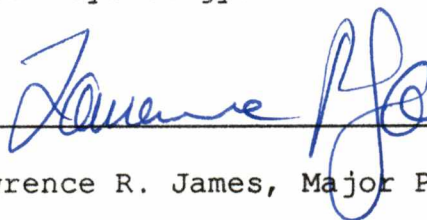


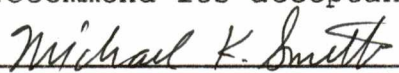
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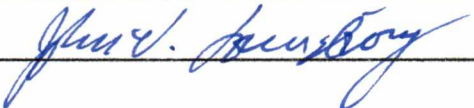
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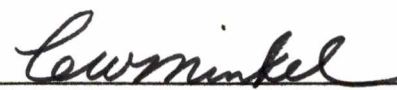
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THE IMPACT OF TARGETS ON THE
INFORMATION PROCESSING OF JUDGES

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Michael D. McIntyre

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ABSTRACT

Studies of halo error in performance rating are typically predicated on the assumption that judges process information consistently across targets. This study used a modified policy capturing technique to explore the possibility that judges integrate information differently as a function of target. Judges (N=146) rated six targets on six dimensions of performance and overall performance, and rating policies were derived for each target. The homogeneity of the target-specific rating policies was tested via sequential moderation analysis. Results indicated that targets influenced rating policies. These results suggest that targets influence the social cognition processes of judges, and that analyzing ratings that have been pooled across targets may result in the loss of important information about these social cognition processes.

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

There is a general trend in Industrial/Organizational Psychology toward viewing performance rating as an information processing task (Borman, 1978; Cooper, 1981; Denisi, Cafferty & Meglino, 1984; Feldman, 1981; Ilgen & Feldman, 1983; Landy & Farr, 1980; Nathan & Lord, 1983). Included in this information processing perspective is the belief halo error in performance rating is at least in part a function of the way that judges process information about targets (Cooper, 1981; Feldman, 1981; Koslowski & Kirsch, 1987; Lance & Woehr, 1986; Mount & Thompson, 1987; Murphy & Balzer, 1986). Broadly defined, halo [error] refers to a judge's tendency to rate a given target at the same level across different dimensions of performance (Bernardin, 1977). More specific definitions of halo refer to the active role that judges' social cognition processes may play in generating the phenomenon. Examples of more specific definitions of halo include a judge's tendency to attend to a global impression of a target rather than to distinguish among levels of performance on different dimensions (Borman, 1975); a judge's tendency to let the assessment of a target on a salient dimension influence his or her evaluation on other dimensions (Blum & Naylor, 1968); and a judge's

inability or unwillingness to distinguish between different dimensions of a target's performance (DeCotiis, 1977).

The definitions above focus on the information processing capacities of judges. Little or no attention is given to the attributes of the targets being evaluated, which is to say that conceptualizations of halo do not consider the potential role that targets might play in halo. Inattention to potential effects of targets on halo appears to be based on the implicit assumption that the social cognition processes of judges that underlie halo are consistent across targets. I believe this implicit assumption to be not only wrong but also a source of misinformation in research on halo. My case is developed theoretically below.

Halo Measurement

Statistically, halo typically refers to a situation in which the observed relationship among a set of performance dimensions, using either correlational or variance measures of relationship, is postulated to be greater than the true relationship among these same performance dimensions (Becker & Cardy, 1986; Fisicaro, 1988; Pulakos, 1984). Statistical estimators of halo are again predicated on the assumption that the social cognition processes of judges are consistent across targets. This point is perhaps most clearly indicated by the fact that halo is typically estimated using ratings that have been pooled over targets (cf. Murphy, 1982). A

problem with this approach is that estimating halo based on pooled targets essentially obscures any differences in the social cognition processes of judges that may be a function of (e.g., moderated by) specific targets. Examples of halo studies may help clarify this point.

A common approach to the study of halo in the field involves a number of judges (typically supervisors) rating a different set of targets (typically their respective subordinates). This approach has been referred to as a nested targets design (e.g., Borman & Dunnette, 1975; Lee, Malone & Greco, 1981; Saal, 1979; Warmke & Billings, 1979). The ratings from each judge are pooled over judges to form a single, overall data set consisting of all ratings from all judges on all targets. Halo is estimated for the entire group of targets and judges based on this pooled data set, using the variance or the correlational approach (Becker & Cardy, 1986). Clearly, no attention is given to the possibility that the presence or degree of halo may vary by such things as type of target, which in part could be engendered by the fact that judges process information about different judges in disparate manners.

The typical laboratory study of halo error involves a crossed research design in which each of the judges rates the same set of targets (e.g., McIntyre, Smith & Hassett, 1984; Murphy & Balzer, 1986; Pulakos, 1984). From this design, halo can be estimated for each individual judge or for the

entire group of judges. In the former case, each judge's ratings are pooled across targets to form a data set for each judge. In the latter case, ratings are pooled across both judges and targets to form an overall data set. In either case, ratings are pooled across targets, implying that there is no significant difference in the way that judges process information about different targets.

Estimates of halo based on ratings that have been pooled across targets will only lead to meaningful statements about the way that judges process information if judges are using the same social cognition processes for all targets. If judges do not process information consistently for each of multiple targets-- that is, if targets moderate how information is processed-- then estimates of halo based on pooled data may be misleading and produce erroneous inferences regarding the social cognition processes that judges use on a specific type of target. The goal of this study was to test the assumption that judges process information consistently across targets.

Policy Capturing

Information processing is generally treated as a series of cognitive operations that includes activities such as selecting, encoding, storing and integrating information about targets (cf. Borman, 1978; Cooper, 1981; Feldman, 1981). This study concerns the integration aspect of

information processing. As used here, information integration refers to the way that judges combine various pieces of information in making an overall evaluation of a target (Feldman, 1981; Hobson & Gibson, 1983; Zedeck & Kafry, 1977).

Policy capturing is a statistical technique used often to assess the information integration strategy or rating policy of a single judge (Naylor & Wherry, 1965). A modified version of policy capturing was employed in the present research to assess how targets might act as main effects to influence the strategies or rating policies used by judges in general. The modified policy capturing procedure involved a group of judges who first rated the same six targets on six dimensions of performance and on overall performance. I then used these data to attempt to uncover a rating policy on the across-judge data for each target. Specifically, the rating policy for a given target was estimated by regressing overall performance of the target on the six dimensions of performance for that target. The sample was composed of judges, all of whom had rated the target. The obtained regression equation represents the way that judges weighted information on the six dimensions in determining the overall performance of the target. I refer to the rating policy generated for the target as the "target-specific rating policy."

A target-specific rating policy was computed for each of

the six targets, using six separate modified policy capturing analyses. If targets engender the same social cognition processes (i.e., if information is weighted consistently across targets), then target-specific rating policies would be the same or similar for each of the six targets. It is noteworthy that by having a single group of judges rate the same set of targets, differences in target-specific rating policies could be attributed to the impact of targets on the information processing of judges. Thus, similarity among target-specific rating policies suggests that targets do not influence-- that is, moderate-- the information processing of judges. Conversely, differences in target-specific rating policies suggests that targets engender different social cognition processes on the part of judges.

It is also noteworthy that the approach I used to test for the possibility of target-specific rating policies presupposes and is dependent on the presence of differences in the levels of ratings that different judges assign to the same target. That is, in order for correlations to occur among performance dimensions for judges' ratings of a single target, systematic differences must exist in the levels that judges assigned to that target. I expect such differences in level to be a function of the interaction between a specific judge and a specific target, which produces what might be referred to as a "target-specific and judge-specific rating policy" (a within-judge issue). My concern with a target-

specific rating policy focuses on the target-specific portion of the interaction, and is predicated on the assumption that differences in levels of ratings over judges within a target are based on the same target-engendered policy.

Specifically, we predict that (a) if a target-specific rating policy exists for a target, then (b) the rank orders of ratings for that target across performance dimensions will be similar among judges even though the absolute levels of the ratings vary across these judges. In short, it is being suggested that judges can agree that certain dimensions are salient for a given target as indicated by relative similarity in rank orders of ratings, without agreeing on the absolute levels of ratings assigned to the target on the dimensions.

The person perception literature is replete with reasons as to why judges might assign different levels to the same target. Differences in rating levels could result from differential selection, attention, and encoding, as well as different uses of implicit theories, cognitive categories, judgemental heuristics, and attributional biases on the part of judges (Bruner & Tagiuri, 1954; Cantor & Mishel, 1979; Fiske & Taylor, 1984; Miller & Ross, 1975; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974).

Research Design

A fully crossed research design was employed in which

146 judges rated six targets on six specific dimensions of performance and on overall performance. Target-specific rating policies were then derived for each target by regressing the ratings of overall performance on the ratings of the specific dimensions of performance for the sample of 146 judges. The resulting regression equations, target-specific rating policies, were compared via sequential moderation analysis (James, Joe & Irons, 1982) to ascertain if they varied as a function of target.

SECTION II

METHODS

Procedure

Judges (N=146) in this study were undergraduate students from a large southeastern university. Ninety-six of the judges were female (66%), sixty-five of the judges were social science majors (45%), and the mean age of the judges was twenty-four years (SD=6.51).

Targets in this study were six hypothetical professors who were described in 200-word vignettes. Judges were instructed to read all six vignettes and then rate each target on seven items: six specific dimensions of performance and overall performance. The vignettes were presented to the judges in varying orders to avoid order effects. The six specific dimensions of performance included in this study are common to teacher evaluations (cf. Braskamp, Brandenburg, & Ory, 1984), and were as follows: 1) enthusiasm for course content, 2) ability to motivate students, 3) knowledge of subject matter, 4) concern for students, 5) organization for class periods, and 6) fairness of grading. The overall performance item referred to the overall effectiveness of the target as a professor. All the ratings were made on the following 5-point scale: 1) extremely low, 2) low, 3) average, 4) high, and 5) extremely high.

Stimulus Materials

The development of the professor vignettes was based on traditional theories of achievement motivation, affiliation, and social influence (cf. Atkinson, 1987; McClelland, 1985; Raynor, 1978). In the context of this study, achievement motivation referred to the extent to which the professor was concerned with the academic achievement of the students; affiliation referred to the extent to which the professor was interested in establishing positive, affective relationships with students; and social influence referred to the extent to which the professor was interested in having influence over the students. The vignettes were designed to provide a diverse set of targets for the judges, with emphasis placed on potential combinations of achievement motivation and affiliation. Accordingly, one professor was described as high on achievement motivation and high on need for affiliation; one as high on achievement motivation and low on need for affiliation; one as low on achievement motivation and high on need for affiliation; one as low on achievement motivation and low on need for affiliation; one as high on need for social influence; and one as low on need for affiliation and incompetent. Two of the vignettes are presented below in full.

"Professor Barnett teaches an upper level course that you need to graduate. He is a rather quiet individual who does not have much interest in developing personal

relationships with students. Basically, he comes to the classroom to do a job and that's what he does. He comes to class, lectures, and leaves. His lectures are very straightforward. He follows the textbook closely and focuses primarily on basic principles. He is never critical of authorities in the area and does not spend much time exploring new ways of looking at things. Professor Barnett is basically interested in perpetuating the status quo and expects students to conform to the conventional wisdom in his field. He cites authorities regularly and expects students to be able to do the same. Professor Barnett takes class role regularly and uses it in determining grades. His tests are as straightforward as his lectures. If you memorize the basic points in the text, you will do well in his course. Passing his course is no problem for most people."

"Professor Capshaw teaches an upper level course that you need to graduate. He is an intelligent individual and an expert in his field. He is also very arrogant and very concerned with commanding the respect of his students. He is authoritative and pushes students hard intellectually without much concern for their emotional well-being. He is very intimidating and at times he can be both critical and condescending to students. He requires students to make appointments well in advance to see him outside of class. Professor Capshaw has high expectations for his students and is very demanding of them. His lectures are very informative

and he goes far beyond the topics covered in the text. He really makes students think and work hard. Students must come to class well-prepared. He will not back up and review the basics, nor will he slow down and wait for students to catch up if they fall behind. Professor Capshaw also pushes students hard in terms of exams. His exams require students to really understand the course material. Most of his students work hard and pass the course, though only the exceptional performers get an A or a B. Students who do well in his class really feel that they have learned something."

SECTION III

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

To reiterate briefly, target-specific rating policies were computed by regressing overall performance on the six specific performance dimensions for each set of within-target ratings. The unstandardized regression weights (b weights) within each of the six resulting regression equations represent the weight that the judges assigned to each performance dimension in determining the overall performance for that target. An overall rating policy, based on the pooled, within-target data was also computed. The target-specific rating policies and the pooled rating policy are presented in Table 1.* The means and standard deviations of the dimensions are presented in Table 2.

To assess whether the rating policies of judges would vary as a function of target, the homogeneity of the target-specific rating policies was assessed using sequential moderation analysis (James, Joe, & Irons, 1982). Sequential moderation analysis provides a multivariate test of the homogeneity of the b weights of correlated regression

*All tables and figures may be found in the Appendix.

equations. The analysis was conducted two equations at a time (i.e., pairwise) for a total of fifteen separate tests (an overall test is still in the stage of development). Results of the sequential moderation analysis are presented in Table 3. These results indicate that twelve of the fifteen possible comparisons of target-specific rating policies provided significant differences (using a conservative alpha level set at $\alpha=.01$). Moreover, whereas sequential moderation techniques have yet to be developed that would allow for testing the part-whole relations involved in contrasting within-target rating policies versus the pooled rating policy, it also appears that the pooled rating policy differs from the target-specific rating policies.

The rating policies for two sets of within-target ratings and for the pooled ratings are presented graphically in Figure 1. This figure demonstrates visually what the regression equations show mathematically, namely that judges use different rating policies for different targets. The importance or weight that judges assign specific performance dimensions varies systematically across targets. That is, judges systematically focus on different performance dimensions in determining overall performance for disparate targets.

SECTION IV

DISCUSSION

Studies of halo in performance rating are typically predicated on the assumption that judges process information in much the same manner for each of a set of different targets. The results of this initial effort to assess the effects of targets on rating policies used by judges suggest that some types of targets at least may influence the rating policies employed by judges. This conclusion was supported by the results of a modified form of policy capturing analysis wherein judges' assessments of overall performance were regressed on judges' ratings on six dimensions of performance for each of a set of six targets. The presence of a significant b weight for a dimension on any one of these regressions indicated that judges' ratings of a given target were relatively consistent in the sense that judges tended to rank order the target in a similar manner across the salient dimensions. As discussed, the presence of significant b weights also indicated a lack of absolute consistency in judges' ratings inasmuch as differences had to exist in the levels of the within-target ratings on dimensions with significant b weights (a necessary condition to generate covariation). However, my concern here was not in examining the specific interaction between each target and each judge

that produced absolute differences in the ratings. Rather, I predicted that, even though judges would differ absolutely in their ratings of a given target on a given dimension, the rank ordering of these differences would be systematically related over performance dimensions and overall performance for the target. Moreover, examination of the systematic nature of these rank orderings within a target via correlational analysis would reveal a statistical pattern of b weights that, when compared to patterns revealed for other targets via sequential moderation techniques, would indicate the presence of target-specific rating policies. In general, the statistical results supported these predictions.

In a less technical, substantive sense, a significant b weight for a dimension indicated that judges as a group perceived the dimension as important in relation to the overall performance of the target. It is also suggested by the sequential moderation analysis that the importance or salience of the performance dimensions varied across targets. That is, different dimensions were salient for different targets. To illustrate, fairness of grading was the most consistently salient performance dimension, being significant for five of the six targets. Ability to motivate was a salient dimension when the professor failed to demonstrate both an academic interest and a personal interest in the students. Concern for students was salient to the judges when the professor's interest in challenging the students

intellectually was more prominent than his interest in developing personal relationships with students.

Organization for class was a salient dimension when the professor demonstrated a clear lack of organization, failed to make a balanced presentation of course material, or failed to take the course too seriously. Enthusiasm for course content was salient to the judges when the professor failed to present the students with more information than was provided in the textbook. Knowledge of subject matter was a salient dimension when the professor clearly failed to demonstrate an adequate amount of knowledge.

The results described above suggest a pattern in how general rating policies varied as a function of target. To explore for the possibility of a pattern, we examined the two dimensions for each of the six targets with the highest and lowest mean rating. Of the six highest rated dimensions, only one was salient (i.e., had a significant b weight). Of the six lowest rated dimensions, five were salient. In light of the fact that a low mean rating for a dimension represents negative information about a target, this finding implies that negative information about targets was more salient to judges than positive information. This finding is consistent with other findings in person perception research that suggest that judges place greater weight on negative information than positive information (Fiske, 1980; Steiner & Rain, 1989).

The presence of significant b weights in the regression analysis also indicates that there were individual differences in the way that judges interpreted the stimuli considered to be salient. The source of individual differences for judges remains an unanswered question awaiting the identification of other causal variables and/or the application of more sensitive measurement techniques.

In terms of practical implications, the results of this study highlight the complexity and subjective nature of the performance evaluation process. Judges may vary their rating policies across targets, and judges may interpret information differently within a target. The finding that targets engender different rating policies has direct implications for the use of pooled ratings to examine the social cognition processes of judges. If judges use different rating policies for different targets, then analyzing ratings that have been pooled across targets may lead to misleading or inaccurate conclusions about the way that judges process information. This study suggests that a pooled rating policy may not reflect any of the target-specific rating policies on which it was based.

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APPENDIX

Table 1

The unstandardized regression weights (b weights) for the regressions of overall performance on performance dimensions.

			Targets				
Performance Dimensions	1	2	3	4	5	6	Pooled Ratings
Enthusiasm	.20*	-.10	.27*	.09	.06	.07	.07*
Ability to Motivate	.21*	.28*	.28*	.10	.22*	.10	.24*
Knowledge	.12	.02	.17	-.04	.27*	.08	.15*
Concern	.11	.21*	.08	.35*	.08	.16*	.16*
Organization	.01	-.02	.23*	.11	.21*	.29*	.08*
Fairness	.30*	.33*	.14*	.26*	.03	.26*	.27*
R ²	.41*	.43*	.59*	.53*	.54*	.49*	.74*

*Significant at $p < .05$

Table 2

The mean and standard deviation in parentheses of each dimension.

				Targets			
Performance Dimensions	1	2	3	4	5	6	Pooled Ratings
Enthusiasm	2.23 (.77)	3.82 (1.00)	3.27 (.90)	4.49 (.64)	1.38 (.61)	4.00 (.87)	3.20 (1.35)
Ability to Motivate	2.16 (.77)	3.50 (1.17)	3.25 (.90)	4.42 (.67)	1.42 (.55)	3.38 (1.00)	3.38 (1.30)
Knowledge	3.18 (.72)	4.62 (.59)	3.47 (.68)	4.62 (.60)	1.64 (.73)	3.64 (.88)	3.53 (1.23)
Concern	2.03 (.83)	1.99 (1.04)	3.98 (.99)	4.06 (.88)	1.40 (.59)	2.73 (1.19)	2.70 (1.38)
Organization	3.53 (.93)	4.36 (.78)	3.52 (.65)	4.37 (.68)	1.25 (.55)	3.69 (.86)	3.45 (1.29)
Fairness	3.45 (.86)	2.65 (.99)	3.90 (.79)	3.93 (.91)	1.52 (.76)	1.79 (.93)	2.87 (1.30)
Overall Performance	2.65 (.78)	3.16 (.96)	3.40 (.85)	4.18 (.78)	1.34 (.53)	2.73 (.86)	2.91 (1.18)

Table 3

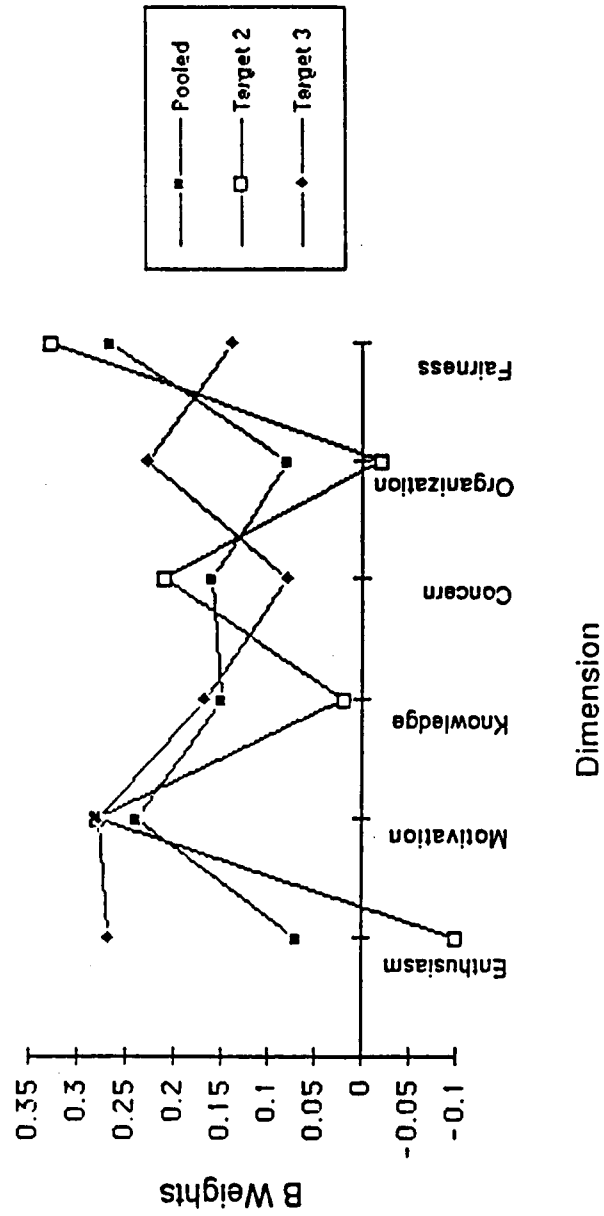
Results of sequential moderation analysis
(Hotelling's T^2 tests).

	Target 1	Target 2	Target 3	Target 4	Target 5	Target 6
Target 1		44.71*	28.25*	17.52	21.30*	13.84
Target 2			133.82*	21.38*	71.31*	111.68*
Target 3				113.72*	48.09*	53.86*
Target 4					36.16*	22.66*
Target 5						15.36

*Significant value for Hotelling's T^2 at $\alpha=.01$.

The T^2 critical value for 6 and 145 degrees of freedom at $\alpha=.01$ is approximately 18.

Figure 1.
Rating Policies



VITA

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