

# Developing a Measure of Social Perceptiveness

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*Work organizations are social entities in which being cognizant of the social context is important for individual performance and, ultimately, organizational success. We developed a scale to measure social perceptiveness and affordance seeking within the work environment. Reliability and validity evidence of the new scale is excellent.*

Organizations are social entities. Therefore, organizational members must be able to perform in a social environment and solve problems using the social context. The social nature of organizations highlights the importance of social skills in the workplace. A review of the literature reveals numerous attempts to define and measure social skills relevant to organizational performance. Many approaches and constructs have been proposed within the areas of social skills, emotional intelligence, and social intelligence; yet, there is little agreement on which constructs can be measured to predict success in an organizational environment. This research builds on the social intelligence literature to measure constructs directly related to problem solving in the organizational domain: social perceptiveness and social affordance seeking.

Organizations are coordinated social systems which represent the integration of individuals working together to achieve goals which cannot be achieved by an individual working alone (Katz & Kahn, 1978). This coordinated action produces systems and subsystems with many dynamic linkages between each. To meet their goals, organizations and their members must attend to the social environment of the system. The accurate perception of the social environment and use of environmental elements is an important determinant of success in an organizational setting. In fact, researchers have demonstrated the relationship of social skills to job performance (Riggio, Riggio, Salinas, & Cole, 2003; Ferris, Witt, & Hachwarter, 2001).

Individuals with a greater understanding of social systems through social skills consistently outperform those without these skills and knowledges.

The history of social skills began with Thorndike (1920) who was the first to identify social intelligence as a separate construct. Since the original introduction of this construct, there have been several attempts to define the concept and identify its components (See Landy, 2005 for a review). Supporters of the construct (Chapin, 1942; Gough, 1965; O'Sullivan & Guilford, 1966) developed new measures of social abilities and demonstrated divergent validity with intelligence and academic abilities. However, with each new measure emerged a different conceptualization of social ability. More recent attempts have further complicated the identification of a unifying social ability construct with variables such as social perceptiveness (Simons, 1966), interpersonal intelligence (Gardner, 1983), social competence (Schneider, Ackerman, & Kanfer, 1996; Sternberg, Conway, Ketron, & Bornstein, 1981), social skill (Riggio, 1986), self-monitoring (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986), and emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

The proliferation of attempts to identify the components of the social intelligence construct indicates both how important the concept is to theorists and practitioners, but also how elusive the concept is to measure. We offer here the proposal that these variously labeled and measured concepts all are likely elements of the social intelligence construct of Thorndike. Yet,

no one of these elements is adequate to capture the richness of the social intelligence construct and thus multiple lenses are appropriate to frame the concept. The specific lens of importance will be dependent on the context or domain of the performance of interest. The performance of interest for this project is the capacity to interact successfully with the social environment in an organizational context.

### *Social Perceptiveness and Affordance*

For the purpose of the current project, two elements of social ability were identified as critical to success in problem solving within a social organization. The dimensions of social ability that we identified for measurement were social perceptiveness and social affordance seeking.

*Social perceptiveness.* Social perceptiveness refers to the capacity to be aware of the needs, goals, and feelings of others and the greater social environment, which includes multiple others in the organization. Organizational members high in social perceptiveness are able to perceive accurately the social situation and determine the requirements of the social context. They are aware of their social environment and of the intentions and sensitivities of others. Their focus may be at the individual interpersonal level or at higher group or organizational levels (Zaccaro, Gilbert, Thor, & Mumford, 1991). Recent work has looked at the content of social perception on the comparisons that are made across multiple dimensions relevant to social perception (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). Our research focuses on the process of forming perceptions and how we tend to represent our social environment. Here, we are not as concerned with the process of perception. Rather, we focus on the awareness of the individuals within the social environment.

*Social affordance.* Related to the capacity of being aware of the environment is the identification of social elements that allow the solution of social problems or challenges. Such social elements are said to "afford" goal attainment based on the functional utility of that element for a specific event or goal. For

organizational employees, social affordance seeking refers to the predisposition to develop social networks in organizations. These networks afford opportunities to solve problems using social elements embedded within the organizational context. Organizational members high on social affordance seeking will develop networks that enable them to cope with the problem solving challenges of their positions. The social environment provides many elements with possible utility for goal attainment (Baron & Boudreau, 1987; Duncan, 1987). Organizational members must attend to the appropriate elements and accurately perceive the meaning of their properties as affording goals. This approach to perception of the social environment comes from the ecological position outlined by Gibson (1979). By seeking affordances, employees are able to join or construct groups strategically, thus adapting to the dynamic social context of the organization. Affordance seeking adds to organizational success by providing the individual with necessary resources and cooperative alliances.

Given the domain of interest for this project--social organizational performance--the addition of social affordance seeking is particularly relevant. The predisposition to form alliances within the social environment represents a context dependent act or behavior. Ford and Tisek (1983) suggested that the developmental mechanisms of general and social intelligence are similar; the differences lie in the behavioral manifestations of the capacities. Social affordance seeking represents the predisposition to act using the social environment. For organizational employees, this affordance seeking generally means the development of social networks.

### *Purpose of Study*

The purpose of this study was to construct a reliable, valid measure of social perceptiveness and affordance seeking. Consistent with earlier concerns about social intelligence, a valid measure should demonstrate divergence from general cognitive capacities or academic

abilities. In addition, there should be consistency with other measures of social skills. Beyond social skills, there should also be a relationship with personality characteristics that represent the predisposition to act in social settings such as extraversion.

## Method

### *Item Construction*

Seventeen items that reflected the concepts of social perceptiveness and affordance were written by a team of faculty and graduate students in industrial organizational psychology. The item, "I encourage understanding points of view of other people", assesses social perceptiveness. An example of a social affordance seeking item is "I seek out relationships that are mutually beneficial." These items are in Table 1.

### *Measures*

In addition to responding to the newly constructed scale, participants completed measures of cognitive ability, political skill, the Big Five personality factors, and self-monitoring. These scales were included to provide evidence of convergent and divergent validity.

*Cognitive ability.* The Verbal Reasoning subtest of the Employee Aptitude Survey (Ruch, Stang, McKilip, & Dye, 1994) was used as the measure of cognitive ability. This test measures the ability of examinees to uncover relationships and principles within statements based on given premises. The test consists of five statements to be evaluated for 6 scenarios, yielding 30 scored questions. Ruch et al reported a parallel forms reliability of .82. Scores on this subtest of the EAS correlated uniformly with aptitude and ability tests given at the college level (e.g., .51 and .53 with the Verbal and Quantitative Subtests of the School College Aptitude Test) and for employment testing (e.g., .56 with the Otis Employment Test).

*Political skill.* The 40 item Political Skill Scale of Ferris and colleagues (2005) contains four subscales: networking ability (NA),

interpersonal influence (II), social astuteness (SA), and apparent sincerity (AS). The measure uses a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). These subscales can further be defined as follows: good networking ability indicates an adeptness at identifying strategic contacts and forming alliances within these networks (*example item:* I spend a lot of time and effort at work networking with others); interpersonal influence refers to the ability to adapt one's interpersonal style to the situation (*example item:* I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me); social astuteness is the ability to interpret accurately the meaning of others' behaviors (*example item:* I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others); and individuals high in apparent sincerity appear to be authentic and genuine (*example item:* When communicating with others, I try to be genuine in what I say and do). Coefficient alphas for this study were .85 for NA, .77 for II, .82 for SA, and .79 for AS.

*Political savvy.* We used the Politics subscale (factor 3) of Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, and Gardner's Organizational Socialization Scale (1994). This subscale was chosen because it taps into an employee's understanding of and success in interpreting formal and informal work relationships and power within an organization. Knowledge of the powerful in an organizational context would be expected to be related to one's social perceptiveness. Means of this scale were found to increase over a four-year period for a sample of professionals, engineers, and managers who had remained with their organizations (Chao et al, 1994). Further, in the Chao et al, study, this scale was significantly correlated with personal income (.33), identity resolution (.32), adaptability (.26), and job satisfaction (.36). There are six items on this subscale with anchors from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item is "I have learned how things 'really work' on the inside of this organization." Coefficient alpha for this study was .74.

*Big Five personality factors.* The Five Factor Model Questionnaire of Gill and Hodgkinson (2007) was used to assess the Big Five personality factors of agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, emotional stability, and extraversion. The scale has 80 items (16 adjectives per dimension) with a 5 point scale anchored 1, “Not like me at all at work” to 5, “Very like me at work.” This scale was chosen because it has been validated with work samples and uses anchors that ask about personality at work; given the context of the proposed measure within the work context, this scale was deemed an appropriate measure of personality. Coefficient alphas for this study were .84 for agreeableness, .78 for conscientiousness, .79 for openness to experience, .85 for emotional stability, and .77 for extraversion.

*Self monitoring.* The measure of Lennox & Wolfe (1984) was used to measure self monitoring. This measure has two primary factors (each with two subscales): Self Monitoring (ability to modify self presentation and sensitivity to expressive behavior of others) and Concern for Appropriateness (cross-situational variability and attention to social comparison information).

The first two subscales are generally considered to represent the traditional definition of self monitoring—identifying the needs of the situation and modifying one’s behavior to the situation. An example item from the ability to modify self-presentation subscale is “Once I know what the situation calls for, it’s easy for me to regulate my actions accordingly.” For the sensitivity to expressive behavior subscale, a sample item is “I can usually tell when I’ve said something inappropriate by reading it in the listener’s eyes.”

The second factor, concern for appropriateness, measures social anxiety. There are two subscales, of which one is cross-situational variability; a sample item from this subscale is: “In different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons.” For the attention to social comparison information subscale, an example item is “I try

to pay attention to the reactions of others to my behavior in order to avoid being out of place.”

The rating scale used with this 33 item measure is anchored as follows: 5 = certainly, always true; 4 = generally true; 3 = somewhat true, but with exception; 2 = somewhat false, but with exception; 1 = generally false; 0 = certainly, always false.

Coefficient alpha for this study was .72 for ability to modify self-presentation, .74 for sensitivity to expressive behavior of others, .75 for cross-situational variability, and attention to social comparison information, .79

### *Procedure*

All scales were combined into a single packet which was administered during class time in three organizational behavior and theory classes with permission of the instructor. All responses were anonymous with students receiving course credit at the discretion of the instructor.

## Results

### *Participants*

Participants were 157 business students from a regional university in southern California. Ages ranged from 18 to 60 with a mean of 25.7 (SD = 7.9). Half of the sample was currently working, with an average of 6.4 (SD = 5.0) years of work experience.

### *Factor Analysis*

A principal axis factor analysis with an oblique rotation was conducted. Overall, the two extracted factors corresponded to the intended factors of social perceptiveness and affordance seeking; 14 items loaded above .40. Three social affordance items loaded on the social perceptiveness factor. Inspection of these items suggest that the unifying theme was that of sensitivity to others, a concept consistent with the factor of social perceptiveness. Reliability analyses yielded coefficient alphas of .83 for social perceptiveness and .80 for affordance seeking. See Table 1.

### *Correlational Analysis*

To establish convergent and divergent validity, scores of the two newly constructed subscales were correlated with measures of Big Five personality factors, political skill, self-monitoring, and cognitive ability. Affordance seeking correlated significantly with extraversion (.49) and openness to experience (.28); in contrast, social perceptiveness did not correlate significantly with either personality trait. The networking subscale of the political skill measure correlated highly (.55) with affordance seeking but minimally (.23) with social perceptiveness. Further evidence for social perceptiveness and affordance seeking was found in negligible to small correlations with self-monitoring. Finally, neither subscale was correlated with cognitive ability. See Table 2 for correlations, means, and standard deviations of the study variables.

### Discussion

The factor analysis provided evidence for the existence of two dimensions within the measure. Both dimensions did not correlate with cognitive ability. This distinction is critical for measures of social ability.

Convergent validity is found in the relationships of both scales with sub dimensions of political skill and self monitoring. Differential relationships of social perceptiveness and social affordance seeking with several of the personality measures and social ability are consistent with the nature of each dimension. Social affordance seeking is a predisposition to act in a social environment through the formation of social networks. The behavioral nature of this dimension is consistent with the nature of extraversion, political savvy, and political ability. Additional differences can be seen in the relationships of agreeableness and conscientiousness with social perception but not social affordance seeking. These variables require an awareness of others. They do not require the behaviors of seeking affordances in social alliances.

It is important to note that it is not the purpose of this measure to capture social

intelligence. While the concepts in this project are based on social intelligence, this measure only assesses related sub dimensions of the construct. Further construct and measurement development is required to assess fully this domain. Although additional research is needed, the initial evidence for the social perceptiveness and affordance seeking scale is very promising. Given the importance in identifying social skills in the work environment, this new scale can fill a critical void in the social skills area. Future research should include the use of this measure in assessing performance in a social organizational context.

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#### Author Notes

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Table 1. Factor Structure of the Social Perceptiveness Measure

SP Scale, Two Factor Solution, Principal Axis Factor with Oblimin Rotation			
Prop. Factor	F 1	F 2	Item
SP	74		I show sensitivity and understand others' perspectives
SP	73		I am attentive to emotional cues and listen well.
SP	64		I am able to recognize different emotions in myself and others.
SA	56		I encourage understanding points of view of other people.
SA	55		I respect and relate well to people from varied backgrounds.
SP	52		I seek mutual understanding and welcome sharing of information.
SA	47		I understand diverse worldviews and am sensitive to group differences.
SP	43		I show concern for others' needs.
SA		69	I cultivate and maintain extensive informal networks.
SA		66	I include people from multiple groups to help in problem solving
SA		61	I seek out relationships that are mutually beneficial.
SA		57	I am able to make and maintain personal friendships among work associates.
SA		55	I cultivate relationships with people.
SA		51	I develop interpersonal relationships with other people.
SA		37	I am able to detect social networks.
<b><i>Items that did not load</i></b>			
SA			I generally find that it is best to solve problems on my own without involving others.
SP			I recognize my own strengths and weaknesses.
Eigen value	4.98	1.02	
% Var	29.3	6.0	

Note. SP = Social Perceptiveness, SA = Social Affordance

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Social Perceptiveness Factors with Study Variables

	Mean (SD)	Factor 1 Social Perceptiveness	Factor 2 Social Affordance Seeking
EAS, Verbal	19.76 (5.66)	.00	-.14
Networking (PS)	4.77 (1.15)	.23*	.55**
Apparent Sincerity (PS)	5.78 (.99)	.58**	.41**
Social Astuteness (PS)	5.23 (.99)	.46**	.47**
Interpersonal Influence (PS)	5.45 (.90)	.48**	.58**
Political Savvy	3.92 (.34)	.05	.26**
Agreeableness	4.07 (.50)	.46**	.54**
Conscientiousness	4.03 (.47)	.27**	.23
Openness	3.25 (.53)	.10	.28**
Extraversion	3.54 (.55)	.16	.49**
Emotional Stability	2.61 (.73)	-.33**	-.12
Self Present (SM)	3.54 (.70)	.24*	.37**
Expressive Sensitivity (SM)	3.55 (.73)	.19*	.16
Cross Situational Variability (CA)	2.83 (.87)	-.11	-.10
Social Comparison (CA)	2.78 (.71)	-.02	.10
	Mean (SD)	5.69 (.79)	5.34 (.88)

Notes. N = 125

PS = Political Skill Subscale, Ferris, et al., (2001)

SM = Self monitoring subscale, Lennox & Wolfe (1984)

CA = Concern for Appropriateness, Lennox & Wolfe (1984)