

## University of Groningen

### Individual accountability

Turusbekova, N.

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*

2007

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Turusbekova, N. (2007). *Individual accountability: The interplay between task, social context and personality attributes*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. s.n.

#### Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

#### Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

# 5. Accountability and self-promotion: the unexpected impact of performance orientation

## 5.1 Introduction

The most important implication of our studies of accountability until now has been that accountability is a multi dimensional phenomenon, and that the interplay of accountability factors seems to be dependent on the motivational characteristics of individuals. We have used goal orientation, to incorporate individual differences into our analysis and to examine their potential interactive effects on the interplays of the accountability variables. In some cases whether or not accountability factors interact with each other seems to be related to the type of goal orientation of an individual and to the level of this orientation. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the interactivity between the accountability factors and to identify the role of goal orientation in the way the accountability factors influenced self-promotion. When faced with accountability, the agents may be expected to manage impressions of others. As Ammeter, Douglas, Ferris and Goka (2004, p.59) put it: “being held accountable can produce beneficial effects for the organization, but it also increases the need to *appear* competent for a variety of audiences.” Often this need is addressed by using self-promotion, i.e. trying to give prominence to one’s achievement and understate one’s failures. Indeed, self-promoters tend to claim responsibility for positive events, or present events for which they are responsible in a more positive light (Stevens & Kristof, 1995). But what happens when this responsibility is made personal and when other accountability factors are applied to potential self-promoters? Does a certain type and level of goal orientation strengthen the impact of the accountability factors? The two studies presented in this chapter give answers to these questions.

## 5.2 Individual Accountability

The definition of accountability used in this chapter is “...a need to justify or

defend a decision or action to some audience which has potential reward and sanction power' (Frink & Klimoski, 1998, p. 9) where such rewards and sanctions are perceived as contingent on fulfilling the expectations of the audience. An accountable individual is referred to as an agent, since some agency is implied in the concept of accountability. Overlooking an agent is an audience that has the reward and sanction power and bases its decisions on the monitoring and evaluating on the agent's activities.

Accountability should not be viewed as a unitary construct according to some authors (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999; Frink & Ferris, 1998; Emans, Turusbekova, Broekhuis & Molleman, 2004; DeZoort, Harrison & Taylor, 2006). In order to produce the necessary effect on the agent, as the definition used throughout the chapters implies, accountability is comprised of a few factors. First of all it should encompass task clarity, which reduces the ambiguity about the object of accountability of the agent. Second, responsibility for the task should be made personal or uniquely pertaining to the agent, to which we refer as personalized responsibility. Personalized responsibility is defined in relation to the social context of the agent and in relation to other agents' responsibilities. Next, to create effective accountability conditions, there should be a particular audience to observe and evaluate the agent's behavior. The potential evaluation is made salient by the audience power to reward or punish the agent, based on the outcomes of the agent's behavior. The last component is feedback that the audience provides to the agent regarding his or her performance of the task. For more elaborated information about the accountability components, the reader is referred to chapters 1 and 2.

### **5.3 Impression management: self-promotion**

As defined by Rosenfeld, Giacalone and Riordan (1995, p. 4) impression management "is the process whereby people seek to control the image others have of them". The resulting image or identity reflects how an agent is regarded in social interactions. Accountability can trigger impression management as it is known for producing a rich context for it (Lewis & Neighbors, 2005; Ammeter, Douglas, Ferris & Goka, 2004; Frink & Ferris, 1998; Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1982; Dubnick, 2005; Lee, Herr & Kardes, 1999). This study examines the components comprising this context.

In organizations impression management plays a pivotal role because of its potential to contribute positively or negatively to organizational functioning (Rosenfeld, Giacalone & Riordan, 1995). While impression management comes in different forms, self-promotion is a particular impression management strategy that, according to Ammeter et al. (2004), the employees are likely to use when they are made accountable. *Self-promotion* means emphasizing one's positive characteristics in an attempt to elicit attributions of competence (Stevens & Kristof, 1995; Turnley & Bolino, 2001). It is a behavior, exhibited when one wants to underline one's achievements and/or play down one's failures.

While making claims of competence is necessary, self-promotion is associated with boastful presentation, and is not an effective behavioral strategy since it is perceived negatively by others (Pfeffer, Fong, Cialdini & Portnoy, 2006). Self-promotion can inflate and distort the information about the agents, events or products. It can lead management to wrong conclusions or faulty decision-making regarding the agents. Studying self-promotion as a viable outcome of the accountability factors is important as it may show what combinations of the accountability variables are associated with this kind of impression management behavior.

Self-promotion is a strategy used to create and sustain a certain identity or an image. The necessity felt by the accountable agents to create such image depends on what they believe about themselves. In other words, their personalities play a role in determining to what extent they engage in self-promotion. Some agents may be more inclined to self-promote than others. We expect that self-promotion, as a behavior exhibited in social context, may be influenced by the accountability factors as well as by an agent's motivational orientation. In particular, accountability amplifies challenges and threats (Schlenker, Weigold & Doherty, 1991), which may prompt individuals to use self-promotion. Goal orientation also influences the way individuals react to the cues in their social environment and regulate their behavior in social situations.

## **5.4 Goal orientation**

Goal orientation is an individual difference variable that indicates what type of goals an individual is likely to prefer. The goal preference is based on what he or she believes about him or herself and what he or she finds motivating. Usually two

kinds of goal orientation are distinguished: performance orientation and mastery orientation.

Performance orientation reflects the extent to which an individual is predisposed to goals that allow demonstrating existing task competences. The purpose of this demonstration is comparing favorably to others, gaining favorable judgment and avoiding negative judgment by others (Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996; Brett & VandeWalle, 1999; VandeWalle, 2001). In the studies of Dweck and colleagues (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988) performance orientation was associated with apprehension of failure and demonstration of incompetence and shunning disapproval of others. In various studies the desire of performance oriented agents to work hard was insignificant (VandeWalle, Ganesan, Challagalla & Brown, 2000; VandeWalle & Cummings, 1997; Ames & Archer, 1988).

The second kind of goal orientation is mastery orientation. It is the extent to which an individual seeks goals that allow learning new competencies by acquiring new skills and managing new situations (Button et al, 1996; Brett & VandeWalle, 1999; VandeWalle, 2001). Mastery oriented agents believe in incremental improvement in their abilities and are motivated by learning. They are open to challenges, intrinsically motivated and persistent (Kozlowski & Bell, 2006).

We expect that performance orientation, rather than mastery orientation will influence the relationship between accountability factors and self-promotion. Performance oriented agents are concerned with producing and sustaining the image of good performers. They differ from mastery oriented agents in that they are focused on competing and comparing themselves to others. Concerns with how people perceive them and the desire to avoid disapproval may motivate their impression management attempts (Rosenfeld, Giacalone & Riordan, 1995). Performance oriented agents are expected to spread the information about their (presumed or actual) superior performance more actively than mastery oriented agents. Based on the above, self-promotion is the domain where we expect performance orientation to play a more prominent role than mastery orientation, although we do not exclude that mastery oriented agents self-promote. In the hypotheses presented below we test for moderating effects of performance orientation on the relationship between the accountability factors and self-promotion. For comparison, the moderating effect of mastery orientation on the relationship between the accountability variables and self-promotion is also

investigated.

## 5.5 Model and hypotheses

According to Tetlock (1985, 1983) in accountability situations, people act as intuitive politicians who try to maximize their status and seek approval of others. Having said that accountability as a whole may stimulate self-promotion, we go deeper into what is the exact mechanism behind it and how its individual factors and their interplays are associated with self-promotion. Our model (see Figure 5.1) depicts the relationships between the accountability factors and self-promotion, which are integrated in and explained as part of the broader context of the moderating effect of performance orientation. We present the hypotheses explicating the moderating effect of goal orientation on the relationship between each of the accountability variables and self-promotion. The hypotheses about two-way interactions are intermitted with the hypotheses about three-way interactions: the interplays of the pairs of accountability variables and their relationship with self-promotion, moderated by goal orientation.

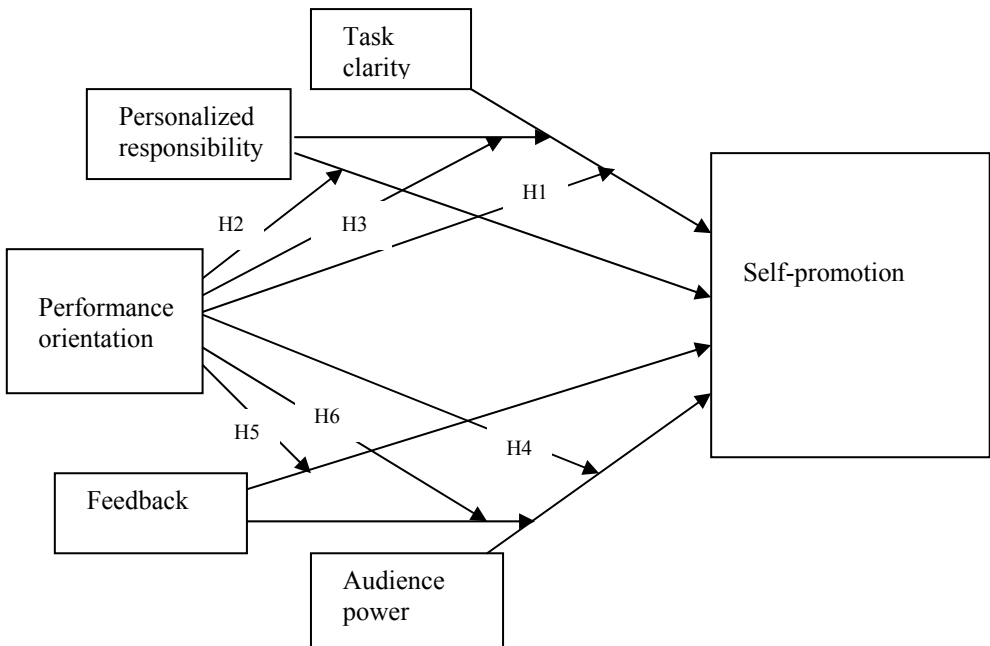


Figure 5.1: Research model (4)

Failing to carry out a clear task will be a big blow to the image of performance oriented agents, as failing to perform a clear task may seem worse than failing to perform a vague task. If performance oriented agents are faced with a clear task, to reduce potential damages to their image in case they show poor performance, they will be prompted to use more self-promotion. If a task is vague, a failure to perform can be attributed to its ambiguity. It reduces the chances that the ability of the agent will be questioned. Thus, task clarity may force performance oriented agents to show increased self-promotion. Hypothesis 1: higher performance orientation is associated with a stronger positive relationship between task clarity and self-promotion.

The next accountability factor, the influence of which may be moderated by performance orientation, is personalized responsibility. In the study by Caldwell & O'Reilly (1982, p. 134) formal assigned responsibility "intensified subjects' tendency to manipulate information to be presented to others". Self-promotion is a way of such manipulation of information, and personalized responsibility by itself can thus be related to higher levels of self-promotion. Performance oriented agents have apprehension of a failure and may use self-promotion as a strategy to ensure that they are perceived as good performers. Therefore the need of personally responsible agents to self-promote will be strengthened if they are also performance oriented. Hypothesis 2: higher performance orientation is associated with a stronger positive relationship between personalized responsibility and self-promotion.

When performance oriented agents are given clear tasks, and are made personally responsible for them, their reaction may be an increase in self-promotion. Task clarity is expected to interact with personalized responsibility because both revolve around the task. Task clarity is a task characteristic that originates in the task while personalized responsibility has the task as a focal point. Being personally responsible for something clear can in principle strengthen the impact of clarity. This relationship is expected to be strengthened particularly by performance orientation. The combination of task clarity and personalized responsibility may create more opportunities for public personal failure, and consequently will be associated with the strongest need to self-promote. If task clarity is not accompanied by personalized responsibility, a failure can be easily attributed to others and thus stops being perceived as personal failure. In the case

personalized responsibility is not coupled with a clear task, any personal failure can be easily negated or it can be attributed to task ambiguity, rather than to the lack of personal ability. It thus stops to be a public failure. The combination of task clarity and personalized responsibility, however, leaves no room for other-attribution or negation. It thus forces the agents who are driven by performance orientation to do something else in order to preserve their image of being competent, in other words, to put some work into self-promotion. Hypothesis 3 runs: the higher the performance orientation, the stronger will be the impact of personalized responsibility on the relationship between task clarity and self-promotion.

Other accountability factors: feedback and audience power are also likely to trigger self-promotion of performance oriented individuals. According to VandeWalle, Cron and Slocum (2001) performance oriented agents interpret feedback as “evaluative and judgmental information about the self” (p. 631) and upon receiving feedback their attention may be shifted away from the task to self-attention. When faced with feedback performance oriented agents may be expected to self-promote in order to preserve their image of competence. Hypothesis 4: higher performance orientation is associated with a stronger relationship between feedback and self-promotion.

The presence of a powerful audience by itself facilitates impression management (Rosenfeld, Giacalone & Riordan, 1995). Self-promotion in front of a powerful audience is widespread, for instance presenting oneself in very positive light during job interviews, where a powerful audience (interviewers) make hiring decisions. Performance evaluations of employees carried out by their supervisors may prompt the employees to increase their self-promotion. As far as performance oriented agents are concerned, they already try to produce a certain impression of competence, therefore, performance orientation is likely to augment the self-promoting behavior of agents who have powerful audiences. Hypothesis 5: higher performance orientation is associated with a stronger positive relationship between audience power and self-promotion.

Feedback and audience power are expected to interact with each other because both are external to the task and the agent. Both are related to the outside opinions and outside parties. In organizations the judgment of the observing audience is transferred via feedback to make the agent knowledgeable of the results of his or her activities. Significance of the audience to the agent is likely to strengthen the



importance of feedback, given by this audience. This qualifies feedback and audience power for possible interactions.

By receiving feedback from a powerful audience performance oriented agents are reminded that they are being monitored, and that this may stimulate them to use more self-promotion. They will do so in order to try and strengthen the image of being good performers. Audience power without feedback creates a niche of obscurity where performance oriented agents will feel no threat of public failure. Feedback without audience power reduces the weight of the positive or negative publicity since the potential exhibition of ability or a potential failure will only be noted by the people who do not have the power to affect the agent's situation. Based on this we formulate hypothesis 6: the higher the performance orientation, the stronger will be the impact of audience power on the relationship between feedback and self-promotion.

## **5.6 Study 1**

Two field studies<sup>5</sup> were carried out in two different companies, in order to have samples coming from diverse organizational backgrounds, with different levels of accountability factors and outcomes. These studies are presented separately and not as one research population because the two companies have different contexts. The first study was carried out at a semi-commercial company, while the second study was conducted at a public organization. Moreover, the organization of the first study went through a highly dynamic episode, since the company was recently created as a result of a merger, while the organization in the second study was not faced with any large organizational changes. These differences may have influenced the social environments, and help us to find out if our hypotheses hold for such different contexts. In that sense they support the external validity of our reasoning. In this sub-chapter, the first study is presented.

---

<sup>5</sup> Both formed part of more encompassing studies. Other parts of these studies have been presented in chapter 4 of this thesis.

## 5.7 Method study 1

### 5.7.1 Participants study 1

The participating semi-commercial company is active in the field of water management in the South of the Netherlands. The main service of the company is water purification. In 2002 the company was transformed as a result of a fusion of parts of two other water management institutions<sup>6</sup>. Recent changes in their tasks were reported by 95% of the respondents.

All 306 employees were sent a questionnaire. 186 respondents returned the questionnaires, which constituted a 61% response rate. The type of tasks of the employees ranged from, for instance, laboratory work, and issuing permits to optimizing project management, from IT to installing water purification systems and from managerial tasks to audit and administrative tasks.

In terms of education, the sample employees generally had vocational training. 12% of the respondents had managerial functions. There were 71% male and 29% female respondents. Average tenure with the company was 12.6 years, and the average age was 44 years. These averages were similar to those of the whole company.

### 5.7.2 Procedures study 1<sup>7</sup>

The information about the coming up study was first posted on the company's intranet. Then every company employee received an e-mail, with the invitation to fill out a web-based questionnaire. Additionally, hard copies of the questionnaire were sent to their homes. Three weeks later a reminder was sent by email. The web answers amounted to 64%, accordingly, returned paper questionnaires amounted to 36%.

Self-reported questionnaires were used. Self-reporting was vital for reasons of confidentiality. If e.g. task performance scores had to be obtained from elsewhere, we would have had to match the performance scores with the rest of the item

---

<sup>6</sup> The data were gathered in 2005 along with the data gathered for the study, presented in chapter 4.

<sup>7</sup> Apart from the measurement of the dependent variable, the procedures are the same as the ones described in chapter 4, as part of the study presented there.

scores. This would have had to be done in breach of confidentiality and resulted in a lower response rate.

### 5.7.3 Measures study 1

7-point Likert-type items were used, anchored by *strongly disagree* (score 1) and *strongly agree* (score 7). The respondents were asked to pick out a particular task and the subsequent questions referred to this task. It had to be a task on which the respondents spent considerable time. The task preferably had to have undergone some recent changes. This kind of task was used for two reasons. First, the task had to be salient, so that accountability dynamics would be applicable to it. Second, because of the novelty of the task the differences in responses between the respondents who are mastery oriented and those who are performance oriented were supposed to be strengthened.

The five independent variables in the hypotheses were measured in the following way. All items in English are presented in Appendix E and in Dutch in Appendix F. Task clarity ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ) was measured by means of five items (e.g. "The task is clear to me"), based on Emans et al (2004), Locke and Latham (1990) and Breugh & Colihan (1994). Feedback ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ) was measured with eight items like "My supervisor provides me with a lot of feedback about how well I am doing this task". Some of these items came from the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman & Oldham /JDS, 1980), others from Emans et al. (2004). Personalized responsibility ( $\alpha = 0.62$ ) was measured with three items such as "I do not share responsibility for carrying out this task with others" from Emans et al. Audience power ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ) consisted of four items based on Emans et al. and Hinkin & Schriesheim (1989) e.g. "Evaluation by my supervisor regarding this task may influence whether or not I get a pay raise". Performance orientation ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ) was measured by three items based on Janssen (2002), e.g. "In managing this task it is important to me that I perform better than others in my working environment". Mastery orientation ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ) as an additional independent variable (see chapter's introduction) was measured by three items based on Janssen "I need to master everything that is necessary to perform this task as well as possible" is an example of an item from this scale. The scale for self-promotion ( $\alpha = 0.67$ ), the dependent variable in the hypotheses, was devised from the Job Focused Tactics of Wayne & Ferris (1990) e.g. "I try to make a negative event related to this task not appear as

severe as it actually is to my supervisor” and had three items.

### 5.7.4 Preliminary analysis study 1

Since only self-report questionnaires were used, a confirmatory factor analysis was carried out in order to estimate the likelihood of a common method variance. Parameter estimates were computed using the maximum likelihood method included in the LISREL 8.51 computer package. Since we intended to measure seven constructs (i.e., task clarity, personalized responsibility, feedback, audience power, performance orientation, mastery orientation, and self-promotion) we selected a model containing seven first-order latent constructs. To check for mono-method bias, we tested a model with only one latent variable. Comparing one factor model with the seven factors model showed that the solution with eight factors is substantially better than a single factor solution ( $\Delta\chi^2$  [21] =2781.11  $p<.001$ ). This confirmed that more than one factor underlies the data, which implies that common method variance is not likely to be a significant problem.

## 5.8 Results study 1

Characteristics of the company under study, based on the means in Table 5.1, are as follows. Task clarity is high (mean of 5.84 out of possible 7). The levels of feedback (4.01) and personalized responsibility (4.06) are moderate, which cannot be said about audience power (2.90) that is on the lower side.

**Table 5.1. Study 1. Means, Standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha's and Intercorrelations**

Variable	M	SD	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Task clarity	5.84	0.84	.92	-						
2 Feedback	4.01	1.18	.89	.07	-					
3 Personalized responsibility	4.06	1.38	.62	-.08	-.02	-				
4 Audience power	2.90	1.41	.93	-.12*	.31*	-.04	-			
5 Mastery orientation	6.06	0.56	.78	.09	.03	-.02	.12	-		
6 Performance orientation	3.80	1.21	.82	.09	.11	.04	.16*	.26*	-	
7 Self-promotion	2.26	0.84	.67	-.17*	.10	.03	.27*	-.09	.13*	-

(N=186)

Mastery orientation (6.06) is high and performance orientation (3.80) is neither high nor low. The employees of this company appear to have a rather low level of self-promoting behavior (2.26).

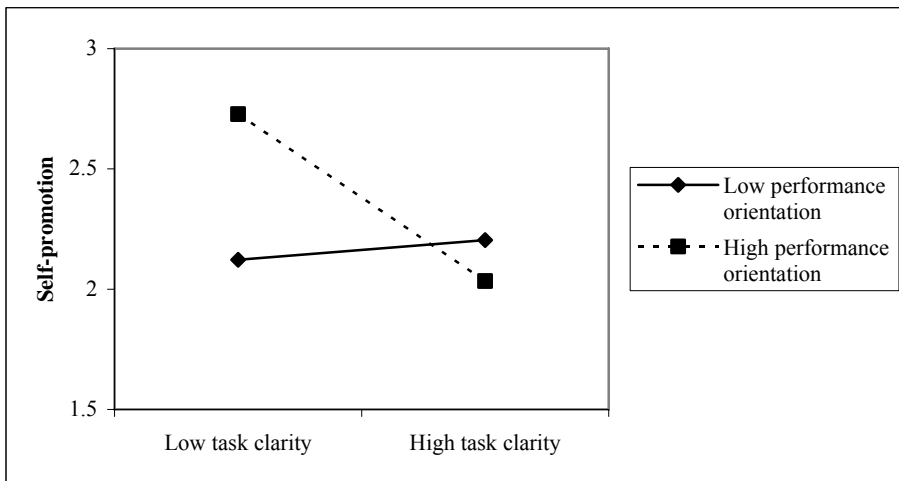
In terms of correlations of the independent variables with the dependent variable, we see the following. Task clarity is negatively correlated with self-promotion, while audience power and performance orientation are positively correlated with self-promotion.

Moderated regression analyses were carried out to test the hypotheses. The results are discussed in the order of the hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 posited a strengthening of the task clarity – self-promotion relationship by performance orientation. The direct effects indicate that clear tasks are negatively associated with self-promotion and that being performance oriented is positively associated with self-promotion. There is a negative interaction between task clarity and performance orientation (see Table 5.2). This contradicts hypothesis 1 and therefore this hypothesis is rejected. The sign of the interaction points to a mutual impact of task clarity and performance orientation as regards their effects on self-promotion, in such a way that those effects became less positive and/or more negative. The graphical representation of the two-way interaction (see Figure 5.2) suggests that highly performance oriented agents show higher self-promotion when they have vague tasks and lower self-promotion when they have clear tasks. For agents who are low in performance orientation, there seems to be no association between task clarity and self-promotion, since the line representing this combination of variables (the solid line) is rather flat.

**Table 5.2 Study 1. Self-Promotion regressed on task clarity and performance orientation**

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$
Task clarity	-.15	.07	-.15**
Performance orientation	.11	.05	.16**
$R^2 = .053^{**}$			
Task clarity x Performance orientation	-.10	.05	-.14**
$R^2 = .073^{**}$			
$\Delta R^2 = .019^{**}$			

(N=186) Note. Two-tailed test; \* $p \leq .10$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .



**Figure 5.2: Study 1. Self-promotion regressed on task clarity for low and high performance orientation.**

Low score = 1SD below the mean, high score = 1SD above the mean.

Hypothesis 2 stated that higher performance orientation is associated with a stronger relationship between personalized responsibility and self-promotion. The results (Table 5.3) show that personalized responsibility by itself is not associated with self-promotion. The interaction between personalized responsibility and performance orientation is furthermore not significant. These results suggest that hypothesis 2 is not confirmed.

**Table 5.3. Study 1 Self-promotion regressed on personalized responsibility and performance orientation.**

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$
Personalized responsibility	.02	.05	.03
Performance orientation	.09	.05	.13*
$R^2 = .017$			
Personalized responsibility x Performance orientation	-.01	.04	-.01
$R^2 = .017$			
$\Delta R^2 = 0$			

Note. (N=186) Two-tailed test; \* $p \leq .10$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

According to hypothesis 3 we expected that the higher the performance

orientation, the stronger would be the impact of personalized responsibility on the relationship between task clarity and self-promotion. A significant three-way interaction between the variables was found (see Table 5.4), which is depicted in Figure 5.3. It shows that when performance orientation of agents is high, the relationship between task clarity and self-promotion is negative and that this negative relationship is the strongest in the case of low, rather than high level of personalized responsibility (see Table 5.4). In a sense, this contradicts our hypothesis, which therefore is rejected.

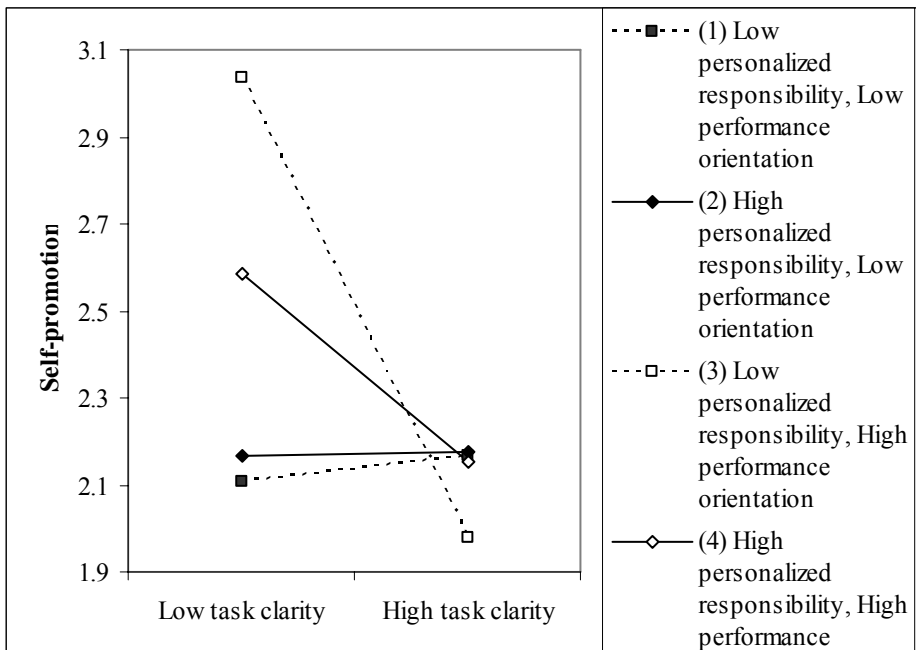
**Table 5.4. Study 1. Self-promotion regressed on task clarity, personalized responsibility and performance orientation**

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$
Task clarity	-.18	.08	-.18**
Personalized responsibility	-.03	.05	-.04
Performance orientation	.14	.05	.21**
$R^2 = .049^{**}$			
Task clarity x personalized responsibility	.07	.06	.10
Task clarity x PO **	-.19	.07	-.28**
Personalized responsibility x PO	-.07	.04	-.14*
$R^2 = .085^{**}$			
$\Delta R^2 = .036^*$			
Task clarity x personalized responsibility x PO	.09	.05	.18*
$R^2 = .101^{**}$			
$\Delta R^2 = .016^*$			

Note. N=186, PO=performance orientation; two-tailed test; \* $p \leq .10$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

Slopes for ‘low personalized responsibility - high performance orientation’ and ‘high personalized responsibility - high performance orientation’ significantly differ from each other ( $t = 2.55, p < .01$ ) and point down. This means that no matter what the level of personalized responsibility is, when performance orientation is high, the relationship between task clarity and self-promotion is negative. This in fact is the two-way interaction between task clarity and performance orientation, which has been discussed earlier in relation to hypothesis 1. The steeper slope ‘low personalized responsibility - high performance orientation’ implies that the negative association between task clarity and self-promotion of performance

oriented agents is stronger when they are not personally responsible for the task. The highest level of self-promotion according to Figure 5.3 corresponds to the situation where highly performance oriented agents who have vague tasks are not personally responsible for tasks. Somewhat lower self-promotion, according to the graph, is shown by performance oriented agents who have vague tasks and are personally responsible. The main negative effect of task clarity on self-promotion is obvious from the graph, it should completely be attributed to those high in performance orientation. The lowest level of self-promotion corresponds to the situation wherein the performance oriented agents have clear tasks and do not feel personally responsible. This cannot be said of agents who are not performance oriented.



**Figure 5.3: Study 1. Self-promotion regressed on task clarity for low and high personalized responsibility and low and high performance orientation.**

Low score = 1SD below the mean, high score = 1SD above the mean

Low performance orientation in combination with high personalized responsibility is associated with virtually a flat line depicting a zero relationship



between task clarity and self-promotion. This means that when performance orientation of agents is low, whether or not they are made personally responsible and whether or not their task is clear, does not play a role in the level of self-promotion they show. The slopes ‘low personalized responsibility - low performance orientation’ and ‘high personalized responsibility– low performance orientation’ do not differ significantly from one another. The three-way interaction is a further specification of the two-way interaction. Figure 5.3 clearly shows that those high in performance orientation show more self-promotion than those low in performance orientation, but only if task are vague and especially if personalized responsibility is low.

Hypothesis 4 stipulated that higher performance orientation is associated with a stronger relationship between feedback and self-promotion. The results (Table 5.5) show no association either between feedback and self-promotion or between performance orientation and self-promotion; there is also no significant two-way interaction. Therefore hypothesis 4 is not supported.

**Table 5.5. Study 1. Self-promotion regressed on feedback and performance orientation**

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$
Feedback	.07	.05	.10
Performance orientation	.08	.05	.11
$R^2 = .024$			
Feedback x Performance orientation	.03	.04	.07
$R^2 = .029$			
$\Delta R^2 = .004$			

Note. N=186; two-tailed test; \* $p \leq .10$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

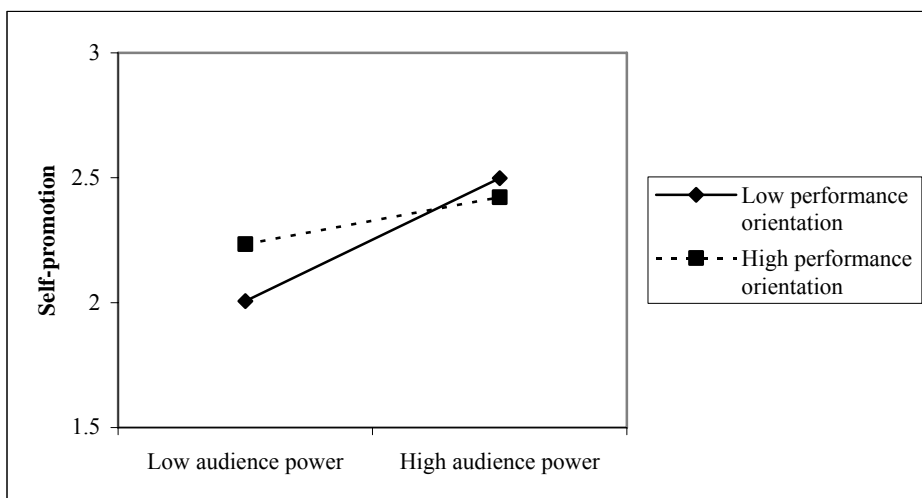
Hypothesis 5 stated that higher performance orientation is associated with a stronger positive relationship between audience power and self-promotion. Indeed, from a positive main effect of audience power on self-promotion (Table 5.6), we infer that audience power is likely to promote this type of impression management. The main effect of performance orientation is not significant. The interaction between feedback and performance orientation is significant. However the sign of the interaction is not in accordance with our hypothesis 5, which therefore is not supported. From the interaction (see Figure 5.4) we infer that performance orientation attenuates the relationship between high audience power and self-promotion, rather than strengthening it. This means that highly performance

oriented individuals show less self-promoting behavior when their audience is powerful, compared to those low in performance orientation. If their audience is not powerful, highly performance oriented agents show relatively more self-promotion. This is further explained by the three-way interaction pertaining to the next hypothesis.

**Table 5.6. Study 1. Self-promotion regressed on audience power and performance orientation**

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$
Audience power	.17	.04	.29***
Performance orientation	.04	.05	.06
$R^2 = .081$ ***			
Audience power x Performance orientation	-.08	.04	-.16*
$R^2 = .104$ ***			
$\Delta R^2 = .023$ **			

Note. N=186; two-tailed test; \* $p \leq .10$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .



**Figure 5.4: Study 1. Self-promotion regressed on audience power for low and high performance orientation.**

According to hypothesis 6 we expected that the higher the performance orientation, the stronger would be the impact of audience power on the relationship between feedback and self-promotion. The corresponding three-way interaction is significant and negative (see Table 5.7) and it is graphically presented in Figure 5.5. The slope for 'high audience power - high performance orientation' is the only

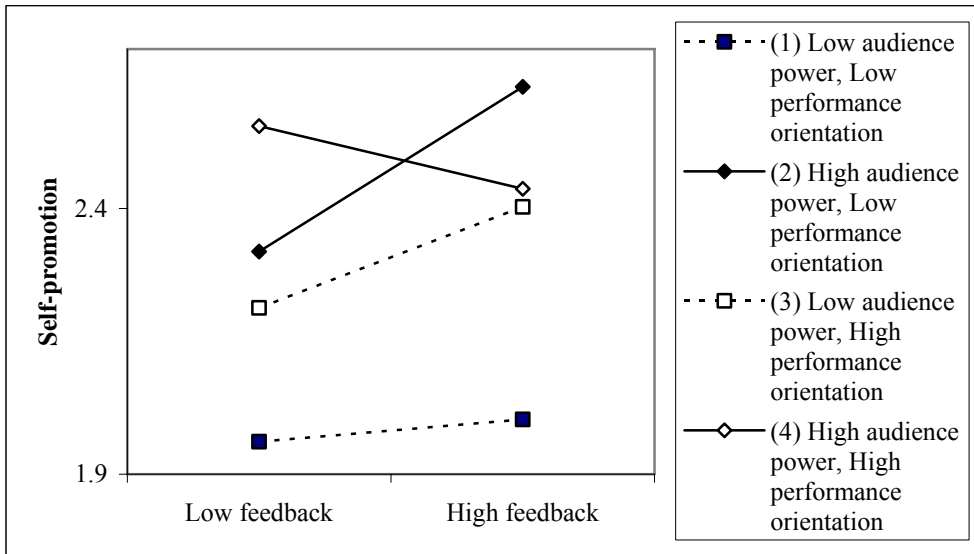
one of the four slopes that goes downwards. This means that when performance orientation of agents is high, high audience power is associated with a negative relationship between feedback and self-promotion. This disconfirms hypothesis 6, which predicted that performance oriented agents would show a positive relationship between feedback and self-promotion, strengthened by audience power. It appears that if agents are performance oriented, the more powerful audience they have and the more feedback they receive, the less self-promotion they show. The remaining three slopes are associated with a positive relationship between feedback and self-promotion.

**Table 5.7. Study 1 Self-promotion regressed on feedback, audience power and performance orientation**

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$
Feedback	.05	.06	.08
Audience power	.17	.04	.29***
Performance orientation	.09	.05	.13*
$R^2 = .081^{**}$			
Feedback x audience power	.01	.04	-.01
Feedback x PO	-.03	.04	-.07
Audience power x PO	-.08	.04	-.16**
$R^2 = .108^{**}$			
$\Delta R^2 = .027$			
Feedback x audience power x PO	-.07	.03	-.21**
$R^2 = .138^{***}$			
$\Delta R^2 = .030^{**}$			

Note. N=186; PO-performance orientation; two-tailed test; \* $p \leq .10$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

The combination of high audience power and low performance orientation is associated with a positive relationship between feedback and self-promotion. The ‘high audience power - low performance orientation’ differs significantly from ( $t = -2.131$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) ‘high audience power - high performance orientation’. It is the steepest upward going slope, which means that of all combinations of audience power and performance orientation this one is associated with the strongest feedback – self-promotion relationship. This slope shows that when agents who score low in performance orientation have a powerful audience and receive a lot of feedback, they are likely to self-promote.



**Figure 5.5: Study 1. Self-promotion regressed on feedback for low and high audience power and low and high performance orientation.**

Low score = 1SD below the mean, high score = 1SD above the mean.

Similarly, the slope for ‘low audience power – high performance orientation’ goes up. This represents a positive relationship between feedback and self-promotion for highly performance oriented agents whose audience has little power to influence them. The fourth slope ‘low audience power – low performance orientation’ points up, but only slightly. This means that feedback has virtually no impact on self-promoting behavior of agents who are not performance oriented and do not have powerful audience. The conditions of ‘low audience power – low performance orientation’ (irrespective of the level of feedback) are associated with the lowest levels of self-promotion, which means that agents who are low in performance orientation and who do not experience pressure of having a powerful audience self-promote the least. The slopes depicting the conditions ‘low audience power - low performance orientation’ and ‘high audience power – low performance orientation’ do not significantly differ from each other, which is indicative of an additive effect of audience power. More powerful audiences are associated with more self-promotion of people who are not performance oriented.

For comparison we tested for the moderating effects of mastery orientation on

the relationship between task clarity, personalized responsibility and self-promotion and between feedback, audience power and self-promotion. Test of the moderating effects shows that two- or three-way relationships involving mastery orientation as a moderator were insignificant. Self-promotion regressed on task clarity for low and high personalized responsibility and low and high mastery orientation shows a significant negative main effect of task clarity on self-promotion ( $\beta = -.19$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ). This is in congruence with the already obtained results. Self-promotion regressed on feedback for low and high audience power and low and high mastery orientation yielded a significant positive main effect of audience power ( $\beta = .30$ ;  $p \leq .001$ ) and a significant negative main effect of mastery orientation on self-promotion ( $\beta = -.18$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ), which points to a possible negative relationship between mastery orientation and self-promotion.

## 5.9 Discussion study 1

We have studied a number of combinations of performance orientation and accountability factors and their influence on self-promotion. The results gave rise to conclusions that are important to both strands of literature: accountability and goal orientation. As expected, highly mastery oriented workers are low self-promoters. Furthermore, mastery orientation does not influence the relationship between the accountability variables and self-promotion. In contrast to the mastery oriented workers, highly performance oriented workers appear to have a tendency to self-promote.

Task clarity appears to unequivocally reduce self-promotion among the performance oriented workers. Task clarity apparently reduces the 'room' for self-promoting behavior of this category of agents by presenting them with an atmosphere where there is more objectivity, consequently making impressions harder to manage, even for the people driven by performance orientation. Agents who are not driven by performance orientation are not inclined to self-promote.

Performance oriented agents seem to show the highest level of self-promotion when their tasks are vague and they do not feel personally responsible. Stated otherwise, in case the accountability factors task clarity and personalized responsibility are absent, performance oriented individuals seem to abuse this absence and consequently engage in self-promotion. Making tasks clear is associated with a substantial reduction in this behavior. When the task of a

performance oriented individual is vague, increasing his or her personalized responsibility is associated with somewhat lower self-promotion. Apparently, personalized responsibility makes the actor somewhat more aware of the relationship between his or her behavior and outcomes. The lowest level of self-promotion is associated with high task clarity and low responsibility. For those low in performance orientation, task clarity and personalized responsibility do not matter so much. Independently of task clarity and personalized responsibility, those low in performance orientation have no drive to promote themselves.

There is a clear main effect of audience power on self-promotion. As has already been mentioned, performance oriented individuals are basically inclined to self-promote. Audience power is another factor that triggers self-promotion of all, those who are high and those who are low in performance orientation. Feedback, unlike audience power, is not always associated with higher self-promotion. Highly performance oriented agents tend to self-promote when their audience is powerful. They engage in most self-promotion when they are observed by a powerful audience, but do not receive feedback from the audience. For them the need and the room for self-promotion seem to be created in a situation where the strong audience has to be impressed, and poor feedback, a kind of information void, can be filled by self-promotion. This is in line with the social facilitation theory.

Zajonc's (1965) social facilitation theory says that mere presence of others has a non-directional effect (arousal) on people's behavior, in particular that performance is facilitated and learning is impaired by an audience. Our finding is congruent with Zajonc's argument that presence creates uncertainty and as a result the subject's drive is augmented. According to Zajonc, when people are not good at performing a task (which could have been the case with the respondents in our study, because their tasks have changed a lot) presence of an audience will worsen their outcomes. Performance oriented employees who are observed by a powerful audience, but receive little feedback do not know if they perform well or not. This strengthens their inclination to self-promote in order to make sure that they are perceived as good performers. According to our results when the powerful audience provides feedback to performance oriented agents, self-promoting behavior is no longer enhanced. Presence of feedback from a powerful audience gives performance oriented agents more certainty about their image and reduces their drive to self-promote. It reduces the need as well as the room for self-

promotion, since by giving feedback, the audience lets the agent know that it is already informed about the agent's behavior.

Results of this study reveal that for the not- performance oriented people, feedback from a powerless audience is not associated with an increase or a reduction in self-promotion. However, feedback that comes from a powerful audience serves as a stimulus to react upon, and invites non-performance oriented agents to engage in self-promotion, which they otherwise are not inclined to do. Agents who score low in performance orientation are not as focused on their performance as performance oriented agents. Possibly they also underestimate their performance. Feedback from a powerful audience makes non-performance oriented agents more aware of their actual performance, they may realize that they are better performers than they thought they were, and rightfully increase their self-promotion. A conclusion would then be that the 'feedback – audience power' accountability component works really differently for the two types of agents: those high and those low in performance orientation. When faced with this accountability component, self-promotion of performance oriented agents appears to decrease, while that of non-performance oriented agents appears to increase. This and other findings are easily translatable into management advices.

Our findings give insight into how self-promoting behavior of employees might be managed, and what levels of this behavior can be expected depending on the accountability factors and level of performance orientation. Below are detailed recommendations for measures that may be applied to a performance oriented work force. First, if the task of a performance oriented agent happens to be vague it is better for the reduction of self-promoting behavior to precisely outline his or her scope of responsibility. If self-promoting behavior of performance oriented agents is to be decreased, they have to be given clear tasks. Personalized responsibility seems to be a good tool to diminish impression management of performance oriented agents at the initial stage of task performance when tasks are vague. If tasks are vague, performance oriented agents can be given personalized responsibility for the tasks and this will somewhat compensate for the lack of clarity and to a certain degree reduce self-promotion. However, if the task of a performance oriented agent is clear this stops to be the case. It is better then, in terms of reduced self-promotion, **not** to make him or her personally responsible.

If a manager has employees that are performance oriented, who receive little

feedback and have significant parties to whom they feel accountable, it is likely that these employees engage in self-promotion. This means that their actual performance may need to be scrutinized in order to obtain a realistic picture. To reduce self-promotion of performance oriented employees not only their audiences have to be powerful, but the employees should also be provided with sufficient amount of feedback about their performance on the task. This will let them feel more secure and they will decrease self-promotion. Another strategy with performance oriented workforce is to not have a powerful audience and not to provide feedback. In these conditions there is no need for them to self-promote. We now summarize the self-promoting behavior of performance oriented employees as follows. First, if they deal with vague tasks, they need to feel personally responsible, but they do not need to be made personally responsible if their tasks are clear, as high task clarity and low personalized responsibility are associated with the lowest level of self-promotion among them. Second, if their audience is powerful, it needs to provide feedback, but if it is not powerful, providing feedback would be a risky measure as it is associated with more self-promotion.

The second group is the employees who are low in performance orientation. The accountability factors influence them differently; accordingly a different approach is detailed below. They report low levels of self-promotion independent of the level of task clarity and personalized responsibility. A powerful audience increases their self-promotion, especially in combination with feedback. If the ‘noise’ created by self-promotion of these employees is to be reduced, e.g. to have more objective performance evaluations, it is better not to apply the –‘audience power’ component to them. For employees who are high as well as those who are low in performance orientation, strong feedback and audience power create pressure, which is conducive to self-promotion. Employees self-promote less when there is neither a strong audience nor much feedback.

To conclude study 1, we examined the most likely impression management strategy that springs up in the accountability conditions – self-promotion. The first main conclusion pertains to the domain of accountability: as a phenomenon it indeed works as a compilation of its factors, i.e. the combinations of accountability factors act stronger than each factor on its own. The second conclusion is important to studies of goal orientation and impression management. We found that rather than increasing self-promotion among performance oriented individuals,



accountability appears to be a tool for reducing or preventing them from self-promoting. In terms of self-promotion, individuals who are low in performance orientation appear not to be sensitive to the ‘high task clarity – high personalized responsibility’ component, while the ‘high audience power – high feedback’ component is associated with an increase in their self-promoting behavior. Therefore generalized statements that higher accountability is associated with more high impression management are not correct. This study gives evidence that in relation to self-promotion, the influence of the accountability factors is related to the individual’s level of performance orientation. Since self-promotion is only one of many types of impression management, the influence of the accountability factors on other impression management strategies may have to be investigated.

## **5.10 Study 2**

Study 2 is a replication of study 1, which is covered in the first part of this chapter. Study 2 was carried out at a different entity – a public organization active in the field of justice, founded in 1990, with a staff of 900 persons. The main function of this organization is the collection of (mainly traffic) fines. In contrast to the company of study 1, which had undergone an organizational change shortly before the study, the organization of study 2 has not recently undergone any major changes. The educational background of the employees in study 2 as well as of study 1 was mainly vocational, however, the average level of education of employees in study 2 was higher. Below is an account of the method, followed by the results section and the discussion of the results of study 2. Conclusions based on both studies are presented at the end of the chapter.

## **5.11 Method study 2**

### **5.11.1 Measures study 2**

Measures in study 2 were identical to study 1. The reliabilities (as they surfaced in study 2) of the scales are presented in Table 5.8.

### **5.11.2 Participants study 2**

Two hundred employees were approached and 95 of them returned the

questionnaire, thus a response rate of 47.5 percent was reached. The kinds of tasks that the respondents performed included for instance, managing contacts with bailiffs, various IT tasks, handling appeals and court orders, commenting on the enforcement orders, etc.

10.5% of the respondents had a managerial function, while the organization's average was 8.6%. 55% of the respondents were male and 45% female, while for the organization as a whole the male/female ratio is 46/54. The average age of the respondents was 37.5 years, which is representative of the population.

### 5.11.3 Procedures study 2

Respondents received questionnaires with enclosed return envelopes from their supervisors and were once reminded to fill them in. The questionnaires were returned directly to the researchers.

## 5.12 Results study 2

Statistical analysis was carried out in the same way as in study 1. First we present a brief description of the organization using information displayed in Table 5.8.

**Table 5.8. Study 2. Means, Standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha's and Intercorrelations**

Variable	M	SD	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Task clarity	6.1	0.56	.86	-						
2 Feedback	4.3	1.09	.89	-.04	-					
3 Personalized responsibility	3.5	1.61	.50	-.21*	-.05	-				
4 Audience power	4.0	1.03	.87	-.16	.50**	.17	-			
5 Mastery orientation	5.7	0.92	.66	.05	.12	-.20*	-.09	-		
6 Performance orientation	3.6	1.31	.84	-.15	-.04	.21*	.29**	.14	-	
7 Self-promotion	2.4	0.88	.66	-.11	.08	.02	.26**	.05	.40**	-

Note. N=92\*p< .05 (2-tailed). \*\*p<.01 (2-tailed).

Task clarity has a high mean (6.1), which means that tasks are very clear to the respondents. Task clarity correlates negatively with personalized responsibility.

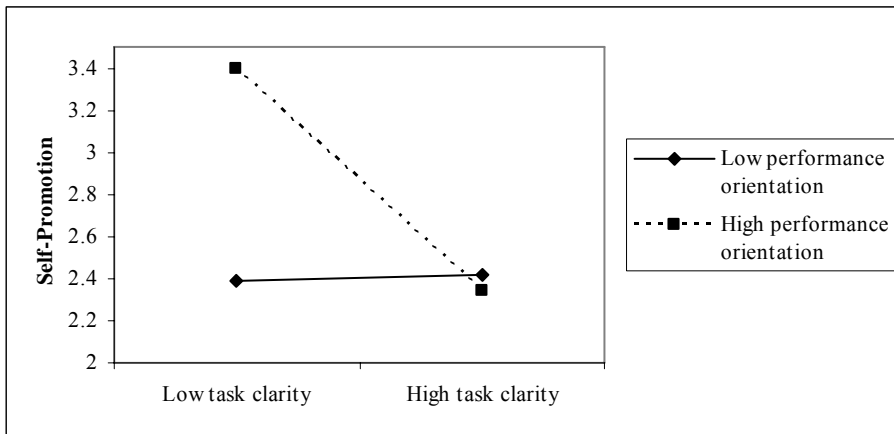
This may mean that in this organization the tasks that are the most individualized are at the same time the least articulated. The mean of feedback is 4.3, which indicates relatively moderate feedback. The mean of personalized responsibility is around 3.5 (on a scale from 1 to 7), that means that responsibility is not clearly assigned to agents, possibly because teams are responsible for tasks. Personalized responsibility is correlated positively with performance orientation and negatively with mastery orientation. Audience power with a mean of 4.0 is rather strong in comparison to study 1. Audience power correlates with performance orientation and with self-promotion. The mean of performance orientation is 3.6, that of mastery orientation is high (5.7). Performance orientation has a correlation with self-promotion. The mean of self-promotion is rather low (2.4).

Hypothesis 1 stated that higher performance orientation is associated with a stronger relationship between task clarity and self-promotion. To test this and the other hypotheses, multiple regression analyses were carried out. Task clarity is negatively related to self-promotion (see Table 5.9). This means that agents who have clear tasks actually self-promote less. There is quite a strong positive main effect of performance orientation. From the significant negative two-way interaction between task clarity and performance orientation (see Figure 5.6), we infer that when performance orientation is high, the relationship between task clarity and self-promotion is more negative than it is when performance orientation is low. Hypothesis 1 is, therefore, rejected. In fact, when performance orientation is low, there is no relationship between task clarity and self-promotion. From the graph we see that when tasks are vague, agents low in performance orientation self-promote much less than agents high in performance orientation.

**Table 5.9. Study 2. Self-promotion regressed on task clarity and performance orientation**

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$
Task clarity	-.26	.15	-.17*
Performance orientation	.23	.07	.35***
$R^2 = .13^{**}$			
Task clarity x Performance orientation	-.27	.11	-.24**
$R^2 = .19^{***}$			
$\Delta R^2 = .05^{**}$			

Note. N=92; two-tailed test; \* $p \leq .10$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .



**Figure 5.6: Study 2. Self-promotion regressed on task clarity for low and high performance orientation.**

Low score = 1SD below the mean, high score = 1SD above the mean.

Hypothesis 2 ran: higher performance orientation is associated with a stronger relationship between personalized responsibility and self-promotion. The two-way interaction between personalized responsibility and performance orientation is not significant (see Table 5.10), therefore hypothesis 2 is not supported. According to hypothesis 3 the higher the performance orientation, the stronger the impact of personalized responsibility on the relationship between task clarity and self-promotion is. The three-way interaction has not reached significance (see Table 5.11) and the slope difference test has, accordingly, shown no significant differences between the four slopes, therefore hypothesis 3 is not supported. Hypotheses 4 ran: higher performance orientation is associated with a stronger relationship between feedback and self-promotion. There is a strong positive main effect of performance orientation on self-promotion (see Table 5.12). There is, furthermore, a negative interaction between feedback and performance orientation (however it does not reach significance). Hypothesis 4 therefore is clearly not supported. Hypothesis 5 stated that higher performance orientation is associated with a stronger relationship between audience power and self-promotion. The main effect of audience power does not reach significance (see Table 5.13), neither does the interaction between audience power and performance orientation. Hypothesis 5 is, therefore, not supported.

**Table 5.10. Study 2. Self-promotion regressed on personalized responsibility and performance orientation**

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$
Personalized responsibility	.01	.07	.01
Performance orientation	.19	.16	.28
$R^2 = .13^{**}$			
Personalized responsibility x Performance orientation	.02	.05	.09
$R^2 = .13^{**}$			
$\Delta R^2 = .01$			

Note. N=92; two-tailed test; \* $p \leq .10$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

**Table 5.11 Study 2. Self-promotion regressed on task clarity, personalized responsibility and performance orientation**

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$
Task clarity	-.34	.16	-.22**
Personalized responsibility	-.03	.07	-.05
Performance orientation	.35	.18	.51*
$R^2 = .145^{**}$			
Task clarity x personalized responsibility	.11	.10	.12
Task clarity x PO **	-.70	.30	-.62**
Personalized responsibility x PO	-.03	.05	-.14
$R^2 = .204^{**}$			
$\Delta R^2 = .059$			
Task clarity x personalized responsibility x PO	.12	.08	.39
$R^2 = .225^{**}$			
$\Delta R^2 = .022$			

Note. PO-performance orientation. N=92; two-tailed test; \* $p \leq .10$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

**Table 5.12. Study 2. Self-promotion regressed on feedback and performance orientation**

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$
Feedback	.09	.08	.12
Performance orientation	.25	.07	.37***
$R^2 = .13^{**}$			
Feedback x Performance orientation	-.08	.06	-.14
$R^2 = .15^{**}$			
$\Delta R^2 = .02$			

Note. N=92; two-tailed test; \* $p \leq .10$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

**Table 5.13 Study 2. Self-promotion regressed on audience power and performance orientation**

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$
Audience power	.09	.07	.14
Performance orientation	.21	.07	.31**
$R^2 = .14^{**}$			
Audience power x Performance orientation	.07	.05	.13
$R^2 = .15^{**}$			
$\Delta R^2 = .02$			

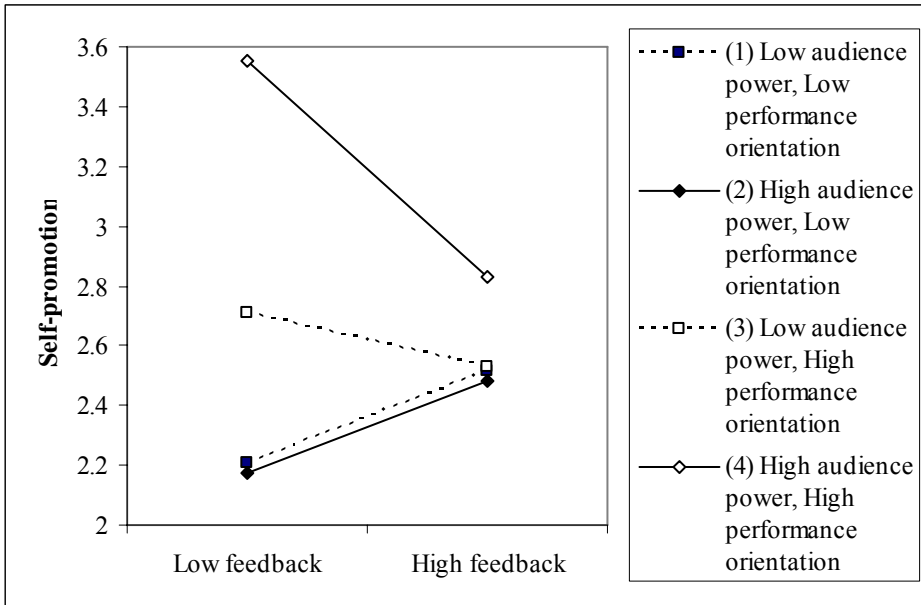
Note. N=92; two-tailed test; \* $p \leq .10$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

**Table 5.14 Study 2. Self-promotion regressed on feedback, audience power and performance orientation**

Variables	B	SE	$\beta$
Feedback	-0.04	0.10	-.046
Audience power	0.14	0.08	.210*
Performance orientation	0.28	0.08	.414***
$R^2 = .141$			
Feedback x audience power	-0.07	0.06	-.126
Feedback x PO	-0.19	0.08	-.320**
Audience power x PO	0.15	0.06	.291**
$R^2 = .220$			
$\Delta R^2 = .079$			
Feedback x audience power x PO	-0.07	0.04	-.197*
$R^2 = .244$			
$\Delta R^2 = .024$			

Note N=92; two-tailed test; PO=performance orientation \* $p \leq .10$ . \*\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ .

According to hypothesis 6 the higher the performance orientation, the stronger will be the impact of audience power on the relationship between feedback and self-promotion. The three way interaction only approaches significance ( $p=.10$ ). The first slope representing ‘high audience power – high performance orientation’ goes down (see Figure 5.7). This indicates a negative association between feedback and self-promotion when performance orientation is high and audience power is high as well. This means that when performance orientation of agents is high, high audience power is associated with a negative relationship between feedback and self-promotion. This is contrary to what was posited in hypothesis 6, which is, therefore, clearly rejected.



**Figure 5.7: Study 2. Self-promotion regressed on feedback for low and high audience power and low and high performance orientation.**

Low score = 1SD below the mean, high score = 1SD above the mean.

The next slope ‘low audience power – high a performance orientation’ goes down, it differs significantly from ‘high audience power – high a performance orientation’ ( $t = -1.983, p < 0.05$ ). This means that for performance oriented agents when audience power is low, the association between feedback and self-promotion is still negative. On the graph the ‘low audience power – high performance orientation’ is lower than ‘high audience power – high performance orientation’. This means that receiving a lot of feedback from a weak audience is associated with less self-promoting behavior on behalf of performance oriented agents than when they have powerful audiences observe them. In any case, feedback is associated with a reduction in self-promotion of performance oriented agents.

The slopes ‘low audience power – low performance orientation’ and ‘high audience power – low performance orientation’ indicate that when performance orientation is low, feedback is positively associated with self-promotion, regardless of the level of audience power. In terms of self-promoting behavior, feedback makes those low and high in performance orientation act more or less similarly. By presenting realistic information, feedback may indicate that one is doing well and

this will enhance self-promotion among those low in performance orientation, who may become more positive about themselves. To people high in performance orientation, feedback also presents realistic information, which may be the reason why their self-promotion decreases.

For comparison reasons the moderating effects of mastery orientation on the relationship between task clarity, personalized responsibility and self-promotion and between feedback, audience power and self-promotion were tested. Only one main effect surfaced: self-promotion regressed on feedback, audience power and mastery orientation yielded a significant positive main effect of audience power ( $\beta = .32$ ;  $p \leq .05$ ). No significant moderating effects surfaced. It appears, therefore, that mastery orientation does not play any role in the way the accountability factors influence self-promotion.

## **5.13 Discussion study 2**

The results obtained in this study are of high significance from the point of view of motivational properties of accountability and goal orientation. They shed light on how the accountability factors interact with goal orientation factors to impact self-promotion of agents. Unequivocally, performance orientation makes people self-promote. This study has shown that task clarity is associated with reduced self-promotion among performance oriented agents. Similarly, feedback is related to a decrease in self-promotion among the performance oriented individuals. Moreover, it is associated with an increase of this behavior among individuals who are not performance oriented. The latter may underestimate themselves and feedback that may indicate that they are doing well may give them a better and more positive self-perception. This will enhance self-promotion among agents who are low in performance orientation because they become more realistic and positive about their performance. In this case, a certain degree of self-promotion, as long as it is not excessive, can be positive for their careers.

It appears that performance oriented agents, who normally tend to self-promote, tend to reduce self-promotion when they are faced with task clarity and/or feedback. When they are given vague tasks and when they lack feedback, performance oriented agents may feel both compelled and free to use this kind of impression management. It may be similar to defensive bolstering, a behavior that arises as a result of being subjected to the influence of the accountability factors,



where individuals “devote mental energy to generating reasons why they are right and would-be critics wrong” (Tetlock, 2002). Performance oriented agents boost their image to compensate for the lack of information about what has to be done and lack of feedback about how their work is evaluated. It is their tool to protect or enhance their image as good performers, since they do not know if their actual performance is satisfactory or not. As soon as they receive feedback or when their tasks are clarified, their self-promoting behavior declines substantially. Apparently, clear task and clear feedback make it difficult to overestimate oneself. Feedback makes those low and high in performance orientation behave more or less similarly or be more realistic about their achievements and self-image.

In this study we observed no interplays between the accountability variables, only evidence of additive effects, and interplays of individual accountability factors with performance orientation.

## **5.14 Conclusions studies 1 & 2**

Both studies have clarified the role of accountability and goal orientation in self-promoting behavior. Our hypotheses were formulated to incorporate performance orientation as a moderator of the relationships between the accountability factors and self-promotion. Nonetheless we also looked into if mastery orientation would produce the similar effects. In congruence with our expectations, performance rather than mastery orientation is associated with self-promotion. Mastery oriented agents do not seem to have a tendency to self-promote, while performance oriented agents do. Therefore in our study we concentrated on the moderating role of performance orientation. Below we highlight the conclusions that can be drawn based on both studies.

The first general conclusion is that task clarity and feedback diminish the positive effect of performance orientation on self-promotion. Highly performance oriented agents show more self-promotion only when feedback is low and tasks are unclear. Both studies give evidence that self-promotion of performance oriented agents decreases as the clarity of their task increases. Task clarity brings in objectivity and certain standards of performance and lets performance oriented agents focus on achieving the task, rather than habitually enhancing themselves by comparing themselves to other’s performance. This must reduce the possibilities and also the need of performance oriented agents to self-promote. As soon as

feedback increases and tasks are clarified, the levels of self-promoting behavior of those who are low and those who are high in performance orientation become very similar. Based on the results of study 1 (results of study 2 neither confirm nor contradict those of study 1), we may conclude now that when agents are performance oriented and both accountability variables – task clarity and personalized responsibility - are absent, self-promoting behavior is the highest. Besides, a powerful audience appears to trigger much more self-promotion among those high in performance orientation when feedback is low. When feedback is high they get a much more realistic perception of their own behavior and they know that the audience also has a realistic view. This makes it less easy for them to promote themselves. Neither task clarity nor personalized responsibility influence self-promoting behavior of the agents who are not driven by performance orientation. Increased feedback may give them a better appraisal of their own performance and this may explain their tendency to self-promote more.

Successful use of *self-promotion* tactics according to some authors (Wayne, Liden, Graf & Ferris, 1997; Cialdini & DeNicholas, 1989; Wortman & Linsenmeier, 1977) ‘is extremely difficult because when only slightly overdone, it is interpreted as bragging or conceit’ (Wayne et al. p.984). Since performance oriented individuals tend to self-promote, it is possible that they have experience in self-promotion. In accountability conditions performance oriented individuals may use more obscure self-promotion tactics, undetected by our measurement. Alternatively, they indeed reduce their self-promotion, since they know, again based on their experience, that self-promotion may result in dislike of the agents who use it. Performance oriented agents have learnt from experience about acceptability of self-promotion. This is in line with some authors (Barreto & Ellemers, 2000; Ammeter et al, 2004) who say that when the audience is capable of sanctioning the agents, the latter adapt their behavior to what they deem as behavior acceptable to the audience. We have to realize that those high in performance orientation are very susceptible to social information. If there is no social information they feel free to promote themselves. However, if it is available, they know that self-promotion may have a counterproductive effect, and so they will immediately stop promoting themselves. Non-performance oriented agents who are faced with the accountability factors, however, may try to use self-promotion. Since it is an area previously unknown to them, and they lack the skill,

they may use obvious tactics of self-promotion. This may explain why in our study performance oriented agents often seem to use less self-promotion and not performance oriented agents more self-promotion in the accountability conditions. Alternatively, agents low in performance orientation may have the inclination to underestimate themselves and task clarity and feedback give them a more realistic and more positive self-image.

The striking finding made in this chapter, which is the opposite of what the current literature states, is twofold. First, accountability can be seen as a tool for reduction of self-promotion among performance oriented individuals. Second, the influence of feedback and audience power on agents who are not performance oriented can be characterized as producing context for self-promotion.

The purpose of this chapter was to investigate the interactivity between the accountability factors and to identify the role of goal orientation in the way the accountability factors influenced self-promotion. Several interaction effects were found: in study 1 the interactions between task clarity, personalized responsibility and performance orientation and between feedback, audience power and performance orientation. In study 2 the interactions between feedback, audience power and performance orientation. Therefore, the second general conclusion is that accountability appears to be an integral phenomenon (compilation), which surfaces especially when performance goal orientation is taken into account.