

Discussing Success: Speakers Signal Luck and Listeners Prefer Hard Work

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Abstract

This research investigates an asymmetry in communication preferences of success between high-status and low-status individuals. Across five studies, we demonstrate that high-status speakers are more likely to ascribe their success to luck and downplay the role of hard work in their success compared to what they privately believe, aiming to convey equality. Ironically, low-status listeners dislike luck attributions of success – rather, they prefer to hear that the high-status individual has worked hard. This asymmetry is attenuated when interacting with equal-status others. Moreover, we show that luck attribution is not only disliked but also can negatively impact low-status individuals by reducing the perceived attainability of success and demotivating low-status individuals from pursuing success.

Track: Consumer Behaviour