportant*". One version of the attenuated weakness was "*My weakness is postponing unpleasant tasks and responsibilities. Of course, I am trying to work on it*" and the other was "*I am rather choleric and sometimes easily irritated. I do work on improving self-discipline and self-control*". All other characteristics in candidates' descriptions were identical for all candidates, except for the additional observation, which was different for each candidate (i.e., "*neat appearance*", "*pleasant demeanor*", "*replies promptly to inquiries*") to make them more distinct from each other.

Analysis

Evaluations of candidates' characteristics were first analyzed using network analysis (Costantini et al., 2015). Network analysis is a recent approach to analysis of personality data based on visualization of associations between measured variables. The outcome of the analysis is a graph consisting of nodes, representing variables, and links between nodes, representing associations, their sign and strength. While more traditional approaches, such as factor analysis, are focused on identifying the common latent elements shared among the measured variables, network analysis simply presents existing relations among them. It allows for a visual identification of central constructs, that is variables related to many others, clusters of similar variables, as well as variables on the edges, that are not strongly related to many others. Partial correlations are especially suitable for description of the relations, because they can be interpreted as measures of unique relationships between two variables,

while controlling for intercorrelations with the remaining variables. To make the resulting network more easily readable, it is recommended to use a LASSO penalty during the network construction, which will reduce weaker partial correlations to zero (Costantini et al., 2015).

A linear mixed effect model with 3 (type of response) x 2 (quality of candidate) between-subject factors and participants as a within-subject factor was used for analysis of the effects of response type and its interaction with competence on all nine measured variables. The three response types were dummy-coded with true weakness as a reference category. The better and worse credentials was recoded to -0.5 and 0.5, respectively. The *b* coefficients for candidates' credentials can therefore be interpreted as the difference between averages of worse and better credentials groups.

Results

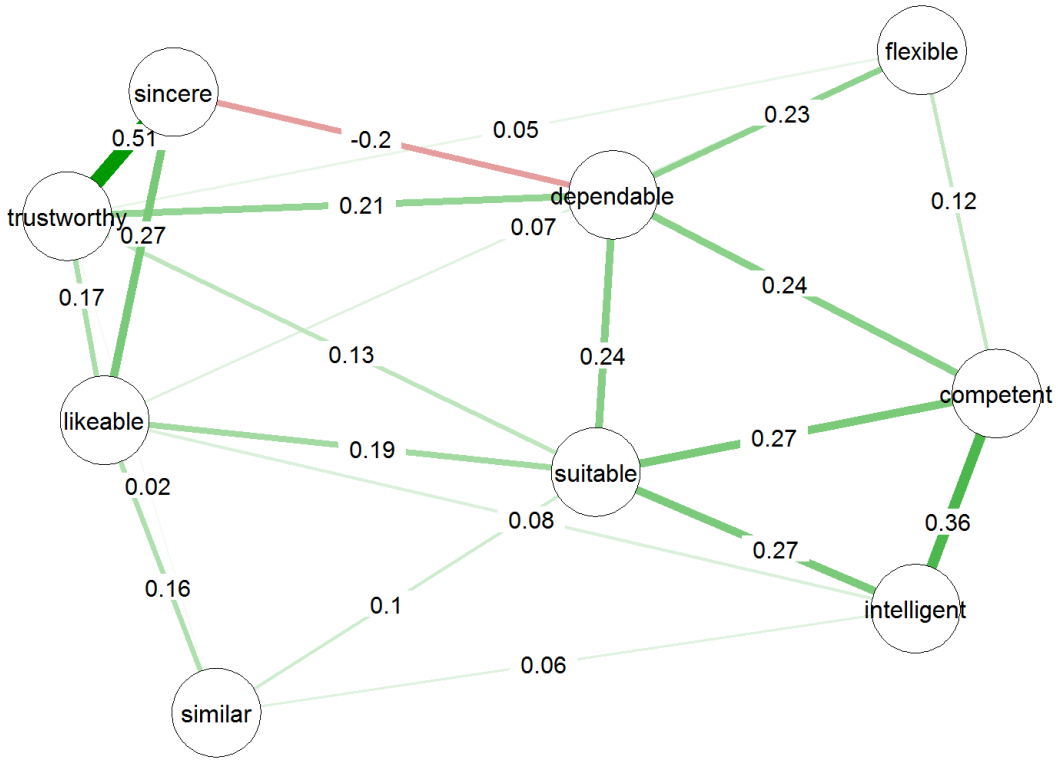
Five participants did not evaluate the candidates and were therefore excluded from the analysis. The remaining evaluations of nine characteristics of 390 job candidates by 130 participants were first analyzed using an adaptive LASSO network (Costantini, et al., 2015). The resulting network can be seen in Figure 1. Numbers on the links are values of partial correlations between the linked nodes, while controlling for intercorrelations with other variables.

Whether a candidate was evaluated as suitable for the given position is measured by the variable "suitable" located in the center of the network. The rating of suitability was most strongly related to evaluations of competence and intelligence, which themselves are strongly correlated. On the other side of the network, variables measuring candidate's sincerity and trustworthiness are located. We see that these two are relatively strongly related, however, there is only a weak relation between trustworthiness and suitability for the job, and no

relation between sincerity and suitability for the job whatsoever. Furthermore, sincerity is negatively related to dependability, despite a positive relation between trustworthiness and dependability. This configuration suggests that someone sincere, but not someone trustworthy, is likely to be perceived as less dependable. Moreover, because of the negative link between sincerity and dependability and a positive link between dependability and suitability for the job, someone sincere would be probably perceived as less suitable for the job as well.

The variable measuring likeability is related to sincerity, trustworthiness and suitability more than to competence or intelligence. Variables measuring flexibility and similarity to the participant are located farther away from the rest and connected only weakly to just a few other variables.

Figure 1. Network analysis of evaluated dimensions.



Note. Nodes represent evaluated characteristics, numbers represent partial correlation between linked variables. Adaptive LASSO network method was used for construction of the graph (Costantini et al., 2015).

Results from the linear mixed effect model analysis for all evaluated characteristics can be found in Table 2. Although all models also contained interactions of the candidate's credentials with each type of response, the interaction terms were non-significant in all cases and they are therefore not reported in the Table 2.

For evaluation of suitability for the given job, candidates with worse credentials were judged as less suitable. However, there was no significant difference in evaluations based on the type of response. For evaluation of intelligence, the results are virtually the same as for the suitability. For evaluation of competence, dependability and flexibility, candidates with worse credentials were again judged more negatively. Moreover, candidates who humblebragged were judged as more positively than those who admitted a true weakness.

For evaluation of sincerity, there was no significant difference between candidates with worse and better credentials. However, there was a pronounced negative effect of humblebragging on evaluation of sincerity when compared with a true weakness response.

For evaluation of trustworthiness, all three main effects were significant: candidates with worse credentials were perceived as less trustworthy and humblebraggers and surprisingly also those who responded with an attenuated weakness were perceived as less trustworthy than those who admitted a true weakness.

For evaluation of likeability, candidates with better credentials were perceived as more likeable, while those who humblebragged were perceived as less likeable.

Table 2. Estimated effects of quality of candidates and types of their responses on evaluated characteristics.

Evaluated characteristic	Candidate's credentials	Humblebrag (vs. true weakness)	Attenuated weakness (vs. true weakness)
	estimated *b* coefficient, [95% confidence interval]		
suitable	1.41, [0.98, 1.84] *t* (361.8) = 6.48, ***p* < .001**	0.24, [-0.03, 0.51] *t* (256.0) = 1.71, *p* = .09	-0.03, [-0.31, 0.24] *t* (256.0) = -0.24, *p* = .81
intelligent	0.83, [0.49, 1.17] *t* (277.4) = 4.79, ***p* < .001**	-0.12, [-0.30, 0.06] *t* (256.0) = -1.28, *p* = .20	-0.17, [-0.35, 0.01] *t* (256.0) = -1.87, *p* = .06
competent	1.00, [0.62, 1.38] *t* (328.3) = 5.19, ***p* < .001**	0.43, [0.20, 0.65] *t* (256.0) = 3.71, ***p* < .001**	0.01, [-0.22, 0.23] *t* (256.0) = 0.08, *p* = .93
dependable	1.07, [0.64, 1.50] *t* (345.6) = 4.88, ***p* < .001**	0.84, [0.58, 1.11] *t* (256.0) = 6.20, ***p* < .001**	0.03, [-0.23, 0.30] *t* (256.0) = 0.24, *p* = .81
flexible	0.71, [0.31, 1.12] *t* (310.1) = 3.48, ***p* < .001**	0.40, [0.17, 0.63] *t* (256.0) = 3.41, ***p* < .001**	-0.06, [-0.29, 0.17] *t* (256.0) = -0.54, *p* = .59
sincere	0.40, [-0.02, 0.81] *t* (366.0) = 1.87, *p* = .06	-1.69, [-1.96, -1.41] *t* (256.0) = -12.19, ***p* < .001**	-0.07, [-0.34, 0.20] *t* (256.0) = -0.53, *p* = .59
trustworthy	0.70, [0.28, 1.12] *t* (341.9) = 3.26, ***p* = .001**	-0.83, [-1.09, -0.57] *t* (256.0) = -6.33, ***p* < .001**	-0.30, [-0.56, -0.04] *t* (256.0) = -2.29, ***p* = .02**
likeable	0.73, [0.28, 1.18] *t* (327.0) = 3.17, ***p* = .002**	-0.85, [-1.12, -0.58] *t* (256.0) = -6.23, ***p* < .001**	-0.09, [-0.36, 0.18] *t* (256.0) = -0.65, *p* = .51
similar to the participant	0.52, [0.00, 1.03] *t* (359.0) = 1.96, *p* = .05	-0.79, [-1.12, -0.46] *t* (256.0) = -4.71, ***p* < .001**	-0.55, [-0.88, -0.23] t (256.0) = -3.30, **p = .001**

For evaluation of similarity to the participant, there was no significant difference between candidates with worse and better credentials. However, humblebraggers as well as those who responded with an attenuated weakness were perceived as less similar to the participants than those candidates who responded with a true weakness.

Discussion

Results of the network analysis suggest that sincerity and likeability, the characteristics negatively affected by humblebragging in the previous studies Sezer et al. (2018), were not very important for the judgment of suitability for the job of a marketing specialist when information allowing a more direct evaluation of competence and intelligence was available. Results of separate analyses of evaluated characteristics show a robust effect of candidate's credentials, namely his education and work experience, on almost all evaluated dimensions. In line with the previous study by Sezer et al. (2018), we also observed a negative effect of humblebragging on perceived sincerity, likeability, and trustworthiness. However, there were positive effects of humblebragging on competence, dependability, and flexibility. Possibly because of the mutual elimination of these opposing forces, humblebragging led to neither more, nor less positive overall evaluation of candidate's suitability for the job. Therefore, our second hypothesis was not supported.

The results also suggest that responding with an attenuated weakness is not very different from responding with a true weakness, at least for evaluation of sincerity and likeability, as well as all other characteristics for which no response tactic makes a difference. However, for some characteristics, such as trustworthiness or similarity, it seems that an attenuated weakness has a similar effect as humblebragging.

We found no evidence for our third hypothesis – that is an interaction between effects of response tactics and candidate's credentials. Therefore, it seems that all types of responses affect the perceived characteristics of all candidates in the same way, regardless of whether

they have outstanding or only subpar education and work experiences. This is in line with findings of a previous field study on effects of impression management tactics in a job interview (Gilmore & Ferris, 1989), in which no effect of candidate's credentials was observed as well. One possible cause might be that our participants were not able to compare candidates of different qualities and the lack of such contrast might have weaken the effect of the quality on evaluations in general.

General discussion and conclusions

Results of Study 1 suggest that although the prevalence of humblebragging was lower in the Czech sample than in studies using participants from the US, it is evident that responding to the question about one's weakness with a positive quality in disguise is not an exclusively American phenomenon. It therefore seems sensible to explore whether those who use the chosen response tactics strategically are correct in their beliefs that it will improve their chances of getting hired.

Although the previous studies of humblebragging suggested that presenting strengths when asked about weaknesses might be counterproductive, our results from Study 2 paint a more complex picture. Namely, the results of Study 2 suggest that when people evaluate job candidates based on a several pieces of information including the answer to the question about the biggest weakness, the negative effect of humblebragging on overall evaluation of candidate's suitability for the position does not necessarily emerge. However, we still observed the negative effect on perceived sincerity and related variables. On the other hand, humblebragging increased perceived competence, dependability, and flexibility. As different organizations value and different job positions require different personal characteristics, both response strategies could be effective in an appropriate context, based on whether competence or sincerity leads to a better perceived person-organization fit (Kristof, 1996).

Future studies might try to explore whether the effectiveness of humblebragging varies systematically with characteristics and demands of the job in question.

Nevertheless, the current study has several limitations that preclude us from drawing any definitive conclusions. Firstly, results of a single study always represent only a small amount of evidence, and so further direct and conceptual replications are always necessary before one can be reasonably confident in any observation about the world. Secondly, although we speak of "humblebragging" and "presenting a true weakness" throughout the text, in fact, we only used two specific examples of each response type in our study. Although we assume that our results would generalize to other examples of humblebragging and true weaknesses, without a random sampling of stimuli from a well-defined set, one could never be sure that it is so (Bahník & Vranka, 2017). Thirdly, we use only hypothetical scenarios presented in a written form and judged by students instead of real HR managers. That means that even if our results are replicable and even if they generalize to other responses, they still might have no clear relation to job interviews in the real world. On the other hand, there is evidence that both professionals in the field and non-expert participants in experiments are using similar mental models in a wild range of organizational decision-making problems, and thus laboratory results predict field results reasonably well (Herbst & Mas, 2015; Houdek, 2016; Mitchell, 2012).

Despite these limitations, our findings contribute to the search for a correct response to the question about weaknesses in a job interview and to the exploration of humblebragging as an impression management tactic in general. Providing a corrective view of the effects of humblebragging is especially important, since only very little research on the topic currently exists (Bolino et al., 2016; Steinmetz, et al., 2017).

References

Anderson, N. H. (1965). Primacy effects in personality impression formation using a generalized order effect paradigm. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2*(1), 1–9.

Bahník, Š., & Vranka, M. A. (2017). If it's difficult to pronounce, it might not be risky: The effect of fluency on judgment of risk does not generalize to new stimuli. *Psychological science*, *28*(4), 427-436.

Barrick, M. R., Shaffer, J. A., & DeGrassi, S. W. (2009). What you see may not be what you get: Relationships among self-presentation tactics and ratings of interview and job performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 94,* 1394–1411

Bolino, M., Long, D., & Turnley, W. (2016). Impression Management in Organizations: Critical Questions, Answers, and Areas for Future Research. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, *3*, 377–406.

Bolino, M. C., Kacmar, K. M., Turnley, W. H., & Gilstrap, J. B. (2008). A multi-level review of impression management motives and behaviors. *Journal of Management, 34*, 1080–1109.

Bolino, M. C., Klotz, A. C., & Daniels, D. (2014). The impact of impression management over time. *Journal of Managerial Psychology,* 29(3), 266-284.

Costantini, G., Epskamp, S., Borsboom, D., Perugini, M., Mõttus, R., Waldorp, L. J., & Cramer, A. O. (2015). State of the aRt personality research: A tutorial on network analysis of personality data in R. Journal of Research in Personality, 54, 13–29.

Ellis, A. P. J., West, B. J., Ryan, A. M., & DeShon, R. P. (2002). The use of impression management tactics in structured interviews: A function of question type? *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87*, 1200–1208.

Gilmore, D. C., & Ferris, G. R. (1989). The effects of applicant impression management tactics on interviewer judgments. *Journal of Management, 15*, 557–564.

Godfrey, D. K., Jones, E. E., & Lord, C. G. (1986). Self-promotion is not ingratiating. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *50*(1), 106–115.

Grant, S. M., Hodge, F. D., & Sinha, R. K. (2018). How disclosure medium affects investor reactions to CEO bragging, modesty, and humblebragging. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, *68*, 118-134.

Gray, K. (2011). You're Hired! Practical Tips and Techniques for the Confident Interview. *Legal Information Management*, *11*(01), 69–71.

Gunia, B., & Levine, E. (2019). Deception as Competence: The Effect of Occupation on Ethical Judgment and Behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *152*, 122-137.

Helmreich, R., Aronson, E., & LeFan, J. (1970). To err is humanizing sometimes: Effects of self-esteem, competence, and a pratfall on interpersonal attraction. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, *16*(2), 259–264.

Herbst, D., & Mas, A. (2015). Peer effects on worker output in the laboratory generalize to the field. *Science, 350*(6260), 545–549.

Houdek, P. (2016). What comes to a manager's mind: Theory of local thinking. *Journal of Management Inquiry, 25*(4), 359–366.

Innes, J. (2009). *The Interview Book: Your Definitive Guide to the Perfect Interview Technique*. Pearson Education.

James, J. (2009). *You're hired! Interview tips and techniques for a brilliant interview*. Bath, UK: Trotman.

Kacmar, K. M., Delery, J. E., & Ferris, G. R. (1992). Differential effectiveness of applicant impression management tactics on employment interview decisions. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 22*, 1250–1272.

Kristof, A. L. (1996). Person-organization fit: An integrative review of its conceptualizations, measurement, and implications. *Personnel psychology, 49*(1), 1–49.

Leary, M. R., & Kowalski, R. M. (1990). Impression management: A literature review and two-component model. *Psychological bulletin, 107*(1), 34–47.

Lievens, F., & Peeters, H. (2008). Interviewers' sensitivity to impression management tactics in structured interviews. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment, 24*(3), 174–180.

McDonnell, S. (2005). *The Pocket Idiot's Guide to Interview Questions and Answers*. Penguin.

Mitchell, G. (2012). Revisiting Truth or Triviality. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 7*(2), 109–117.

Nguyen, N. T., Seers, A., & Hartman, N. S. (2008). Putting a good face on impression management: Team citizenship and team satisfaction. *Journal of Behavioral and Applied Management, 9*(2), 148–168.

Roulin, N., Bangerter, A., & Levashina, J. (2015). Honest and deceptive impression management in the employment interview: Can it be detected and how does it impact evaluations?. Personnel Psychology, 68(2), 395–444.

Sandal, G. M., van de Vijver, F., Bye, H. H., Sam, D. L., Amponsah, B., Cakar, N., Franke, G. H., Ismail, R., Kjellsen, K., Kosic, A., Leontieva, A., Mortazavi, S., & Tien-Lun Sun, C. (2014). Intended self-presentation tactics in job interviews: A 10-country study. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *45*(6), 939–958.

Sezer, O., Gino, F., & Norton, M. I. (2015). Humblebragging: A Distinct–and Ineffective–Self-Presentation Strategy. *Harvard Business School working paper series # 15-080*. Retrived June 30, 2020, from http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:14725901

Sezer, O., Gino, F., & Norton, M. I. (2018). Humblebragging: A distinct—and ineffective—self-presentation strategy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 114*(1), 52-74.

Steinmetz, J., Sezer, O., & Sedikides, C. (2017). Impression mismanagement: People as inept self-presenters. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *11*(6), e12321.

Stern, I., & Westphal, J. D. (2010). Stealthy footsteps to the Boardroom: Executives' backgrounds, sophisticated interpersonal influence behavior, and Board appointments. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *55*(2), 278–319.

Stevens, C. K., & Kristof, A. L. (1995). Making the right impression: A field study of applicant impression management during job interviews. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 80*, 587–606.

Waung, M., McAuslan, P., DiMambro, J. M., & Mięgoć, N. (2016). Impression Management Use in Resumes and Cover Letters. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 1–20.

Wihler, A., Meurs, J. A., Momm, T. D., John, J., & Blickle, G. (2017). Conscientiousness, extraversion, and field sales performance: Combining narrow personality, social skill, emotional stability, and nonlinearity. Personality and Individual Differences, 104, 291–296.