

Not knowing what you don't know

How Claiming to Know False Business Concepts is Indicative of Organizational Problems

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Abstract

Research has demonstrated that claiming to know information that does not exist is indicative of a wide variety of negative outcomes such as: cheating, self-deception, and overconfidence. This phenomenon of “overclaiming” knowledge can also be indicative of psychological traits such as psychopathy and narcissism. We adapted the widely used overclaiming technique for use in business settings. Across multiple samples and surveys, we found that individuals who claim to know business concepts that do not exist are narcissistic and misrepresent their abilities and limitations. These findings also had implications for organizational citizenship and willingness to take instructions. The overclaiming technique, however, is a surreptitious measure, not readily amenable to response bias or detection. These findings have implications for red flags among personnel disputes, hiring decisions, and employee screening.