



## Applying for remote jobs? You'd better be competent! Teleworking turns recruiters attention to candidate competence over warmth-related skills

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### ABSTRACT

Person Perception Theory suggests that two traits, warmth and competence, govern social judgments of individuals and that warmth has a primacy effect over competence because of its capability to predict people's intentions. Drawing on economic (i.e., rational) decision-making theories, we hypothesized that in organizations, which are by definition concerned with instrumental goals (i.e., maximization of profits and minimization of costs), worker competence is more important than worker warmth and influences hiring decisions about candidates. Moreover, we hypothesized that teleworking turns recruiters' attention to candidate competence (over warmth) to a greater extent than onsite work. Supporting our hypothesis, Study 1, a vignette experiment, showed that people manifest a stronger intention to recruit a candidate who is highly competent (although less warm), while this effect was stronger when the work-setting favored teleworking. Study 2 (preregistered), a field experiment with recruiter participants, further showed that recruiters are more inclined to hire highly competent (although less warm) candidates when the work-setting favors teleworking through the perception of competent candidates as more appropriate for a job. These results provide evidence for a reversal of the primacy effect of warmth at work and illuminate the important role of work-setting (online vs. onsite) in recruiters' hiring decisions.

The abrupt closure of many offices and workplaces these past years introduced a new era of remote work for millions of people. People who had rarely or never worked remotely in the past now claim that their job responsibilities can be done from home equally well. Interestingly, a large number of workers prefer to keep teleworking even now that the COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted in most countries (Predotova, 2021). *Global Workplace Analytics (2022)* estimates that approximately 30 % of the workforce worldwide will continue working remotely. At the same time, teleworking expands the pool of workers that organizations can choose from and gives organizations the opportunity to hire skilled workers from various locations improving person-job fit (Clancy, 2020).

Inevitably, the shift to more teleworking is drastically transforming the work content, work dynamics, and possibly the qualifications that organizations appreciate in candidates. In the past, coming across colleagues in the office hallway and chatting about work-unrelated topics was happening regularly. Workers would spontaneously go by a colleague's office to ask for a missing piece of information or to make a coffee break. All these informal interactions, widely known as "social capital" (i.e., "...the aggregate of resources that derive from the network of

relationships possessed by an individual or organization;" Inkpen & Tsang, 2005) have now been limited to the minimum due to teleworking. Although workers report more meetings than ever, they also report less social interaction with other people at work (Baym et al., 2021). Eventually, workers' social skills and social capabilities might become less important with teleworking, while other skills, such as their efficiency and intelligence, which are more easily "visible" and possibly "useful" in socially sterile online settings, might become more vital. Accordingly, this contribution aims to investigate how the increasing switch to teleworking influences recruiting decisions in organizations.

In this study, we suggest that worker social skills, known as "warmth" (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007), lose their significance in conditions of teleworking and therefore play a less influential role in recruiters' hiring decisions. In contrast, worker competence-related skills (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007) become more important and acquire thus a more prominent role in hiring decisions. We further investigate workers' perceived appropriateness (i.e., perceived fitness with the job) as a possible explanatory mechanism that drives the hypothesized effects.

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### 1.1. Person perception: competence vs. warmth

According to Person Perception Theory (Abele et al., 2016; Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007), competence (also referred to as agency) and warmth (also referred to as communion) are the two core dimensions driving person perception (Abele et al., 2008; Brambilla et al., 2012; Judd et al., 2005).<sup>1</sup> Competence includes characteristics such as intelligence, skillfulness, ambition, efficiency, and capability, whereas warmth includes characteristics such as friendliness, politeness, sociability, and supportiveness (Abele et al., 2016; Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). There is abundant research underscoring the importance of employee competencies, capabilities, and skills in hiring decisions (Breugh & Starke, 2000). Indeed, considering the increasing “internationalization” of companies (Alvarado-Vargas et al., 2020) and the “war for talent” (Michaels et al., 2001) that accompanies it, being able to hire the most capable and qualified candidates comes across as the recipe for success. Accordingly, one would suggest that workers' competence is possibly the strongest predictor of recruitment intention in organizations. Nevertheless, peoples' soft skills, which are related to their warmth (Hager et al., 2002; Mitchell et al., 2010) have also been found to be very important in the workplace (Vasanthakumari, 2019). More specifically, warmth-related traits are frequently presented as an art (Ravindranath, 2016) that comes along with high degrees of emotional and social intelligence but also with negotiation and persuasion capabilities (Cialdini, 2001). Such traits are essential when dealing with other people at work (colleagues and customers) and contribute to the formation of a favorable and supportive work climate (Ravindranath, 2016). Importantly, a significant number of studies has consistently revealed the primacy effect of warmth over competence in person perception given the connection of warmth with benevolent intentions (Peeters, 1983, 2001; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990, see also Brambilla et al., 2012; Brambilla et al., 2013).

Based on the above, one would suggest that, for different reasons, both competence and warmth-related traits are very important traits of individuals and are highly desirable among workers. Yet, very little is known about the prevalence of one or the other trait in impression formation about job candidates. Is competence or warmth more important when evaluating job candidates or are the two traits equally important? Despite the numerous studies on the role of competence vs. warmth in the broader social context (e.g., Abele et al., 2016; Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007), to the best of our knowledge, the literature on the role of competence vs. warmth in the organizational context is rather scarce (Bufquin et al., 2017; Cuddy et al., 2011; Fousiani et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2020; Wojciszke & Abele, 2008), while none of the existing research has investigated the importance of the two traits in hiring decisions in organizations.

In real life, we frequently encounter situations where organizations place more emphasis on worker competence as compared with other skills, for the mere reason that organizations nowadays face increasing competition and therefore, their focus lies on the increase of tangible outcomes (e.g., money), survival, and success (Fletcher et al., 2008; Spence & Helmreich, 1983). Economic decision-making theories, such as Game Theory and Rational Choice Theory (Luce & Raiffa, 1957; Olson, 1965), assume that decisions are primarily driven by people's economic self-interests, which are based on the costs and rewards of an action (Luce & Raiffa, 1957). Indeed, based on these theories (Luce & Raiffa, 1957; Olson, 1965; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), organizations,

which are, in principle, for-profit entities, should be primarily concerned with instrumental and economic goals, and thus prioritize pay, profit, success and decrease of costs (see Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Accordingly, one would expect that recruiters value workers' competence more than worker's warmth, as competence is seen as a key element to goal fulfillment (e.g., most questions in job interviews are about candidates' competence-related skills) and has high instrumental value (Wojciszke & Abele, 2008). For instance, Wojciszke and Abele (2008) found that when an assessee's competence is perceived as potentially profitable for the assessor (i.e., observer), an assessee's competence becomes more important over their communion-related traits. In a similar vein, Fousiani et al. (2022) found that when organizational goals are highly instrumental (e.g., focusing on economic gains) as opposed to relational (e.g., focusing on harmonious social interactions), people deem a candidate's competence more important than their warmth. Competence may outweigh warmth in person perception when it serves perceivers' goals, and this might be more often the case in organizations, which are by definition concerned with instrumental goals. Based on the above, we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 1.** A candidate's competence will be a stronger predictor of recruitment intention as opposed to a candidate warmth.

### 1.2. The moderating role of teleworking in recruitment intention

In the current contribution, we further investigate whether the importance of candidate competence or warmth in recruitment decisions varies as a function of the work-setting (teleworking vs. working in person from an office). The current research was designed to make a novel contribution by investigating how work-setting moderates the link between dimensions of person perception (warmth vs. competence) and recruitment decision. Teleworking has several potential advantages. Recent studies have manifested the beneficial outcomes of teleworking, including performance and job satisfaction, better work-family balance, decreased stress levels, lower turnover and increased well-being (Azarbouyeh & Naini, 2014; Coenen & Kok, 2014; Kossek et al., 2006; Vega et al., 2015). Based on these results, teleworking comes across as a very beneficial work-setting. Nevertheless, many disadvantages have been attached to it, including social isolation, disconnection from the work environment and colleagues, gradual demotivation of workers (Fedakova & Ištónová, 2017; Pyöriä, 2011; Wojcak et al., 2016), reduced learning (Cooper & Kurland, 2002), reduced visibility (Maruyama & Tietze, 2012), and need for stronger organizational skills (Kłopotek, 2017). Drawing on economic decision-making theories (e.g., Game Theory and Rational Choice Theory; Luce & Raiffa, 1957; Olson, 1965) which promote rational thinking (i.e., cost-benefit oriented decisions; Luce & Raiffa, 1957; Olson, 1965; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; see also Lievens & Highhouse, 2003) we postulate that these disadvantages could possibly influence job requirements for teleworking and therefore the type of traits/qualifications that recruiters value when evaluating candidates. More specifically, in teleworking settings social interactions are minimized, demotivation is more likely to emerge, and learning possibilities are reduced. In such settings, one would expect that warmth comes across as an objectively less useful quality of a worker. In contrast, worker competence would be more relevant in conditions of teleworking as it would give the impression of a person who would not (easily) lose motivation or interest, would have the organizational skills that are required for their success, and would have the ability to perform well even from a distance. In other words, being smart, efficient, ambitious, capable, and productive—all traits related to one's competence (Abele et al., 2016; Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007)—would be deemed even more important when the work-setting encourages teleworking over working from the office. Besides, warmth would not only appear as a less relevant trait in the socially sterile context of teleworking, but it might also come across as a “problematic” trait that hinders a worker's capability to adapt to the on-

<sup>1</sup> The Person Perception Theory identifies an additional trait, namely morality (e.g., integrity), which along with warmth belongs to the broader category of communion (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). Yet, the morality facet of communion has been found to have a primacy effect over both warmth and competence (Brambilla et al., 2011; Brambilla et al., 2012; Brambilla et al., 2013; Brambilla & Leach, 2014; Kervyn et al., 2015), and we do not expect its significance to be contingent on the work-setting. Accordingly, in the current work we only focused on the warmth dimension of communion.

line reality (e.g., being sociable and seeking social interactions would be possibly seen as a mismatch with a position that does not provide possibilities to express such tendencies). In contrast, in a traditional work-setting such as an office-setting, worker warmth would still be highly appreciated and valued as it would contribute to the desired relationship harmony among organization members (Clokic & Fourie, 2016). More specifically, although competence will remain a stronger predictor of recruitment intention in an office-setting, this effect will be less strong in such a setting, where a candidate is judged based on various qualities (e.g., sociability, politeness, friendliness) besides their competence. Based on the above, we stated the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2.** The positive effect of candidate competence (vs. warmth) on recruitment intention will be stronger when the work-setting is teleworking than office-working.

### 1.3. The mediating role of perceived appropriateness of candidate

In this study, we further investigated the perceived appropriateness of a candidate (i.e., the fitness of a candidate with a job) as a possible underlying mechanism that explains the relationship between candidate person perception (competent vs. warm) and recruitment intention. The Person-Job fit literature points out the importance of candidates having characteristics and skills that *match* the demands of the job tasks (Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001) in the hiring process (Kristof-Brown, 2000). Indeed, employees are more appropriate and thus perform better in jobs that better fit their own skills and characteristics (Boon & Biron, 2016). Importantly, the perceived fitness of a candidate with a job positively influences recruiters' intention to hire them (Kristof-Brown, 2000; Starks, 2007). Relatedly, Fousiani et al. (2022) found that recruiters' perceived appropriateness for a job mediated the relationship between a candidate's characteristics and recruitment decision.<sup>2</sup> Based on the above, we stated the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3.** A candidate's competence, as opposed to a candidate's warmth, will be more strongly related to the perception of a candidate as appropriate for a job when the work-setting is teleworking. Perceived appropriateness of a candidate will be related, in turn, to stronger recruitment intention.

## 2. Contributions and research overview

Our study contributes to the literature in the following ways: First, it aims to shed light on how the warmth and competence of workers influence recruitment decisions depending on the type of work-setting (teleworking vs. working from the office). Although the literature on the role of competence and warmth in person perception in the broader social context is rather exhaustive (Abele et al., 2016; Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007), the role of competence and warmth in organizations in particular, remains largely uninvestigated (Cuddy et al., 2011; Fousiani et al., 2022). Accordingly, our study informs the literature on Person Perception (Abele et al., 2016; Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007) and extends it to the organizational context. Second, the current contribution speaks to the HRM literature and informs it about the antecedents and the underlying processes that drive recruitment decisions in organizations. Importantly, we highlight the discrepancies in the hiring decisions when work-setting promotes teleworking or onsite work.

The postulation that hiring decisions are primarily driven by a candidate's competence rather than warmth may come across as intuitive.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the conceptual similarity between viewing a candidate as appropriate for a job and recommending a candidate for hire, we perceive the two constructs as distinct (Fousiani et al., 2022; Kristof-Brown, 2000; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001) as appropriateness for a job reveals *perception* whereas recommendation for hire reveals *intention* (which is not always aligned with perception).

Nevertheless, the scarce literature on this topic has manifested the prevalence of a candidate's interpersonal skills over measurable, competent-related skills in their perceived employability, which is in line with the person perception literature (Abele et al., 2016; Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011; Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). More specifically, Clokic and Fourie (2016) found that employers value graduate students' "soft" skills (also referred to as "interpersonal" skills), such as teamwork, communication ethics, courtesy, and dependability (Hager et al., 2002; Mitchell et al., 2010) to a greater extent than their "hard" skills (i.e., measurable skills that are competence-related) because soft skills facilitate good communication and harmonious relationships. However, no study has investigated recruiters' intention to hire candidates scoring higher in one or the other characteristics in the organizational setting. Most importantly, no study has investigated how the switch to online or hybrid work-settings has influenced recruiters' preference for more competent or warmer candidates. Therefore, investigating whether job candidates scoring higher in one or the other characteristics are recommended for hire and the boundary conditions that shape recruiters' hiring intentions is worthwhile. This contribution also has important practical implications, as our findings might be of interest to HR practitioners who need to be aware of the role that impression formation exerts in recruitment decisions in the post-COVID-19 era, where teleworking seems to gradually replace traditional onsite work.

We conducted two studies to test our hypotheses. Study 1 was an experiment using a convenient sample. This study tested **Hypotheses 1 and 2** by manipulating the warmth vs. competence of a candidate and teleworking vs. office work in vignettes. We then measured recruitment intention of the participants. To enable a straightforward test in a relatively simple design, we only included high competence/moderate warmth vs. high warmth/moderate competence conditions. Study 2 was a field experiment with recruiters as participants. This study tested all three hypotheses. We manipulated warmth vs. competence, similar to Study 1, while we measured work-setting. Then, we measured perceived appropriateness of the candidate (mediator) and recruitment intention (outcome variable). In both studies, we used SPSS 27 to run regression analyses with Process (Hayes, 2013, 2018). Study 2 was pre-registered at Open Science Framework: [https://osf.io/vqzpf/?view\\_only=fb2179291b6844399c503beb257bb3e2](https://osf.io/vqzpf/?view_only=fb2179291b6844399c503beb257bb3e2).

## 3. Study 1

### 3.1. Method

#### 3.1.1. Participants

A total of 304 participants (182 females;  $M_{age} = 28.44$ ,  $SD = 11.69$ ) living in the Netherlands took part in an online study. One-hundred twenty-one participants were Dutch, 31 were German, 12 were British, 135 were another nationality, and 5 participants did not indicate their nationality. Of the participants, 119 were employees, 161 were students, and the rest were either unemployed or did not indicate their employment status. Additionally, 78 participants finished high school, 200 completed higher education, and 8 participants did not indicate their education level. A sensitivity power analysis with G\*Power revealed that this sample yields 95 % power to detect a small to medium effect size:  $f = 0.18$ .

#### 3.1.2. Experimental design and procedure

Student assistants recruited a convenient sample. The study was programmed online using Qualtrics. Participants read the description of a job vacancy seeking for a person to coordinate a team of 10 to 20 people. Then, they were asked to take the perspective of an HR manager, who was supposed to hire one of the candidates that had applied. The job description included our manipulation of the work-setting (teleworking vs. office). In the office condition, the vacancy indicated that the applicant must work in the office as most important tasks and activ-

ities take place onsite. In the teleworking condition, the vacancy pointed out that the job is remote and most tasks take place online (see Online Supplementary Materials [OSM] for the complete vignettes). Manipulation checks followed the vacancy description. As manipulation checks for the work-setting, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which the job they were presented was a) completely remotely from home b) from the company office (1 = *not at all true*, 7 = *absolutely true*).

The manipulation of the candidates' warmth and competence followed. To increase ecological validity and make the manipulations more convincing, we indicated to participants that four candidates were shortlisted based on their qualifications, and eventually, two candidates were invited for interviews. Therefore, the recommendation would be decided between two candidates. Subsequently, participants were presented with a short description of the candidates, which included our manipulation of the candidate's warmth and competence. Participants read information about both candidates' competence and warmth; however, we manipulated only one candidate's competence and warmth (high competence/moderate warmth vs. high warmth/moderate competence), whereas the other candidate was always presented as having moderate scores in both dimensions (see OSM for the complete vignette). Accordingly, we created vignettes based on Abele and Wojciszke (2007). Participants in the high competence/moderate warmth condition read: ("Mr Jan de Vries is a very smart person who has excellent ideas on how to coordinate working groups. Mr de Vries seems to be a particularly intelligent, efficient, and skillful person. However, it is worth mentioning that although Mr Jan de Vries seems to be a relatively sociable person who could potentially connect with others, in his career so far he has not proved to be the most likeable, friendly or supportive person"). Participants in the moderate competence/high warmth conditions read: ("Mr Jan de Vries is a relatively smart person who has some potentially interesting ideas on how to coordinate working groups. Yet, Mr de Vries does not seem to be the most intelligent, efficient, or skillful person. However, it is worth mentioning that Mr Jan de Vries seems to be a really sociable person who can easily connect with others. In his career so far, he has proved to be a very likeable, friendly, and supportive person"). The order of presentation of competence or morality information was randomized to avoid order-effect biases (Perreault, 1975). Manipulation checks followed the competence/warmth manipulation. Using the Fiske et al.'s (2002) competence and warmth scales, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they perceived each of the candidates as competent, intelligent, skilled ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ), friendly, sociable, supportive ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *a lot*).

### 3.1.3. Measures

**3.1.3.1. Recommendation of the candidate for hire.** We developed a 2-item scale to measure recommendation for recruitment. The items are: "Would you recommend Mr de Vries for the job?"; "Would you recommend Mr de Vries for this position?" (1 = *absolutely not*, 7 = *absolutely yes*,  $\alpha = 0.90$ ).

**3.1.3.2. Control variable.** Participant's gender served as a control variable (1 = female, 2 = male).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Manipulation checks

We ran a univariate Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for each of the work-setting manipulation check items. The univariate effect for work-setting was significant  $F(1, 300) = 510.75, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.63$ . Participants in the teleworking condition perceived the work-setting as more remote ( $M = 5.97, SD = 0.1.70$ ) than participants in office condition ( $M = 1.70, SD = 1.60$ ). Similarly, participants in the office condition perceived the work-setting as more onsite ( $M = 6.26,$

$SD = 1.46$ ) than participants in the teleworking condition ( $M = 2.02, SD = 1.76$ ). Neither the main effect of competence/warmth nor the work-setting by competence/warmth interaction came out significant  $F_s < 1$ .

Next, we ran an ANOVA for competence/warmth manipulation checks. The effect of competence/warmth manipulation was significant  $F(1, 300) = 225.26, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.43$ . Results showed that participants in the high competence/moderate warmth condition perceived the candidate as more competent ( $M = 5.74, SD = 0.95$ ) as compared to participants in the high warmth/moderate competence condition ( $M = 3.91, SD = 1.17$ ). Moreover, participants in the high warmth/moderate competence condition perceived the candidate as warmer ( $M = 5.88, SD = 1.02$ ) as compared to participants in the high competence/moderate warmth condition ( $M = 3.87, SD = 1.32$ ). We conclude that our manipulations worked as intended.

### 4.2. Hypothesis testing

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a moderation analysis in Process (Hayes, 2013, 2018; Model 1). We requested a 95 % bias-corrected interval based on 5000 bootstrap samples. Competence/warmth (1 = high competence/moderate warmth, 2 = moderate competence/high warmth) was the independent variable, work-setting was the moderator (1 = teleworking, 2 = office), and recommendation for recruitment was the dependent variable. Participant gender served as control variable. The overall model was significant  $R^2 = 0.04, F(4, 294), p = .02$ . The effect of gender was not significant  $b = 0.12, SE = 0.13, t = 0.94, p = .35, 95\% CI [-0.13, 0.37], \eta^2 = 0.003$ . The main effect of competence/warmth on recommendation of the candidate was significant and negative  $b = -1.24, SE = 0.44, t = -2.80, p < .01, 95\% CI [-2.10, -0.37], \eta^2 = 0.02$ , indicating that participants recommended for recruitment a candidate with high competence (and moderate warmth) more than a candidate with high warmth (and moderate competence). The main effect of work-setting did not prove to be significant  $b = -0.76, SE = 0.44, t = -1.72, p = .09, 95\% CI [-1.63, -0.11], \eta^2 = 0.006$ . Finally, the competence/warmth by work-setting interaction came out significant  $b = 0.63, SE = 0.28, t = 2.25, p = .03, 95\% CI [0.08, 1.18], \eta^2 = 0.02$  and showed that people would rather hire a candidate with high competence (and moderate in warmth) when the work-setting is teleworking  $b = -0.61, SE = 0.20, t = -3.07, p = .002, 95\% CI [-1.00, -0.22]$ . However, the effect was not significant in the office condition  $b = 0.02, SE = 0.20, t = 0.11, p = .92, 95\% CI [-0.37, 0.41]$  (see Fig. 1). These results provide full support for Hypothesis 2.

## 5. Discussion

Study 1 experimentally tested the moderated effect of work-setting (teleworking vs. office) on the relationship between a candidate's warmth vs. competence and recruitment intention. Although our findings manifested a primacy effect of candidate competence over warmth in recruitment decisions, when taking a closer look at the competence/warmth by work-setting interaction, one observes that the main effect is only significant in the teleworking condition but not in the office condition. Taken together, these results show that the competence/warmth effect on recruitment intention is most likely driven by the teleworking condition and should therefore be interpreted with caution. However, the competence/warmth by work-setting interaction effect was in line with Hypothesis 2. It manifested a primacy effect of competence when work-setting was teleworking but not when work-setting favored onsite work. These results point out teleworking as a condition that undermines the importance of workers' warmth-related traits in hiring decisions.

Despite its merits, Study 1 includes an important limitation: the recruited participants had no hiring experience. This is a limitation as

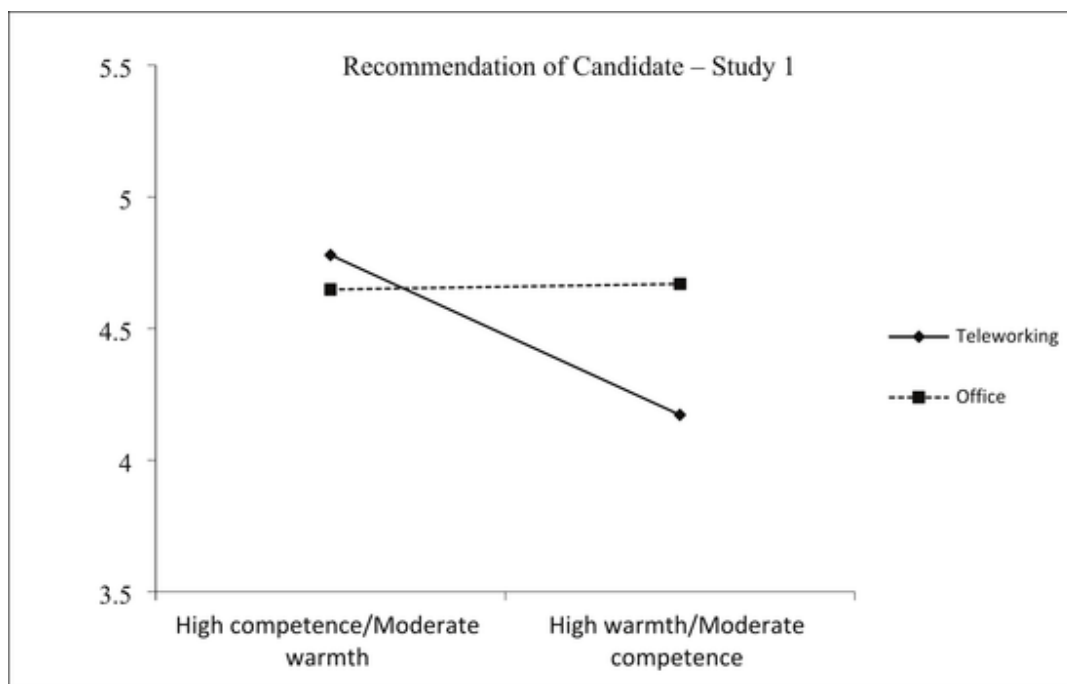


Fig. 1. Intention to recommend a candidate as a function of competence/warmth and work-setting (Study 1).

Note. Recommendation was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *absolutely not*, 7 = *absolutely yes*). Work-setting was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *teleworking*, 7 = *office*). Competence/warmth were coded as 1 = *high competence/moderate warmth*, 2 = *moderate competence/high warmth*.

people with recruiting experience may judge candidates' characteristics differently. More specifically, recruiters may have real-life working experience that may influence the importance they place on a candidate's competence or warmth. It is likely, for instance, that recruiters have experienced the negative consequences of an employee's low warmth and limited sociability skills and that they value this characteristic more than their competence. However, the opposite pattern would also be possible. Therefore, the generalizability of these results among recruiters is questionable. Moreover, Study 1 manipulated work-setting as teleworking vs. office, failing to include a "hybrid" work-setting. Finally, Study 1 measured recommendation for recruitment with a scale of two highly similar items. Given that there are various ways to indicate their recruitment intention (e.g., explicitly recommend one for hire, make a positive or a negative evaluation, invite one for another interview round etc.), a scale consisting of various and less similar items might produce more informative findings. Study 2 (preregistered) is a field experiment aiming to address these limitations. Moreover, Study 2 investigated the perceived appropriateness of a candidate as a possible mediator in the hypothesized relations.

## 6. Study 2

### 6.1. Methods

#### 6.1.1. Participants

In total, 298 participants (160 males;  $M_{age} = 43.97$ ,  $SD = 9.77$ ) took part in an online survey via Prolific. Two hundred sixty-seven participants were British, 27 were American, 3 participants were another nationality, and one participant did not indicate their nationality. Of the participants, 42 participants completed high school, 252 completed higher education, and 4 participants did not indicate their education level. A sensitivity power analysis with G\*Power revealed that this sample yields 95 % power to detect a medium effect size:  $r = 0.21$ . Participants were compensated £0.60 for their participation. Participants were debriefed and thanked upon completion of the study.

#### 6.1.2. Experimental design and procedure

Participants first filled in a questionnaire assessing the extent to which employees were working mostly online, from the office, or partly online and partly from the office. Participants then read a job vacancy description, and they were asked to imagine that this job vacancy was announced in their company or department. They were informed that some people had applied for the job, and they were the ones to make a final decision about whom to hire. Opposite to Study 1, the job vacancy did not include a specific job title. Manipulation of candidate competence and warmth was similar to Study 1 yet adjusted to the specifics of the current study (see OSM for the complete vignettes). Similar to Study 1, participants read short descriptions of two candidates. We only manipulated the warmth and competence of one of the two candidates, while the second candidate was described as moderate in both dimensions.

Manipulation checks came after the competence/warmth information: participants rated the extent to which they perceived each of the candidates as competent, intelligent, skilled ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ), friendly, sociable, supportive ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ) (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *a lot*). Lastly, participants indicated their perception of the candidate as appropriate for the job and their recommendation for each candidate.

#### 6.1.3. Measures

**6.1.3.1. Work-setting.** We used an eight-item measure based on [Converso et al. \(2021\)](#) to measure participant's current work-setting (e.g., "In the company/department where I work, employees work... 1 = *fully remotely (teleworking)*, 4 = *partly remotely, partly at the office*, 7 = *fully in person (at the office)*).

**6.1.3.2. Perceived appropriateness of the candidate.** We asked participants to indicate perceived appropriateness of the candidate with the perceived appropriateness of a candidate scale of [Fousiani et al. \(2022\)](#) (e.g., "Do you think Mr John Smith is a good fit for the job?" [1 = *not at all*, 7 = *to a great extent*,  $\alpha = 0.94$ ]).

**6.1.3.3. Recommendation of the candidate for the job.** We developed a 7-item scale inspired by Cable and Judge (1997) (e.g., “Would you recommend Mr John Smith for the job?”; “Are you willing to invite Mr John Smith to the next interview round?” (1 = *absolutely not*, 7 = *absolutely yes*,  $\alpha = 0.98$ ).

The complete measures are presented in the OSM.

**6.1.3.4. Control variable.** Similar to Study 1, we controlled for participant's gender (1 = male, 2 = female).

## 7. Results

### 7.1. Manipulation checks

To check our manipulations of competence/warmth, we conducted a multivariate ANOVA with competence/warmth as the independent variable and the competence and warmth manipulation check items as the dependent variables. The main effect of competence/warmth on the competence manipulation check was significant  $F(1, 295) = 245.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.45$  and showed that participants in the high competence/moderate warmth condition perceived the candidate as more competent ( $M = 6.01$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ) as compared to participants in the high warmth/moderate competence condition ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ). Moreover, the main effect of competence/warmth on the warmth manipulation check item was also significant  $F(1, 295) = 264.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.47$  and showed that participants in the high warmth/moderate competence condition perceived the candidate as warmer ( $M = 6.12$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) as compared to participants in the low warmth/high competence condition ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ). We conclude that the manipulation checks worked as intended.

### 7.2. Hypothesis testing

We first conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to test if our measures were distinct from each another. In the analysis, we included work-setting, recommendation for recruitment, and perceive appropriateness of candidate. After allowing for correlated errors between two items in the model (work setting: items 7 with 8 as presented in the Online Supplementary Material), we achieved good fit ( $\chi^2 = 386.92$ ,  $df = 131$ ,  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA = 0.08 [CI 0.07; 0.09]; CFI = 0.96; SRMR = 0.03). This indicates that the constructs are sufficiently distinct from one another.

Then, to test our hypotheses we conducted a moderated mediation analysis in Process (Hayes, 2013, 2018; Model 8). We requested a 95 % bias-corrected interval based on 5000 bootstrap samples. Competence/warmth (1 = high competence/moderate warmth, 2 = high warmth/moderate competence) was the independent variable, work-setting was the moderator, perceived appropriateness of the candidate was the mediator, and intention for recommendation of the candidate was the dependent variable. Participant gender served as control variable. The overall model was significant  $R^2 = 0.04$ ,  $F(4, 292) = 3.00$ ,  $p = .02$ .

#### 7.2.1. Appropriateness of candidate (mediator)

The main effect of competence/warmth on perceived appropriateness of the candidate was not found to be significant. Similarly, the main effect of work-setting on perceived appropriateness was not significant. The interaction effect on perceived appropriateness of the candidate came out significant. As expected, the results showed that recruiters perceived a candidate of high competence (although moderate warmth) as more appropriate for hire when the work-setting was teleworking rather than office (see Table 1 for the relevant statistics; see Fig. 2). Interestingly, perceived appropriateness of the candidate ( $M = 4.98$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) was positively related to the intention for recommending the candidate ( $M = 5.04$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) ( $r = 0.89$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Most importantly, the moderated mediation index was sig-

**Table 1**

Effect of competence/warmth of a candidate on recommendation for recruitment as a function of work-setting and mediated by perceived appropriateness of candidate (Study 2).

Predictor	B	SE	t	p	95 % CI	$\eta^2$
Perceived appropriateness of candidate (mediator)						
Constant	5.26	0.21	25.49	<0.001	4.86; 5.67	
Competence/warmth	-0.14	0.14	-1.07	0.28	-0.41; 0.12	0.01
Work-setting	0.05	0.04	1.11	0.27	-0.04; 0.14	0.02
Competence/warmth × work-setting	0.22	0.09	2.53	0.01	0.05; 0.40	0.04
Gender	-0.18	0.13	-1.31	0.19	-0.44; 0.09	0.008
Recommendation intention (dependent variable)						
Constant	0.39	0.17	2.09	0.03	0.04; 0.73	
Competence/warmth	0.26	0.06	4.05	<0.001	0.13; 0.38	0.80
Appropriateness of candidate	0.93	0.03	33.83	<0.001	0.88; 0.99	0.79
Competence/warmth × work-setting	0.03	0.04	0.75	0.45	-0.05; 0.12	0.04
Gender	0.01	0.06	0.09	0.92	-0.12; 0.13	0.004
Conditional indirect effects						
Mediator	Work-setting	B	BootSE	Boot 95 % CI		
Appropriateness of candidate	Telework	-0.46	0.18	-0.81	-0.10	
	Office	0.25	0.19	-0.13	0.63	

Competence/warmth was coded as: 1 = *high competence/moderate warmth*, 2 = *high warmth/moderate competence*. Work-setting was rated on a 7-point (1 = *telework*, 7 = *office*) Likert scale. Perceived appropriateness of candidate was rated on a 7-point (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *to a great extent*) Likert scale. Intention for recommendation for recruitment was rated on a 7-point (1 = *absolutely not*, 7 = *absolutely yes*) Likert scale.

nificant 0.21,  $SE = 0.08$ , 95 % CI = [0.05, 0.37], showing that a candidate's competence/warmth interacts with the work-setting in the prediction of recommendation for hire through the perceived appropriateness of the candidate. These results provide full support for Hypothesis 3.

#### 7.2.2. Recommendation for recruitment

The main effect of competence/warmth on recommendation for recruitment was significant and positive, indicating that recruiters perceive a candidate of high warmth (and moderate competence) as more appropriate for hire. This result is opposite to Hypothesis 1. The main effect of work-setting on recruitment intention was not significant. Finally, the main effect of perceived appropriateness on recruitment intention was significant and positive. Finally, warmth/competence by work-setting interaction effect on recruitment intention was not significant (see Table 1 for the relevant statistics).

## 8. Discussion

Study 2 was a field experiment aiming to replicate the findings of Study 1 and further extend it by using recruiters as participants and investigating the underlying mechanisms that drive the hypothesized effects. Moreover, in this study, instead of manipulating the work-setting as we did in Study 1, we measured it. None of the main effects on perceived appropriateness of the candidate (mediator) was significant. However, the competence/warmth × work-setting interaction proved to be significant. In line with Hypotheses 2 and 3, it showed that the

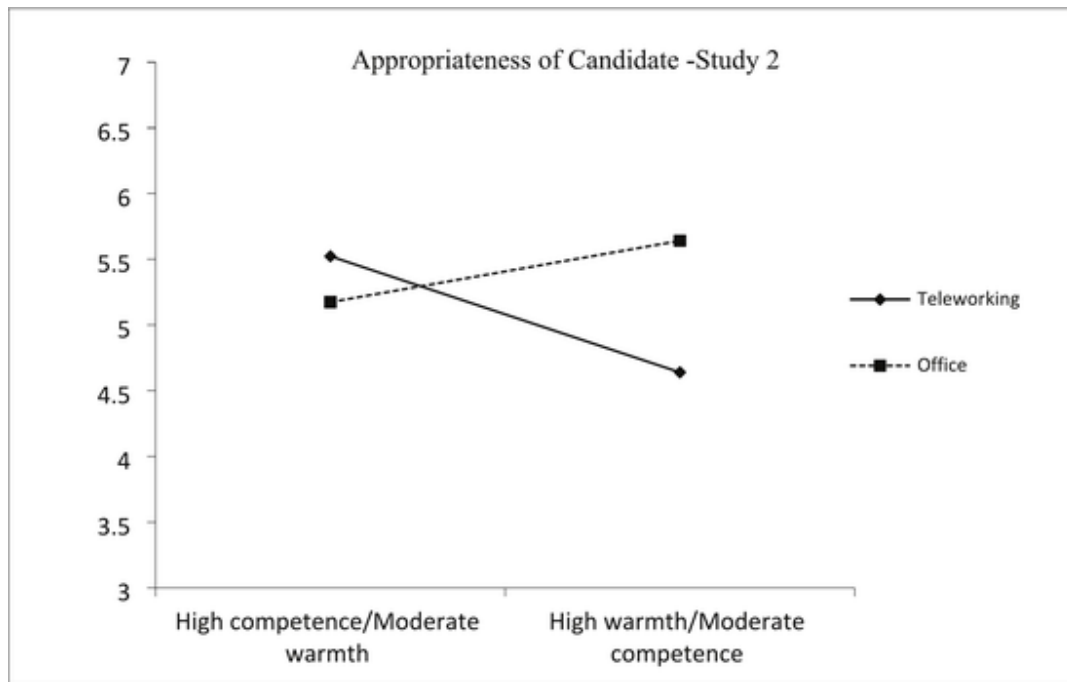


Fig. 2. Perceived appropriateness of a candidate as a function of competence/warmth and work-setting (Study 2).

Note. Ratings were on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *to a great extent*). Competence/warmth were coded as 1 = *high competence/moderate warmth*, 2 = *moderate competence/high warmth*. Work-setting was coded as (1 = *teleworking*, 2 = *office*).

more the work-setting favors teleworking over working from the office, the more recruiters perceive competent (as opposed to warm) candidates as appropriate for a job, which is, in turn, related to stronger recruitment intention. When looking into the main effects and interaction effect on recommendation for recruitment alone – that is, without considering the mediating role of perceived appropriateness of candidate – the competence/warmth effect is significant: Opposite to [Hypothesis 1](#), this effect shows that recruiters are more likely to hire a candidate who scores higher in warmth rather than competence. Although this finding is rather unexpected, it might reveal the importance that actual recruiters attach to candidates' interpersonal skills when making hiring decisions. Indeed, warmth has been found to have a primacy effect over competence in the broader social context as it can be more diagnostic of people's intentions and character quality ([Brambilla et al., 2012](#); [Brambilla et al., 2013](#); [Leach et al., 2007](#)). An alternative explanation is that participants across the two studies may recruit employees for different jobs. More specifically, participants in Study 1 read a vignette focusing on a certain job. Whereas, participants in Study 2 were real recruiters occupied in various companies and sectors and hiring for various jobs, which might have influenced the criteria they use when hiring. Indeed, aspects inherent in a job or an organization might influence recruiters' hiring decisions. For instance, [Fousiani et al. \(2022\)](#) recently found that the type of organizational goals that are prevalent in a company influence recruiters' hiring decisions. Future research should further investigate the primacy effect of competence or warmth in organizations. Finally, the competence/warmth  $\times$  work-setting interaction effect in the prediction of recommendation for recruitment was not significant. Taken together, these results reveal that the hypothesized interaction effect on recruitment intention is only significant through the perceived appropriateness of the candidate.

## 9. General discussion

Attracting and selecting the right types of employees has been an increasing concern for organizations ([Combs et al., 2006](#)). Teleworking broadens the pool of workers that organizations can choose from and

allows organizations to hire high-skilled workers from all over the world, increasing competition among candidates ([Covo, 2020](#)) and improving person-job fit ([Clancy, 2020](#)). Although both candidate competence ([Breugh & Starke, 2000](#)) and candidate warmth ([Ravindranath, 2016](#)) are very important to employers, the latter might become less relevant with teleworking. The current contribution aims to investigate the importance of each of these qualities – competence vs. warmth – of candidates in the prediction of recruitment intention. Do recruiters hire candidates based on their competence and thus their intellectual skills, or do they recruit them based on their warmth and, thus their interpersonal/social skills? Drawing on economic decision-making theories ([Luce & Raiffa, 1957](#); [Olson, 1965](#); [Thibaut & Kelley, 1959](#); see also [Lievens & Highhouse, 2003](#)), we argue that at work, which is an increasingly competitive environment that often prioritizes instrumental goals ([Fletcher et al., 2008](#); [Spence & Helmreich, 1983](#); [Wojciszke & Abele, 2008](#)), candidate competence will have a primacy effect over candidate warmth. Moreover, we argue that the tendency to value employee competence might be further strengthened by the recent switch of the global workforce to teleworking. To investigate this pressing question, we considered the moderating role of work-setting (teleworking or working from the office) in the relationship between person perception and recruitment intention.

Study 1 experimentally tested our hypotheses by manipulating candidate competence vs. warmth and work-setting (teleworking vs. office) in vignettes. Although the main effect of a candidate's competence/warmth on the recommendation for hire came out significant, this effect seems to have been qualified by the competence/warmth  $\times$  work-setting interaction, and it should be therefore interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, in line with [Hypothesis 2](#), Study 1 showed that people have a stronger intention to recruit highly competent employees (even if lower in warmth) when the organization favors teleworking instead of onsite work. Study 2, a field experiment among recruiters, manipulated competence vs. warmth similar to Study 1 and measured work-setting. Study 2 also included perceived appropriateness of the candidate for the job as a possible mediator in the hypothesized interaction effect. None of the main effects on the mediator came

out significant. However, the main effect of competence/warmth on recruitment intention was significant: Opposite to [Hypothesis 1](#), the main effect showed that recruiters recommend highly warm over highly competent candidates for hire. A possible explanation for this unexpected finding is that actual recruiters (Study 2) have learnt through their hiring experience to appreciate people's social qualities and interpersonal skills and are better able to acknowledge the importance of such skills in the hiring decision. In contrast, lay participants without such recruiting experience (Study 1) might not have been able to appreciate the relational value of candidate warmth in organizations and thus prioritized candidate competence. Alternatively, the unexpected effect of competence vs. warmth on recruitment intention might also be explained via people's general tendency to appreciate other people's warmth (over competence) due to its diagnostic value when trying to predict other people's intentions ([Peeters, 1983, 2001](#); [Peeters & Czapski, 1990](#); see also [Brambilla et al., 2012](#); [Brambilla et al., 2013](#); [Fousiani & Van Prooijen, 2019](#)). Future research should further investigate this effect in organizations.

Importantly, in line with [Hypotheses 2 and 3](#), we showed that recruiters manifest a stronger intention to hire a highly competent over a highly warm person the more the work-setting encourages teleworking, through the perception of such candidate as more fitting with a job. These findings are in line with our postulation that teleworking turns recruiters' attention to candidate characteristics that have stronger instrumental value, such as competence, while candidate warmth, which has a stronger relational value and is expressed through candidate social interactions ([Abele et al., 2016](#); [Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011](#); [Abele & Wojciszke, 2007](#)), becomes less significant in the hiring decision.

### 9.1. Theoretical implications

These results have important theoretical implications. First, despite the plethora of research on person perception in the broader social context (e.g., [Abele et al., 2016](#); [Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011](#); [Abele & Wojciszke, 2007](#)), there is very little empirical evidence on the importance of competence vs. warmth in organizations ([Bufquin et al., 2017](#); [Cuddy et al., 2011](#); [Kim et al., 2020](#); [Wojciszke & Abele, 2008](#)). For instance, [Cuddy et al. \(2011\)](#) touch on the importance of competence vs. warmth in employee evaluation, assessment, and promotion. However, in their research, they do not present any relevant empirical evidence about this topic. Moreover, [Bufquin et al. \(2017\)](#) showed that both workers' perceived warmth and competence significantly predict employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Yet, their study does not explore the value that people place on one or the other trait when evaluating and hiring employees. Interestingly, [Wojciszke and Abele \(2008\)](#) demonstrated the prevalence of competence over warmth of assesseses when the assessee's competence was related to the assessors' instrumental goals. Nevertheless, this study does not inform about the importance of competence vs. warmth in recruitment decisions. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to investigate the primacy effect of competence vs. warmth of a candidate in people's recruitment intentions. Most importantly, this current contribution is the first to show that teleworking turns recruiters' attention to candidate competence, which might be due to the instrumental goals that might come along with teleworking. The current findings paint a clearer picture of the issue at hand, which has been largely overlooked despite its major role in organizational functioning. Eventually, the current findings also speak to the Person Perception literature itself ([Abele et al., 2016](#); [Abele & Bruckmüller, 2011](#); [Abele & Wojciszke, 2007](#)) and provide evidence about the conditions under which the widely known primacy effect of warmth may be reversed (see also, [Wojciszke & Abele, 2008](#)). Finally, this study provides evidence for the underlying mechanisms that drive the investigated effects. Specifically, we found evidence that the perceived appropriateness of a candidate (i.e., perceived fitness with a job) is the underlying mechanism that drives the moder-

ated effect of competence on recommendation intention. Accordingly, this contribution informs the HRM literature about the explanatory mechanisms that drive people's hiring decisions in organizations.

### 9.2. Practical implications

Apart from its theoretical implications, this study also features a number of practical implications: HR practitioners should be aware of recruiters' overall preference for competent over sociable candidates and the possible bias that they may demonstrate when evaluating candidates in their attempt to further the (instrumental) goals of said organization. HR practitioners should not neglect the role that the work-setting—teleworking or working from the office—plays in the personnel selection process. In other words, HR practitioners should be aware of their tendency to reject candidates who have weaker competence-related but stronger social skills when judging them through the lens of the socially sterile online work-setting and be mindful of the consequences of such decisions. For instance, although—at first glance—teleworking does not seem to require strong relational and interpersonal skills, such skills are always beneficial to organizations as they might enable workers to find ways to connect, even when the circumstances do not allow, and also, are strongly related to people's well-being and the advancement of the organization in the long-run ([Ravindranath, 2016](#); [Vasanthakumari, 2019](#)). Besides HR practitioners, these findings are important to employees and job applicants in general as they reveal that the evaluation of individuals' core traits is contingent on contextual characteristics and, therefore, whether one or the other traits are evaluated in a positive or in a negative light depends on the context in question.

### 9.3. Limitations and future directions

Although we used different methods to operationalize our variables across the studies (Study 1 was a  $2 \times 2$  vignette experiment and Study 2 was a field experiment), the findings were largely similar, revealing the robustness of the investigated effects. However, this work includes a number of limitations and inconsistencies between the studies. A significant limitation of Study 1 is that it used a convenient sample; thus, participants had no recruitment experience. The generalizability of the findings of Study 1 is therefore questionable. Moreover, Study 1 manipulated work-setting as teleworking vs. office. We know, however, that a hybrid work-setting is a possibility nowadays, and many employees deem it very efficient given the possibility that it offers for online and onsite work at the same time. Therefore, the absence of such a hybrid work-setting is an important limitation of Study 1. Study 2 addressed these limitations by recruiting participants with hiring experience and measuring work-setting through a questionnaire (fully online, fully onsite, or partly online and partly onsite [hybrid]). Furthermore, Study 2 provided evidence for the mediating role of perceived appropriateness of the candidate in the observed effects. Despite the strengths of Study 2, both studies largely relied on vignettes for the manipulation of candidate competence vs. warmth and were thus hypothetical in nature. Although our vignettes were adapted versions of vignettes that have been successfully used in previous research ([Laustsen & Bor, 2017](#)), conclusions drawn from these studies are mostly about perceptions and may not transfer to real-life situations. Another important limitation of Study 2 is the strong positive correlation between perceived appropriateness of the candidate (mediator) and recommendation for recruitment (dependent variable) which might reveal that participants may have not perceived the two constructs as distinct. Therefore, the findings regarding the mediating role of perceived appropriateness of the candidate in the hypothesized relationships should be interpreted with caution as they may be misleading. Another mediating variable, that is less strongly correlated with recommendation for recruitment might be more appropriate in this research model. This contribution needs to be



seen as a preliminary step towards a more fine-grained understanding of the relationship between person perception and recruitment decisions. Future research needs to include a broader range of methodological designs (e.g., longitudinal designs and time-lagged field studies) to shed light on this topic. Finally, our measures were self-reported, non-behavioral measures; therefore, we cannot conclude with certainty if the observed effects can be generalized to people's behavior. Future research should further investigate these effects using behavioral measures (e.g., actual recruitment of job candidates) for a better understanding of the effects of competence vs. warmth on hiring decisions.

#### 9.4. Concluding remarks

Real-life examples underscore the primacy effect of candidate competence over warmth in hiring decisions in organizations. For instance, most job interviews focus on the candidate's capabilities and intellectual skills while less effort is put into extracting information about the candidate's social skills. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the global workforce, and most companies are currently hiring people to work either fully or partly remotely. This work-setting shift has further influenced recruiters' attention to candidate's competence-related (vs. warmth-related) skills. The present research sought to clarify that teleworking creates conditions that further undermine the importance of workers' social skills, which are inherent to people's well-being and organizational progress.

#### CRedit authorship contribution statement

Dr. Kyriaki Fousiani and Dr. Bibiana Armenta jointly designed the study and collected the data of the studies. Kyriaki Fousiani analyzed the data and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Chloe Sypes wrote the method and results sections of the studies. All the three authors contributed to the revision of the manuscript.

#### Compliance with ethical standards

This research involves human participants. All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

#### Declaration of competing interest

Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest. No funding was received for this study.

#### Data availability

Data and Research Materials are available from the Open Science Framework at: [https://osf.io/ehqr6/?view\\_only=e7698eaa36e545079eb9ad1154ac66ce](https://osf.io/ehqr6/?view_only=e7698eaa36e545079eb9ad1154ac66ce).

Study 2 was pre-registered at Open Science Framework: [https://osf.io/vqzpf/?view\\_only=fb2179291b6844399c503beb257bb3e2](https://osf.io/vqzpf/?view_only=fb2179291b6844399c503beb257bb3e2).

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