Effects of Individual Differences on Applicant Perceptions of an Operational Assessment Center

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Abstract

Knowing to what extent applicant reactions are related to stable individual differences and not only to characteristics of a selection procedure is important for the design and administration of the selection procedure and for dealing with applicants. The aim of this study was to explore relationships between individual differences (Big Five, core self-evaluations, trait affectivity, and general mental ability) and applicants’ perceptions of an operational assessment center (AC). Data from 294 applicants revealed that individual difference variables explained significant variance in their perceptions of the AC, even after controlling for self-rated and actual performance. Based on these results, the nature of the applicant pool should be considered for designing selection procedures, dealing with applicants, and for research purposes.

Keywords: applicant reactions, individual differences, assessment center, personnel selection
Effects of Individual Differences on Applicant Perceptions in an Operational Assessment Center

Applicants’ reactions to selection procedures can have a substantial impact on organizations. For example, applicant perceptions during selection procedures have been shown to affect important outcomes like the intentions to accept a job offer, to recommend the organization to others, or to pursue legal action (see Truxillo & Bauer, 2011, for an overview). Furthermore, it is also assumed that applicant perceptions are related to their later behavior such as job performance or turnover (cf. Hausknecht, Day, & Thomas, 2004). Finally, it has even been proposed that applicant perceptions may have negative effects on their later health and well-being (Anderson, 2004; Hülsheger & Anderson, 2009). For this reason, various studies have been dedicated to potential antecedents of applicant perceptions. This research has focused on applicant perceptions of the fairness of selection procedures (Gilliland, 1993), and it has provided important insights on how different aspects of selection procedures (e.g., job relatedness) affect these fairness perceptions and what organizations can do to influence them favorably (e.g., provide applicants with information about how the selection procedure relates to the targeted job; cf. Anderson, Salgado, & Hülsheger, 2010; Hausknecht et al., 2004; Ryan & Huth, 2008; Truxillo & Bauer, 2011).

In addition to aspects of the selection procedure, it has also been suggested that dispositional variables can affect applicant perceptions of selection procedures (Hausknecht et al., 2004; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). If dispositional factors account for applicant perceptions, this could mean that some applicants may react negatively to selection experiences regardless of an organization’s efforts to optimize their selection procedures (Truxillo, Bauer, Campion, & Paronto, 2006). However, despite repeated calls for research on the role of individual difference variables for applicant reactions (Hausknecht et al., 2004; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000), the available information on why certain applicants perceive
selection procedures differently is very limited. Together with knowledge of the potential applicant pool, which might especially be available in the case for internal applicants, such information can help in making choices about how to design a selection process so that it suits the needs of the specific candidates.

For this reason, the main goal of the present study was to explore the role of a broad range of dispositional variables for applicants’ perceptions in a high stakes setting. In doing so, our first aim was to include applicant perceptions that go beyond fairness perceptions, thereby responding to recent calls to also consider variables that are potentially relevant for negative psychological effects of applicant perceptions (Anderson, 2004; Hülsheger & Anderson, 2009). Our second aim was to consider popular individual difference variables such as the Big Five and general mental ability (GMA), and, moreover, to consider potentially important work-related variables like core self-evaluation constructs and trait affectivity that go beyond these previously studied variables. Furthermore, our third goal was to determine the relative contribution of these dispositional variables in the context of an operational assessment center (AC). Even though ACs are common for selecting candidates for leadership positions, they have rarely been considered in applicant reactions research. Thus, we aimed to generate information that may help AC designers and users to better understand applicants’ perceptions of ACs. Finally, in our study, we explored the relationships between dispositional variables and applicant perceptions in a sample of candidates who were already employed by the selecting organization and applied for a tenured position in this organization. Therefore, the present research also helps to gather evidence on the reactions of an important group of candidates, namely internal candidates, that has received only scant attention in the past (Ford, Truxillo, & Bauer, 2009).
Theoretical Background

In light of the growing awareness of applicants’ views on selection, several theoretical frameworks have been suggested that specify different determinants of applicant reactions (cf. Truxillo & Bauer, 2011). The most influential framework was proposed by Gilliland (1993), who introduced a model of applicant reactions that is based on organizational justice theory. This model defines a set of ten procedural justice rules (job relatedness, opportunity to perform, reconsideration opportunity, consistency of administration, feedback, selection information, honesty of test administrators, interpersonal effectiveness of administration, two-way communication, and the propriety of questions) that determine the perceived fairness of a selection procedure. According to this model, negative applicant reactions result if these justice rules are violated. Most of the applicant reactions research during the last two decades has applied this model (Truxillo & Bauer, 2011) and most of Gilliland’s (1993) rules were shown to be relevant for later applicant reactions (especially job relatedness and opportunity to perform; Hausknecht et al., 2004).

Similarly to Gilliland’s (1993) model, Arvey and Sackett (1993) also focused on the perceived fairness of the selection process. They proposed that perceived fairness is determined by the selection system content (e.g., job relatedness, fakability), candidates’ perception of the development process of the selection procedure (e.g., adequacy of job analysis), the administration of the selection procedure, and the organizational context (e.g., selection ratio).

A third approach to applicant reactions has focused on the social validity of the selection process; that means on the components that make selection situations socially acceptable (Schuler, 1993). The concept of social validity has been developed independently from the organizational justice perspective. It suggests that four aspects of the selection process influence applicants’ acceptance of this process and characterize selection situations
that are perceived as open, fair, respectful, and rational (Schuler, 1993). These four aspects are: a) the information that applicants receive about the job itself and characteristics of the organization; b) the amount of control that applicants may exert over the selection situation; c) transparency of the selection procedure and the decision process; and d) the content and form of feedback that they are given (Schuler, 1993).

In addition to these models that focus on applicants’ perceptions of the fairness or social validity of selection procedures, researchers have recently called for a shift in focus from fairness perceptions to perceptions that can lead to negative psychological effects for applicants (Anderson, 2004; Anderson & Goltsi, 2006; Hülsheger & Anderson, 2009). First, it has been argued that the justice perspective may not capture the whole spectrum of factors that influence applicant reactions because, for example, applicants seem to prefer selection methods (e.g., interviews) that they also consider as less fair (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000; Rynes, 1993). And second, the potential negative impact of selection practices is important from the perspective of the applicants’ well-being (Anderson, 2004).

According to Anderson and Goltsi (2006), negative psychological effects can be understood as measurable long-term declines in applicants’ psychological well-being, general mental health, or self-esteem. These negative effects might have a broad range of consequences for applicants and for organizations. Specifically, it has been argued that negative psychological effects can not only affect applicants’ general well-being and health but might also impact their career as well as their private and work environment (Anderson, 2004). Furthermore, Anderson (2004, 2011) has also argued that applicants may sue organizations for the negative mental health outcomes of selection procedures (e.g., diagnosed depression, burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder etc.). In any case, initiation of a legal case against an organization may lead to financial losses, negative publicity and, thus, a damaged reputation, and a potential loss of revenue, since former candidates who felt
mistreated may also refrain from buying the company’s products (Anderson, 2011). Therefore, there is a need for more information concerning aspects of selection procedures that are likely related to negative psychological effects. This need for information seems especially relevant for selection procedures that place high demands on participants and that have the potential to evoke negative psychological effects like ACs (Anderson, 2011; Anderson & Goltsi, 2006; Fletcher, 1991; Fletcher & Kerslake, 1993).

In addition to these theoretical approaches to applicant perceptions, researchers have also called for more attention to specific groups of applicants, especially internal applicants (Ford et al., 2009). Specifically, it has been suggested that internal applicants’ reactions may even be more important to organizations than external applicants’ reactions because these candidates usually remain in the organization even if they have not been selected for a promotion or a further position. Furthermore, they have already invested a lot of time and effort in their organization and may react more sensitively to their employers’ selection practices. Therefore, their reactions could dramatically affect important organizational outcomes (Ford et al., 2009). Despite the importance of understanding internal applicants’ reactions to selection procedures, hardly any research has been done with this group of candidates (Ford et al., 2009).

Taken together, as noted above, the first aim of the present research was to study the effects of individual difference variables not only for applicant perceptions that include important aspects from the perspective of fairness perceptions, like face validity, measurement quality, and quality of administration, but also for aspects that are relevant from the perspective of negative psychological effects, like perceived controllability and perceived strain during the selection procedure (Kersting, 2010; Schuler, 1990, 1993). Furthermore, in doing so, we focused on a group of applicants that are highly comparable with internal applicants (see below for more information concerning the specific nature of our sample).
Thus, the present study also helps to gather evidence concerning the reactions of an important yet understudied group of candidates.

**Applicant Reactions and Individual Differences**

Information about how some individuals may be predisposed to react in predictable ways could be helpful for organizations that seek to make a favorable impression on candidates (Bernerth, Feild, Giles, & Cole, 2006). In line with Truxillo et al. (2006), who stated “what may seem fair to some applicants (e.g., extraverts), may not seem fair to others (e.g., introverts)” (p. 276), a given aspect of a selection procedure can be perceived very differently by different applicants. Therefore, knowing which applicants are likely to react in a given way can potentially help organizations to better respond to their applicants’ needs in the process of designing a selection procedure, and in generally dealing with candidates.

Information about the nature of the candidate pool can already be available, as is the case with internal candidates. Furthermore, there is also evidence for the existence of job-specific applicant pools (Ones & Viswesvaran, 2003) that include individuals with certain defining characteristics. More specifically, previous findings suggest that individual differences are related to career aspirations, career choice (De Fruyt & Mervielde, 1999), and organizational choice (Schneider, Smith, Taylor, & Fleenor, 1998). Therefore, information on the impact of individual differences on applicant perceptions is helpful for making choices about how to design a selection process or which factors deserve particular attention while dealing with specific candidates for a specific job.

Despite repeated calls for research concerning the role of individual difference variables for applicant reactions (Hausknecht et al., 2004; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000), few studies have addressed how certain applicants perceive selection procedures. Nevertheless, these studies provided the first insights into the relationship between the Big Five and GMA, on the one hand, and the perceived fairness of selection procedures, on the other hand (e.g.,
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Bernerth et al., 2006; Oostrom, Born, Serlie, & Van der Molen, 2010; Truxillo et al., 2006; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2004; Wiechmann & Ryan, 2003). However, most of these few studies only used student samples (e.g., Bernerth et al., 2006; Oostrom et al., 2010; Wiechmann & Ryan, 2003), and there is meta-analytic evidence that perceptions of selection procedures differ between students in simulated selection settings and real applicants (Truxillo, Bodner, Bertolino, Bauer, & Yonce, 2009).

Furthermore, other dispositional variables may be even more important in determining applicant perceptions than these previously studied variables. Nevertheless, as described below, information concerning additional individual difference variables, like the core self-evaluations constructs that are related to important work-relevant attitudes, or other general dispositions that are important in the context of work like trait positive or trait negative affectivity, is barely available. However, information concerning the relationships between these dispositions and applicant reactions may help employers and researchers to better predict applicant reactions. Therefore, research is necessary to close these gaps in our knowledge.

Finally, to date no information is available about how individual differences affect applicants’ perceptions of ACs. Since ACs are widely used for selection of external candidates as well as for promotion and development of internal candidates (Krause & Thornton, 2009), more knowledge regarding applicants’ perceptions of ACs is needed. This is important because, first, it has been argued that ACs have the potential to evoke negative psychological effects, since they last for a long time and place a variety of demands on candidates (Anderson & Goltsi, 2006; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000; Fletcher & Kerslake, 1993). Second, previous studies have shown that applicant perceptions may differ depending on the selection procedure (Oostrom et al., 2010; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000). Thus, results from
previous studies with other selection procedures concerning the relationships between dispositional variables and applicant perceptions may not generalize to ACs.

For the reasons mentioned above, our second goal is to determine the individual contributions of a broad range of dispositional variables (Big Five, core self-evaluations, trait affectivity, and GMA) to variance in applicant perceptions of an operational AC. This information will allow conclusions concerning the relative importance of the specific dispositions as predictors of applicant perceptions. Furthermore, this information may also help AC designers and users as well as AC researchers to better understand the determinants of applicants’ specific perceptions.

**Important Individual Difference Variables**

In the following sections, we will first review research concerning individual differences that have already received some attention in previous research, namely the Big Five and GMA. Then, we will discuss core self-evaluations and trait affect as some additional individual difference variables that are potentially relevant for applicant perceptions.

**Big Five**

Several studies have explored the impact of the Big Five factors on applicant reactions to selection procedures. Viswesvaran and Ones (2004) found that some of the Big Five factors, namely emotional stability and extraversion, were related to the relative importance that individuals placed on different characteristics of selection procedures that were proposed by Arvey and Sackett (1993). Bernerth et al. (2006) found that agreeableness and openness to experience were weakly related to procedural justice perceptions of personality tests. And Oostrom et al. (2010) found that agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness to experience correlated with perceived job relatedness of a cognitive ability test. Furthermore, these authors found that only openness was related to perceived job relatedness of a situational judgment test (SJT). Finally, Truxillo et al. (2006) found significant relationships
between agreeableness, emotional stability, and openness to experience with justice perceptions of a written multiple-choice selection test used to select police recruits. This last finding is of special relevance, given that it is the only study that surveyed real applicants.

Based on the results of the aforementioned studies we expect that, first, agreeableness will be positively related to applicant perceptions of the AC. Specifically, individuals who are high in agreeableness should be more compassionate (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002) and more sympathetic (Truxillo et al., 2006) towards the administrators of the AC. Furthermore, when it comes to applicant perceptions that have the potential to evoke negative psychological effects, there is meta-analytic evidence that less agreeable individuals have the tendency to engage in coping strategies that involve disengagement (e.g., show symptoms of distress; Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007). In addition, less agreeable individuals were shown to perceive less control and more strain at work (Törnroos et al., 2013). Since ACs are designed to simulate work situations, these results probably also apply to ACs. Therefore, agreeable individuals should also perceive various aspects of the AC, including aspects that are relevant for negative psychological effects, more positively.

Second, we expect that conscientious individuals should react more sensitively to ACs. Since conscientiousness has been generally found to be related to organizational justice perceptions (Lv, Shen, Cao, Su, & Chen, 2012), we assume that conscientious internal candidates who have invested more time and effort in their organization as compared to less conscientious individuals should show stronger reactions to perceived injustice during selection. Furthermore, conscientiousness was positively related to problem-solving coping strategies (Connor-Smith & Falchsbart, 2007) as well as to perceived control at work and negatively related to perceived strain at work (Törnroos et al., 2013). Therefore, conscientiousness should be positively related to applicant perceptions of the AC and also to
perceptions that are relevant for negative psychological effects, namely to perceived controllability and perceived absence of strain.

Third, we expect that emotional stability will be positively related to applicant perceptions of the AC. In their study with employees who assumed the role of applicants, Viswesvaran and Ones (2004) found that emotionally stable individuals placed more importance on several aspects of the selection procedure than candidates who were emotionally less stable. Furthermore, when it comes to applicant perceptions that are relevant for negative psychological effects, individuals who are calm and emotionally stable (Judge et al., 2002) and who tend to perceive more control and less strain at work (Törnroos et al., 2013) should also perceive the AC more favorably.

Fourth, we expect that extraversion is positively related to applicant perceptions of the AC. AC candidates are almost always faced with social interaction tasks that are probably more favorably seen by extraverted than introverted individuals. In line with this, extraversion was the most important Big Five predictor of AC performance in the meta-analysis by Collins et al. (2003). Furthermore, it was found that extraverts place more importance on different aspects of the selection process than introverts (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2004). In addition, since extraverts also tend to perceive more control and less strain at work (Törnroos et al., 2013), we believe that extraversion will be positively related to perceptions of the AC that are relevant for negative psychological effects.

Finally, as openness was found to be a stable correlate of applicant perceptions in past research (Oostrom et al., 2010; Truxillo et al., 2006), we expect openness to experience to be positively related to applicant perceptions of the AC. Because openness to experience refers to imaginative and curious individuals with wide interests (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and may influence how these individuals cope with different testing situations (Truxillo et al., 2006), we believe that this should particularly be the case for the various situations that candidates
face in an AC. Moreover, since openness was also related to perceived control and perceived
strain at work (Törnroos et al., 2013), openness should also be related to applicant
perceptions that have the potential to evoke negative psychological effects.
Therefore, our first hypothesis is as follows:
Hypothesis 1: a) Agreeableness, b) conscientiousness, c) emotional stability, d)
extraversion, and e) openness to experience will be positively related to applicant
perceptions of an operational AC.

General Mental Ability

GMA is considered critical in various areas of life (Schmidt & Hunter, 2004) and is
positively related to job performance (Schmidt & Hunter, 2004) as well as to AC
performance (Collins et al., 2003). However, few studies have explored the extent to which
GMA accounts for variance in applicant reactions to selection. In their incumbent sample,
Viswesvaran and Ones (2004) found that GMA was related to the importance placed on
aspects of selection procedures that are related to selection system content, like job
relatedness, or objectivity of the selection system. Similarly, GMA was also found to be
related to perceptions of selection system content, like face validity and predictive validity,
and to test fairness of a cognitive ability test in student as well in real applicant samples
(Macan, Avedon, Paese, & Smith, 1994; Reeder, Powers, Ryan, & Gibby, 2012). Based on
these findings, individuals with higher GMA should be more sensitive to perceived aspects of
the AC that are related to selection system content, like face validity and measurement
quality. In addition, individuals with higher GMA may better cope with the different tasks of
the AC and therefore experience more control and less strain during selection. Consequently,
they should also rate those aspects of the AC that are relevant for negative psychological
effects more favorably. Finally, applicants with higher GMA perform better in ACs (Collins
et al., 2003) and also tend to believe they did well in tests (Macan et al., 1994). Because
outcome favorability is a consistent predictor of applicant reactions (Macan et al., 1994; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000), we expect that GMA will be positively related to applicant perceptions of the AC. Our second hypothesis is therefore as follows:

**Hypothesis 2:** GMA will be positively related to applicant perceptions of an operational AC.

**Core Self-Evaluations**

Core self-evaluations are understood as the most fundamental evaluations that people give themselves with regard to their own self-esteem, competence, and skills (Judge & Bono, 2001). Four constructs have been identified as the underlying core self-evaluation traits (Judge & Bono, 2001): locus of control, which is a person’s conviction that favorable outcomes will result from his or her own actions rather than those of powerful others (Judge & Bono, 2001), generalized self-efficacy, which refers to an individual’s estimation of being able to successfully deal with difficult situations, self-esteem, which is an overall judgment about one’s self-worth, and emotional stability, which was already described as one of the Big Five factors. The core self-evaluations can be measured as a one-dimensional construct or as separate dimensions. In the present study, the latter option was chosen to get an estimate of the relative importance of the different underlying traits.

Core self-evaluations are considered to be amongst the most important personality traits that predict human performance (Judge, van Vianen, & de Pater, 2004), as they have been shown to be consistently related to motivation, job performance, and job satisfaction (Chang, Ferris, Johnson, Rosen, & Tan, 2012; Judge & Bono, 2001; Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998). Therefore, these constructs are probably also important in personnel selection. Furthermore, given that core self-evaluations are significantly related to perceptions of job characteristics (Chang et al., 2012), it is likely that they also account for
variance in applicant perceptions of a selection procedure like an AC, which is designed to measure simulated work behavior.

Moreover, it has previously been argued that locus of control should be related to perceptions of selection systems. Specifically, according to Applicant Attribution-Reaction Theory (Ployhart & Harold, 2004), individuals who have a tendency to see themselves as responsible for important results should be less inclined to perceive a selection procedure negatively than those who tend to attribute responsibility to others. Oostrom et al. (2010) have provided partial support for these assumptions by showing that core self-evaluations were positively related to perceived job relatedness of a GMA test and an SJT in a student sample.

To our knowledge, no study to date has explored the relationships between core self-evaluations constructs and a broader range of applicant perceptions. Moreover, information with regard to real applicants is still lacking. Therefore, our aim was to determine the relationships between applicant perceptions of an operational AC and the different core self-evaluation constructs, locus of control, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Based on the arguments above and the results from previous studies, we expect that candidates with a high internal locus of control will also have more positive perceptions of the AC. Furthermore, individuals who are high in self-efficacy and self-esteem should also believe that they can better cope with the tasks of an AC. Since meta-analytic findings suggest that the core self-evaluation constructs are positively related to effective coping strategies and negatively related to strain (Kammeyer-Mueller, Judge, & Scott, 2009), individuals who are high on these constructs should perceive the AC, including aspects of the AC that are relevant for negative psychological effects, more positively. Therefore we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3: a) Locus of control, b) self-efficacy, and c) self-esteem will be positively related to applicant perceptions of an operational AC.
**Trait Affect**

Trait positive affectivity is the disposition to experience positive moods and strong emotional reactions to positive environmental stimuli (Watson, Wiese, Vaidya, & Tellegen, 1999). In contrast, trait negative affectivity is associated with a tendency to experience negative feelings such as fear, distress, and anger. People with high negative affectivity also think and experience their environment in a negative way. Generally, positive and negative affectivity are conceptualized as two independent dimensions (Watson et al., 1999). This means that, for example, people with low negative affectivity may experience less negative feelings, but this does not have to mean that they are necessarily high in positive affectivity.

To our knowledge, no information is available concerning the relationship between trait affect and applicant perceptions. However, knowing the extent to which applicants’ predispositions to experience positive or negative moods and strong emotional reactions accounts for variance in applicant perceptions is important because if, for example, dispositions to experience negative feelings explain a meaningful amount of variance in applicant perceptions, there may be little an organization can do to affect these perceptions favorably (Truxillo et al., 2006).

There are reasons to believe that positive and negative affectivity are related to applicant perceptions. First, these traits were found to be related to satisfaction with different facets of work (Bowling, Hendricks, & Wagner, 2008). Moreover, Barsky and Kaplan (2007) provided meta-analytical evidence that positive affectivity is positively, and negative affectivity is negatively, related to perceptions of organizational justice. Accordingly, as dispositions like trait affect may predispose employees to interpret or perceive their work environments in a different manner (Munz, Huelsman, Konold, & McKinney, 1996), it seems plausible that these dispositions are also relevant in the perception of selection procedures by candidates. In addition, previous evidence suggests that negative affectivity is related to job
stressors (e.g., Chen & Spector, 1991; Spector & O'Connell, 1994). Therefore, individuals who are high in trait negative affectivity should also perceive aspects of the AC that are relevant for negative psychological effects more negatively. Taken together, we suggest that trait affect will also be related to applicant perceptions. Specifically, we hypothesize that positive affectivity is positively related to applicant perceptions of the AC, while negative affectivity should show negative correlations with various applicant perceptions of the AC, especially with perceptions that are relevant for negative psychological effects. Therefore our final hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 4: a) Trait positive affectivity will be positively and b) trait negative affectivity will be negatively related to applicant perceptions of an operational AC.

Method

Sample and Background

Our sample consisted of 294 participants (281 males and 13 females) from an AC for the selection of career officers for the Swiss Armed Forces. Participants’ mean age was 27.52, with a range from 19 to 41. Their educational background ranged from apprenticeship to university degree, while their militia ranks ranged from lieutenant to major. Two hundred thirty-nine candidates were from the German-speaking part of Switzerland and 55 from the French-speaking part.

Because of the army system in Switzerland (cf. Stadelmann, 2010), the participants were largely comparable to internal candidates. Specifically, the Swiss Armed Forces is a conscript army, which means that all Swiss men are liable for military service and must serve in the reserve until the age of about 30 (reserve officers serve even longer, until the age of 42 to 50 depending on their rank). To apply to become a career officer, candidates must have completed at least one and a half years of training for militia officers and have already been promoted to reserve officer. Furthermore, potential career officers are required to work up to
one and a half years for the Swiss Army on the basis of timely restricted contracts before they can apply for a tenured position as career officers. To be admitted to the AC, candidates were required to pass physical and language tests. The latter is also obligatory because Swiss career officers are required to speak and write in at least two of the main official languages of Switzerland (i.e., German, French, and Italian). Since many militia officers speak at least two of the main official languages, almost 99% of the initial applicants managed to pass these tests.

The selection ratio of the AC was approximately 50%. If they did not pass the AC, the candidates could not become career officers. However, because of the militia regulations in Switzerland, they nevertheless remained militia officers in the Swiss Army and were required to serve in the army for about four to eight weeks each year after the AC. The duration of their later refresher courses varied in weeks per year and number of years depending on their later military ranks (lieutenants and first lieutenants: until the age of 34, captains: until the age of 42, majors: until the age of 50). Taken together, our sample was therefore largely comparable to internal candidates.

**Procedure**

The AC was administered in German or French depending on the mother tongue of the candidates. The AC was prototypical for ACs used to select middle managers (cf. Povah & Povah, 2012) and consisted of two group exercises (a leaderless group discussion and a group debate), two role plays, and two oral presentations (a short self-presentation and a lecture on a topic of military pedagogy). After each exercise, every candidate was rated on three to six dimensions on a scale that ranged from 1 (= clearly failed to meet requirements) to 4 (= clearly exceeded requirements). The targeted dimensions were personal attitude, achievement motivation, planning and organizing, social contact, oral communication, dealing with conflicts, and influencing others. Previous evaluations attested to the good
criterion-related validity of the AC that is comparable to other ACs (Hermelin, Lievens, & Robertson, 2007) and these evaluations also confirmed that there were no subgroup differences between applicants from the different language groups (Gutknecht, Semmer, & Annen, 2005; Melchers & Annen, 2010).

During the AC, participants were required to complete a cognitive ability test as one of the AC exercises, and, in their free time between the exercises, they also completed a questionnaire that included the personality measures. The candidates were told that their scores on the personality questionnaire would only be used for research purposes and would not influence their final AC score or their chances to become career officers. Furthermore, they were encouraged to answer as honestly as possible to aid the AC designers and administrators to improve the quality and fairness of the AC. Directly after the AC and before they were informed about having passed or failed the AC, the participants completed a questionnaire concerning their perceptions of the AC and their self-rated performance.

All tests and questionnaires were administered in the respective mother tongue of the candidates (e.g., German or French). The questionnaires were translated from German into French by a trained translator who thoroughly discussed all items with the study’s administrators to ensure that their meaning was transferred correctly.

**Candidates’ AC Performance**

Two indicators for candidates’ AC performance were used as control variables for later analyses: first, the overall assessment rating (OAR), which was determined as the mean of all the ratings the candidates received on the seven dimensions across all exercises; and second, candidates’ self-rated performance, which was measured directly after the AC and before the candidates were informed of having passed or failed the AC by asking them to indicate on one item how well they thought they had performed in the AC compared to other
candidates (e.g., “Compared with other persons in my age group, I believe I did… in the AC”). The scale for this item ranged from 1 (= very badly) to 6 (= very well).

**Applicant Perceptions**

To assess applicants’ perceptions of the AC, we used a questionnaire developed by Kersting (2010). This questionnaire considers aspects from the models by Gilliland (1993) and Schuler (1993) that were adapted to the context of ACs, and measures six different applicant perceptions concerning the AC. In the context of the present study, we focused on five of the six dimensions. The sixth dimension (positive atmosphere, e.g., “The atmosphere during the AC was positive”) had to be excluded from the analysis due to poor internal consistency ($\alpha = .47$). Each of the remaining five dimensions was measured with four items: 1) face validity ($\alpha = .73$, e.g., “I doubt that one can select appropriate employees for this job with the AC”; reverse coded), 2) measurement quality ($\alpha = .80$, e.g., “The AC allows the exact measurement of differences between participants regarding the characteristics that are assessed in the AC”), 3) controllability ($\alpha = .66$, e.g., “During the exercises of the AC, I always knew what I had to do”), 4) absence of strain ($\alpha = .64$, e.g., “The participation in the AC is stressful”; reverse coded), and 5) quality of administration ($\alpha = .40$ for the original scale, and $\alpha = .61$ after excluding one item, e.g., “The AC was well organized”). Six-point scales ranging from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 6 (= strongly agree) were used for all items.

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate whether the five different perception dimensions were indeed supported. For this purpose, we used 2-item parcels for which we computed the means of the respective item pairs from each scale and used these means as indicators for the five factors in the CFA model. We received a good model fit for five separate but correlated dimension factors, $\chi^2(25) = 27.13$, $\chi^2/df = 1.09$, $SRMSR = .028$, $RMSEA = .017$, $CFI = .997$, and $TLI = .994$. Furthermore, the mean correlation between the latent factors of the 5-factor model was .42. In contrast, the fit of a
model that contained only one overall factor that reflects candidates’ overall perception of the AC had a poor fit, $\chi^2(35) = 268.93$, $\chi^2/df = 7.68$, $SRMSR = .106$, $RMSEA = .152$, $CFI = .550$, and $TLI = .650$. Furthermore, the fit of the 1-factor model was significantly worse in comparison to the 5-factor model, $\Delta \chi^2(10) = 241.80$, $p < .01$. Thus, even though the different applicant perception dimensions are positively correlated, they nevertheless represent distinct factors.

**Individual Difference Variables**

**Big Five.** A shortened version of the minimal redundant scales (Ostendorf, 1990) by Schallberger and Venetz (1999) was used to assess the Big Five. These scales measure the personality traits with four paired adjectives each (e.g., emotional stability: emotionally stable – unstable). The paired adjectives were presented as two end-points of a scale from 1 to 6, and candidates were required to rate whether they considered their personality as closer to one or the other of the paired adjectives. The internal consistencies of these scales were .41 (for the original scale and .56 after excluding two items) for agreeableness, .78 for conscientiousness, .65 for emotional stability, .76 for extraversion, and .78 for openness.

**GMA.** The applicants completed three GMA tests as one of the exercises of the AC. These paper and pencil tests were developed by an international consulting firm and they measured verbal, numerical, and abstract non-verbal reasoning (SHL, 2006). The candidates were given 20 minutes to complete each of these tests. The verbal test consisted of 30 questions that assessed the understanding of short, complex texts. For the numerical test, candidates were required to analyze tables and graphs as well as answer 20 related questions concerning these tables and graphs. Finally, in the abstract non-verbal reasoning test, the candidates were presented with four diagrams per question for which they were required to determine a corresponding fifth diagram that was missing. This test consisted of 40 questions. In a reference group of 1,065 applicants with similar educational background and
age ranging from 15 to 58, the internal consistency was .75 for the verbal test, .81 for the numerical test, and .80 for the non-verbal reasoning test (SHL, 2006). For the candidates’ overall GMA score, we used their average score across the three tests.

**Core Self-Evaluations.** Separate scales were used to measure the different core self-evaluation dimensions. A questionnaire by Krampen (1991) measured locus of control (e.g., “Whether I have an accident or not, depends entirely on me and my behavior”) with eight items, and self-efficacy (e.g., “Even in difficult situations I always come up with ideas about what can be done”) with four items. The items were rated on 6-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). The internal consistency was .63 for the locus of control scale and .73 for self-efficacy. Self-esteem was measured with Badura’s (1987) 10-item German translation of a scale by Rosenberg (1965). The items (e.g., “Sometimes I really feel worthless”, reverse coded) were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The internal consistency of this scale was .69. Emotional stability was already assessed with the Big Five scale.

**Trait Affect.** A shortened and modified version of the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS, Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) was used to measure positive and negative affectivity. This version was developed on the basis of the German translation of the PANAS by Krohne, Egloff, Kohlmann, and Tausch (1996) and was modified by Schallberger (2005) to measure each dimension with eight bipolar items. Four adjective pairs measured positive affectivity (e.g., bored - enthusiastic), while the other four measured negative affectivity (e.g., relaxed - stressed). On a scale from 1 to 6, applicants had to indicate which adjective described their personality better. Cronbach’s α was .78 for positive and .65 for negative affectivity.
Results

Descriptive information and correlations between all study variables are presented in Table 1. As can be seen in this table, the French speaking candidates were less agreeable, tended to attribute important outcomes more externally, and perceived the AC somewhat less favorably than the German speaking candidates. Therefore, we controlled for candidates’ language group in all our regression analyses.

To test our hypotheses, we first analyzed the correlations between the study variables. Then we conducted hierarchical regressions to test whether dispositional variables explain incremental variance in applicant perceptions of the AC over and above self-rated and actual AC performance and candidates’ language group. Finally, because some of the individual difference variables were intercorrelated, we conducted a relative weight analysis to determine the relative importance of each predictor (Johnson, 2000; LeBreton & Tonidandel, 2008).

To test Hypothesis 1, we analyzed whether the Big Five were related to applicant perceptions of the AC at the correlational level. Hypothesis 1 was moderately supported, as agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability were related to some of the applicants’ perceptions of the AC. As expected, agreeableness was significantly related to most perception variables, namely face validity ($r = .18, p < .01$), measurement quality ($r = .22, p < .01$), controllability ($r = .19, p < .01$), and quality of administration ($r = .15, p < .01$). Conscientiousness was only related to face validity ($r = .12, p < .05$) and measurement quality ($r = .18, p < .01$). Emotional stability was significantly related to controllability, absence of strain ($rs = .19$ and .17, both $ps < .01$), and perceived quality of administration ($r = .13, p < .05$). In contrast to our expectations, no significant correlations were found for extraversion or openness to experience and applicant perceptions.
To test Hypothesis 2, we examined the relationships between GMA and applicant perceptions. However, no support was found for Hypothesis 2 as GMA was not significantly related to any of the applicant perceptions of the AC.

Hypothesis 3, which stated that the core self-evaluations constructs locus of control, self-efficacy, and self-esteem would be positively related to applicant perceptions of the AC, was largely supported. As expected, locus of control was significantly related to all perception variables: face validity ($r = .21, p < .01$), measurement quality ($r = .26, p < .01$), controllability ($r = .13, p < .05$), absence of strain ($r = .16, p < .01$), and quality of administration ($r = .21, p < .01$). Likewise, self-efficacy was significantly related to all perception variables: face validity, measurement quality, controllability, absence of strain, and quality of administration ($r = .25, .21, .31, .25, \text{ and } .16$, respectively, all $p < .01$). Finally, self-esteem was significantly related to controllability ($r = .14, p < .05$), absence of strain ($r = .18, p < .01$), and quality of administration ($r = .27, p < .01$).

Hypothesis 4 predicted that positive and negative affectivity would be related to applicant perceptions of the AC. Some support was found for both variables: Positive affectivity was positively related to face validity ($r = .14, p < .05$), measurement quality ($r = .15, p < .01$), controllability ($r = .13, p < .05$), and quality of administration ($r = .15, p < .05$), while negative affectivity was negatively related to controllability ($r = -.12, p < .05$), absence of strain ($r = -.19, p < .01$), and quality of administration ($r = -.13, p < .05$).

To examine whether the individual difference variables explained variance beyond applicants’ self-rated performance and their actual performance in the AC, we conducted separate hierarchical regression analyses for each of the applicant perception dimensions (cf. Table 2). Furthermore, as noted above, we also included the language group as an additional control variable. Thus, in these regressions, we entered self-rated performance, the OAR, and
the language group (German vs. French) in Step 1 and the individual difference variables in Step 2.

While the results concerning the influence of individual differences on applicant perceptions were not significant for perceived face validity of the AC and quality of administration, the regression analyses showed that individual differences explained significant variance in perceived measurement quality, perceived controllability, and perceived absence of strain, even after controlling for self-rated performance, OAR, and candidates’ language group. Specifically, including the individual difference variables in Step 2 accounted for additional variance of .08 (ns) for face validity, .13 (p < .01) for measurement quality, .12 (p < .01) for controllability, .14 (p < .01) for absence of strain, and .08 (ns) for quality of administration. Agreeableness was a significant predictor of perceived measurement quality (β = .24, p < .01) and a marginally significant predictor of perceived controllability, while emotional stability (β = .23, p < .01) was a significant predictor of perceived controllability. Locus of control was the strongest predictor measurement quality in Step 2 (βs = .18 and .26, respectively, ps < .05 and .01, respectively), while self-efficacy was the main predictor of perceived controllability and absence of strain (βs = .25 and .26, respectively, both ps < .01). Finally, positive affectivity had a significant but negative effect on perceived absence of strain (β = -.17, p < .05) and a marginally significant effect on perceived quality of administration (β = .16, p < .10). A potential reason for the negative effect could be multicollinearity. Taken together, individual differences explained significant variance in perceptions of measurement quality, controllability, and absence of strain during the AC, even after controlling for self-assessed and actual performance in the AC as well as candidates’ language group.

Although hierarchical regression analyses are well suited to demonstrate the incremental variance that individual difference variables explain in AC perceptions beyond
self-rated and actual performance, they may not capture the individual contribution of each of these variables, particularly when some of them are correlated (Johnson, 2000; LeBreton & Tonidandel, 2008). Therefore, we conducted relative weight analyses to determine the contribution of each predictor to the explained variance $R^2$ in applicant perception variables (Table 2). These analyses showed that agreeableness was a constant and one of the most important contributors to explained variance in the dimensions face validity, measurement quality, and controllability ($rws = 11.3\%, 17.7\%, \text{and} 11.9\%$). Furthermore, locus of control was an important contributor to variance in perceived face validity, measurement quality, and quality of administration ($rws = 15.0\%, 26.0\%, \text{and} 10.5\%$), while self-efficacy contributed a considerable amount of variance in almost all dimensions ($rws = 22.7\%, 13.2\%, 36.3\%, \text{and} 29.9\%$, for face validity, measurement quality, controllability, and absence of strain, respectively). Finally, self-esteem was the most important predictor of quality of administration ($rw = 26.2\%$) and negative affectivity was one of the most important predictors of absence of strain ($rw = 10.2\%$).

In general, our results revealed that core self-evaluations as a group contributed considerably to the explained variance in applicants’ perceptions (with an average of 40.8\% of the explained variance per dependent variable) that clearly exceeded the overall contribution of the Big Five (which altogether contributed to an average of 24.1\% of the explained variance). However, the Big Five in turn explained more variance than trait affect, but even the latter accounted for an average of 8.0\% of the explained variance across the different dependent variables (with the strongest contribution found for absence of strain). In contrast to this, GMA did not meaningfully contribute to the explained variance in either of the applicant perceptions of the AC.
Discussion

Our study makes at least three important contributions to the applicant reactions literature. First, we explored the impact of individual differences on a broad range of applicant perceptions, including some that have not previously been tested in relation to individual differences. Because, to a certain degree, applicants seem to prefer selection instruments that they also consider as less fair (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000), we additionally studied perceptions of aspects that go beyond organizational fairness. Hereby, we addressed calls for research on perceptions that have the potential to evoke negative psychological effects (Anderson, 2004; Anderson & Goltsi, 2006), like perceived controllability and perceived absence of strain during the selection procedure (Kersting, 2010; Schuler, 1993).

Second, we explored the role of a broad range of dispositional variables, namely the Big Five, GMA, core self-evaluations, and trait affectivity, in applicant perceptions in a high-stakes setting. In doing so, we expand the extant literature on the relationship between individual differences and applicant reactions by including additional work-related individual difference variables that have not (or only in a rather limited manner) been tested in previous research, such as core self-evaluations, positive and negative affectivity, and GMA. Furthermore, our results allow direct inferences concerning the relative importance of these variables as determinants of applicant perceptions relative to each other.

Third, we provide information concerning individual differences and applicant reactions in the context of an operational AC. As applicant reactions may differ between selection procedures (Oostrom et al., 2010; Oostrom, Bos-Broekema, Serlie, Born, & Van der Molen, 2012), and because it has been assumed that ACs are more likely to evoke negative psychological effects (Anderson & Goltsi, 2006; Fletcher, 1991), we provide information that helps to understand the factors that influence applicants’ reactions to ACs.
Finally, our sample was comparable to internal candidates who have rarely been subject to applicant reactions research to date due to a lack of opportunities for doing research with this applicant group and the sensitive nature of internal selection procedures (Ford et al., 2009). Thus, our study also helps to broaden knowledge concerning this specific kind of applicant.

Our findings clearly showed that some individuals may be predisposed to react favorably in selection situations, while others may not. In other words, our results indicated that personality variables accounted for incremental variance in applicant perceptions of the AC even after controlling for self-rated and actual AC performance. The core self-evaluations traits were particularly strong predictors of perceived measurement quality and of applicant perceptions of the AC that have the potential to evoke negative psychological effects. On average, the core self-evaluations constructs explained twice as much variance in these perceptions as the Big Five. Trait affectivity was shown to have the weakest contribution of the personality variables that were considered. Nevertheless, trait affectivity was a relevant predictor, especially for perceived absence of strain. Finally, GMA was not related to applicant perceptions of the AC. In general, our results highlight that core self-evaluations that were hardly ever considered in prior studies are more important for applicant perceptions than the commonly studied Big Five.

A somewhat surprising result was the finding that individual differences did not significantly contribute to perceived face validity of the AC in the second step of our regression analyses. In a previous study with students, Oostrom et al. (2010) found that individual differences significantly influenced perceived face validity even beyond self-rated and actual performance. However, in our study, language group membership was significantly correlated with face validity and several individual difference variables, especially with agreeableness and locus of control. This means that some individual
difference variables had lower values in the French-speaking group. It is therefore possible that controlling for language group membership has led to an underestimation of the influence of individual differences on face validity.

Concerning the specific results for the different individual difference variables, the assumed relationships between the Big Five traits were only moderately supported at the correlational level. Specifically, agreeableness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness were related to applicant perceptions of the AC, and all correlations were in the hypothesized direction. Furthermore, in the regression analyses, agreeableness and emotional stability were significant predictors of perceived measurement quality and controllability even after controlling for self-rated and actual performance. In addition, relative weight analyses revealed that especially agreeableness contributed to the explained variance for these perceptions of the AC. These findings are comparable with previous studies (Truxillo et al., 2006) that found agreeableness to be a relatively consistent predictor of applicant perceptions, indicating that agreeable individuals are more considerate and compliant (Costa & McCrae, 1992) during selection and also react more positively to selection procedures.

Taken together, the size of the correlations obtained for the Big Five are moderate and similar to findings from studies that were conducted with candidates who assumed the role of applicants (e.g., Bernerth et al., 2006; Oostrom et al., 2010; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2004). Thus, in general, our results suggest that the Big Five only determine how individuals perceive operational ACs to a rather limited extent.

GMA was not related to applicant perceptions in our study. In connection with findings from previous studies that showed positive relationships between cognitive ability and perceived face validity of cognitive ability tests (Reeder et al., 2012), our results are somewhat unexpected. However, these positive relationships may be due to the fact that individuals who have higher cognitive ability also believe that they will do well on the
cognitive ability test and thus have a positive attitude toward this kind of test. In our study, GMA was also unrelated to self-rated performance. The reason for this may be that ACs differ from cognitive ability tests, where cognitive ability is the most important factor influencing test performance. In contrast, AC performance requires further skills, such as social skills or oral communication, and thus not only GMA accounts for how candidates handle the different exercises in an AC. Therefore, in retrospect, it may not be surprising that dispositional variables other than GMA are more relevant for candidates’ perceptions of the AC. An alternative explanation could be range restriction. Specifically, the variance in candidates’ GMA might have been somewhat restricted because of the selection procedures that candidates underwent prior to being admitted to the AC. For example, the candidates were required to have knowledge in at least two official languages of Switzerland. Since language proficiency is generally related to GMA (e.g., Bertua, Anderson, & Salgado, 2005), it is possible that this preselection condition has led to a range restriction in the candidates’ GMA. However, on the other hand, the broad range of the candidates’ educational backgrounds (apprenticeship to higher degree) may be an argument against strong range restriction of GMA in our sample.

The assumed relationships between the three core self-evaluation dimensions and applicant perceptions were generally supported in our study. Locus of control and generalized self-efficacy were positively related to all applicant perception variables that were considered. In addition, individuals with higher self-esteem also tended to perceive the AC more favorably. Furthermore, locus of control accounted for significant variance in perceived measurement quality, while self-efficacy accounted for significant variance in both perceptions that are relevant for negative psychological effects even after controlling for self-rated and actual performance. Our relative weight analyses also revealed that these core self-

1 We thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to this connection.
evaluations constructs were the most important contributors to variance in applicant perceptions of the AC as compared to the other individual difference constructs. These findings suggest that individuals who believe that they themselves are responsible for important outcomes in their lives and who also believe they are capable of influencing these outcomes, potentially view challenges and specifically selection procedures like the AC more positively and also perceive more controllability and less strain in the AC. Taken together, our results stress the importance of considering core self-evaluations when assessing different applicant perceptions, including perceptions that have the potential to evoke negative psychological effects.

Finally, positive and negative affectivity were both related to perceptions of the AC at the correlational level. On one hand, candidates who were high in positive affectivity perceived formal aspects of the selection procedure, such as face validity, measurement quality, and quality of administration, more positively. On the other hand, individuals who were high in negative affectivity perceived those aspects of the selection procedure that are related to emotional experience and have the potential to evoke negative psychological effects, such as perceived controllability, absence of strain, and quality of administration, more negatively. These findings reflect the two different dimensions and their nature well. Nevertheless, these relationships were not consistent in the regression analyses and negative affectivity was only a relatively important predictor for absence of strain in the relative weight analysis. These findings support the assumption that trait affect can affect applicant perceptions of selection procedures like ACs. However, the impact of trait affectivity may not be as strong and, generally, may mainly be relevant for perceived strain during selection.

Concerning the issue that the present study dealt with internal candidates, the correlations found in the study fell within the range delineated by the few available studies with external applicants (e.g., Truxillo et al., 2006). This might seem somewhat surprising,
given previous arguments that internal candidates might react more intensely to perceptions of a selection procedure (Ford et al., 2009). However, this should not be taken as evidence that internal applicants are not different from external applicants without collecting further data and also a direct comparison of internal versus external applicants. Furthermore, future studies should explore the effect of internal applicants’ perceptions on their subsequent reactions to selection procedures to determine the extent to which internal applicants’ reactions differ from those of external applicants. It is there where one might expect greater differences between internal and external applicants. As pointed out by Ford et al. (2009), individuals who identify with an organization are likely to react more intensely to injustice in the organization according to Lind’s (2001) fairness heuristic theory.

**Practical Implications**

Our findings have meaningful practical implications, given that there may be different candidate pools for different jobs and organizations (Schneider et al., 1998) and that not only do organizations select employees but also employees select organizations that they are willing to work for. Our results imply that it may be beneficial to take the nature of the applicant pool into account while designing selection procedures and dealing with candidates. For example, when dealing with candidates who are low in agreeableness or who attribute important outcomes externally (low locus of control), it may be important to give them more information about the measurement quality of a selection procedure and to provide candidates with sufficient information about the actual administration of a selection procedure (controllability).

Consideration of specific applicants’ needs in selection is important because selection procedures are often the first contact between potential future employees and an organization. Therefore, the impression that is formed during selection may have numerous consequences for the organization. Furthermore, when dealing with internal candidates, employers should
keep in mind that this group of candidates may be especially sensitive to how they perceive internal selection practices, because they know more about them and have a stronger sense of identification with the organization, and therefore might react more intensely to negative experiences during selection than external applicants (Ford et al., 2009). For this reason, to prevent negative reactions and behavioral consequences, it may be important that employers respond to the needs of their specific candidates through all stages of recruitment and selection.

**Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

The present study has some potential limitations. First, we only measured applicant perceptions of the AC before they received feedback. However, because test feedback has been shown to influence applicant perceptions (Van Vianen, Taris, Scholten, & Schinkel, 2004) and may be related to long-term applicant behaviors (Ryan & Ployhart, 2000), it is also important to explore the effect of individual differences on applicant perceptions of the AC after feedback. Future research could address this limitation by studying how applicant perceptions of the AC change after they have received feedback about their results.

Second, we could not test how applicant perceptions of the AC relate to post-selection reactions like perceived organizational attractiveness, organizational commitment, job performance, or the applicants’ wellbeing. Future research should therefore also relate applicant perceptions to later long-term reactions to the AC.

Third, of the 294 candidates in our study, only 13 were females. This possibly questions the generalizability of our findings to female applicants. However, since there is meta-analytical evidence that gender does not influence applicant reactions (Hausknecht et al., 2004), we believe that this limitation may not be substantial. Furthermore, in Vecchio and Anderson’s (2009) study, gender did not influence applicants’ self-rated performance, which is an important predictor of applicant reactions. However, future research might nevertheless
gain additional insights by exploring the interactions between gender and individual differences and their effects on applicant perceptions.

Fourth, we did not measure specific facets of the Big Five in this study. It might well be that the current results underestimate of the impact of the Big Five in comparison to when finer-grained measures of personality are used. For this reason, future research should explore the impact of the Big Five facets on applicant perceptions of ACs.

Fifth, similar to previous studies (e.g., Macan et al., 1994), our study measured applicant perceptions to the entire AC, but we did not determine the extent to which the specific AC exercises contributed to applicant perceptions of the AC. Future research should address this limitation by analyzing the interplay between applicants’ perceptions of specific exercises and their overall perceptions of the AC.

Despite these limitations, our findings also allow important implications for applicant reactions research. Future research should consider the characteristics of the individuals in addition to characteristics of the selection situation in order to obtain a more complete understanding of applicant reactions and their determinants. This means that not only applicant perceptions but also individual differences, like agreeableness and emotional stability of the Big Five, core self-evaluations, or negative affectivity, should be considered when one is interested in applicant reactions to selection.
References


Schallberger, U. (2005). *Kurzskalen zur Erfassung der Positiven Aktivierung, Negativen Aktivierung und Valenz* [Scales for assessing positive activation, negative activation,


### Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations between all study variables

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**Note.** Language was coded as 0 = German and 1 = French. GMA = general mental ability; OAR = overall assessment rating; All scales ranged from 1 to 6 with the exception of the self-esteem scale that ranged from 1 to 5. Values in the diagonal show Cronbach’s α for the different scales. \( N = 294 \).

<sup>1</sup>GMA data were available for 200 candidates.

* \( p < .05 \), ** \( p < .01 \).
Table 2. Hierarchical regressions and relative weight analyses with self-rated performance, OAR, and individual differences predicting applicant perceptions of the AC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Face validity</th>
<th>Measurement quality</th>
<th>Controllability</th>
<th>Absence of strain</th>
<th>Quality of administration</th>
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*Note.* Language was coded as 0 = German and 1 = French. OAR = overall assessment rating; GMA = general mental ability. $N = 200$ due to available measures of GMA.

a Because of rounding to two decimal places, some of the results for $R^2$ and $\Delta R^2$ with a value of .03 were marginally significant, whereas others were not.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$. 