Conceptualizing and Assessing Interpersonal Adaptability:

Towards a Functional Framework

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Towards a Functional Framework

As a result of the increased frequency and complexity of interpersonal interactions in today's workplaces, researchers and practitioners have stated that today's workers need to be interpersonally adaptive (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007; Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007; Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000). Now, more than ever, today's worker must interact effectively with others in the workplace. One aspect of this reflects the predominance of service-oriented organizations in many economies (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). Within these organizations workers are required to spend a considerable part of their day engaged in social interactions and managing social relationships with customers (Schneider, 1994), and with teams (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). Further, increases in globalization (Javidan, Dorfman, de Luque, & House, 2006), boundaryless organizational structures (Macy & Izumi, 1993), and workplace diversity (Mahoney, 2005), require workers to engage in more complex and dynamic interpersonal interactions.

Traditionally, a 'person-focused' construct, such as interpersonal skills (e.g., Klein, DeRouin, & Salas, 2006), is used to measure an individual's effectiveness within an interpersonal interaction. Interpersonal skills assess the goal-directed behaviors an individual performs, such as effectively negotiating, and demonstrating warmth and friendliness. Interpersonal skills represent a range of behaviors that are appropriate *across most* interpersonal interactions. Though a particular interpersonal skill is appropriate for

most interpersonal interactions, it may not always be appropriate within a specific interpersonal interaction.

As an example, let's say a manager is required to train a new direct report while ensuring that a critical service deliverable is met. The manager begins by using coaching skills (i.e., interpersonal skill), allowing the direct report to initiate his own learning and exploration. If the direct report quickly demonstrates confidence and proficiency at meeting the critical service deliverable, then the manager's initial coaching approach would be appropriate and there is no need to adjust his/her approach. However, the direct report may show tremendous anxiety towards self-directed learning. Or the direct report may demonstrate that he is unable to learn the job quickly enough to meet the critical service deliverable. In such situations, it would be more appropriate for the manager to adapt to a different training style (e.g., directive communication), and delegate the service deliverable to another employee. By correctly perceiving the situation (i.e., employee's anxiety, task will not be completed effectively), and adjusting skills and strategies (i.e., directive learning style from coaching learning style, stop using critical service deliverable as training opportunity) the manager can meet the goals of the situation (i.e., develop the new direct report, meet client service deliverable).

The limitation of using person-focused constructs is that they only assess the person. Interpersonal skills assess *what the manager did*, without taking into account the demands that dynamically occur within situation (e.g., response of employee), and the goals within the situation. In other words, interpersonal skills assess whether an individual performs behaviors that are effective in most situations, but they do not assess whether an individual performs the behaviors that fit with the challenges and goals that

are part of the specific situation. As such, interpersonal skills do not directly assess whether the interpersonal processes and skills elicited by an individual were the most appropriate response *given the specific situation*. An alternative construct to assess the fit of interpersonal skills and interpersonal processes within an interpersonal interaction is *interpersonal adaptability (Chan, 2000)*.

We have two main objectives for this chapter. The first objective is to clearly define what it means to be *interpersonally adaptive*, and introduce a framework for assessing *interpersonal adaptability*. We do so by drawing upon existing frameworks of *individual* adaptability (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006) and interpersonal skills (Klein et al., 2006). We introduce our framework in order to demonstrate that there is a need for researchers and practitioners to further account for the demands and goals within an interpersonal interaction if we want to effectively measure individuals' abilities to effectively adapt within dynamic and complex interpersonal interactions. The second objective is to draw upon our framework to discuss shortcomings for how interpersonal adaptability is commonly assessed in research and practice today. In doing so, we will discuss how our framework of interpersonal adaptability has implications for assessment practices.

INTERPERSONAL ADAPTABILITY

Interpersonal adaptability has been conceptualized as a distinct component of individual adaptability (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006; Pulakos, et al., 2000). Adaptability refers to the "an individual's ability, skill, disposition, willingness, and/or motivation, to change or fit different tasks, social, and environmental features" (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006, p. 13). Interpersonal adaptability can include the flexibility to act more or less

dominant and friendly depending on the situation (Paulhus & Martin, 1988), adjust to a new reporting structure within a team (Kozlowski, Gully, Nason, & Smith, 1999), and adjust one's selling strategy to suit the demands of a customer (Spiro & Weitz, 1990). The commonalities between these definitions is that interpersonal adaptability is a conceptualization of interpersonal effectiveness that takes into account the appropriateness of individuals' interpersonal thoughts, and feelings of the person *within* a specific interpersonal interaction.

We define interpersonal adaptability as the fit of an individual's interpersonal behavior, thoughts, and emotions within an interpersonal interaction in order to achieve the goals afforded by the situational demands of the interaction. This definition highlights five key components of our definition of interpersonal adaptability.

1. Interpersonal adaptability is a functional construct.

2. Interpersonal adaptability is multidimensional

3. Interpersonal adaptability occurs within an interpersonal interaction.

4. Situational demands can be conceptualized by the goals that they afford.

5. Interpersonal adaptability is a measure of fit.

We discuss these components below. First, as a *functional* construct, interpersonal adaptability assesses interpersonal processes and skills *within the context* of situational demands. This is consistent with Kurt Lewin's (1946) famous equation B = f (P,E) (i.e., (B)ehaviour is a function of (P)erson and (E)nvironment. Examples of these situational features abound. Being 'adaptive' can be measured as individuals' performance when working on a task that has been changed or altered (e.g., LePine, Colquitt, & Erez, 2000), generalization of knowledge and skills to a new task (e.g., Kozlowski et al., 2001),

interpretation of situational demands, selection of the situation-appropriate goals, and strategy selection for goal achievement within the situation (e.g., Yang, Read, & Miller, 2009), coping or reacting to a stressful situation (e.g., Pulakos et al., 2000), proactively initiating change to a stable environment (e.g., Crant, 2000). Thus, situational demands must be accounted for in order to evaluate the appropriateness and effectiveness of interpersonal processes and interpersonal skills.

Second, interpersonal adaptability is multi-dimensional. Drawing upon Ployhart & Bliese's (2006) framework for individual adaptability, we conceptualize interpersonal adaptability as being a function of both interpersonal skills and interpersonal processes, such as situation perception and appraisal, and strategy selection. This is consistent with Klein and colleagues' (2006) framework of interpersonal skills, which also conceptualized perceptual and cognitive filtering processes as key mediating variables for the execution of interpersonal skill.

Third, situational demands take place within an interpersonal interaction. An interpersonal interaction is a social interaction between two or more individuals where each individual is goal driven and has the opportunity to make progress towards their goals (Argyle, Furnham & Graham, 1981; Hayes, 2002; Klein et al., 2006). In every interpersonal interaction, an individual is continually required to monitor the actions of others and adjust his or her own actions, thoughts, and emotions in order to effectively attempt to reach his or her goal(s) for the interaction. Thus, interpersonal interactions are dynamic, and/or novel, both of which are the situational demands that are relevant to adaptability (Chan, 2000; Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). Within an interpersonal interaction, adaptability is a quick and flexible adjustment in behavior, thought, and emotion that

occurs following a dynamic situational demand (Lang & Bliese, 2009). Examples of dynamic demands within an interpersonal interaction include a change in an interaction partner's mood, an unexpected request from an interaction partner, and role ambiguity with the interaction partner. In addition, within an interpersonal interaction, interpersonal adaptability may be needed to respond to a lack of change in an interaction partner. As an example, a physician may need to adjust their communication style when explaining a health matter if a patient continues to express confusion (i.e., non-changing situational demand).

Fourth, situational demands within an interpersonal interaction afford particular goals for the interaction. This is consistent with much of the research literature that finds that human behavior (e.g., Argyle et al., 1981; Austin & Vancouver, 1996) and personality (e.g., Miller & Read, 1991; Pervin, 1992) are fundamentally goal-driven. Since persons, situation, and behavior are interconnected (Lewin, 1946; Mischel & Shoda, 1995), it can be deduced that the essence of a situation is the goals that it leads others to set and work towards (Yang et al., 2009). That is, individuals draw upon the demands of a situation to select goals, select and adjust strategies to achieve their goals, and monitor goal attainment.

Fifth, interpersonal adaptability is a measure of fit of an individual's behaviors, thoughts, and emotions with the demands of the interpersonal interaction[1]. The concept of fit implies that skills that are effective for one set of situational demands will not necessarily be effective for another set of situational demands (Chan, 2000). In addition,

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[1] As discussed by Chan (2000), by defining adaptability as a measure of fit, we acknowledge that adaptability is caused by individual differences (e.g., Ployhart & Bliese, 2006) and the ability to learn (e.g., Kozlowski et al., 2001).

there may be different sets of skills and processes that are equally effective at achieving the goal(s) afforded by the demands within a situation. Trait activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003) provides two criteria for assessing the fit of individual's demonstrated processes and skills within a specific situation. First, trait activation theory proposes that the appropriateness of individuals' behavior and processes should be evaluated against the performance goals afforded by the demands within the situation. In other words, did the individual adjust and / or maintain behaviors that increased their ability to achieve the goals most relevant to the situation. Second, trait activation theory proposes that particular situational demands affect the likelihood that individuals will achieve fit within an interaction. Certain situational demands facilitate individuals in achieving fit, whereas other situational demands constrain individuals from achieving fit. For example, it is easier to provide strong customer service to a friendly and loyal customer than when interacting with a distrustful and upset customer.

Now that we have conceptually defined interpersonal adaptability, we can discuss our framework of interpersonal adaptability (see Figure 1). The framework elaborates on the multidimensional nature of the interpersonal adaptability construct, and specifies how the construct is related to other popular interpersonal ability and performance constructs in the assessment literature. In doing so, we aim to guide and improve the assessment of individual differences in the skill to be interpersonally effective.

A FUNCTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF INTERPERSONAL ADAPTABILITY

The framework can be broken down into three components. The first component is the distal component. This distal component includes individual differences that predict

interpersonal effectiveness, which include emotional intelligence, social intelligence, practical intelligence, personality, and team/collective orientation (Klein et al., 2006; Lievens & Chan, 2010). For the purposes of understanding how individual differences are related to interpersonal adaptability, we will focus our discussion on only two of these individual differences (personality and ability-based emotional intelligence). The second component is the within-situation component. This component represents interpersonal adaptability, which is a measure of interpersonal processes and interpersonal skills within the context of situational demands. When interpersonal processes and interpersonal skills are measured within the context of a specific interpersonal interaction, then interpersonal adaptability can be assessed. The third component is the across-situations component. This includes adaptive interpersonal performance (Pulakos et al., 2000) and job performance.

Now that we have provided an overview of our functional framework of interpersonal adaptability, we proceed with a more detailed discussion for each of the three components of the framework. Our discussion focuses on how constructs in our model are commonly assessed.

Distal-Level Variables

In this section we discuss two of the more common distal-level individual difference constructs that can predict interpersonal performance: personality and ability-based emotional intelligence.

Personality

There is broad consensus that personality as measured by the five-factor model is a distal predictor of interpersonal performance (Chan & Schmitt, 2005; Klein et al., 2006;

Ployhart & Bliese, 2006), and personality assessments are frequently used in organizational practice and research to predict performance. However, some researchers have argued that personality does not account for enough of the variance in job performance to warrant such widespread use (e.g., Morgeson et al., 2007).

We expect personality traits to be predictive of interpersonal performance the more that they are representative of interpersonal processes and interpersonal skills across a range of interpersonal situations. Of the five-factor model personality traits, agreeableness and extraversion account for most of the interpersonal processes and interpersonal skills representative across a broad range of interpersonal interactions (McCrae & Costa, 1989). Though these characteristics should intuitively be associated with stronger job performance, the evidence of predictive validity for these two traits to task performance has been mixed (Penney, David, & Witt, 2011). However as found in a recent unpublished meta-analysis (Klein, 2009), if the criterion is specified to general interpersonal skills, then there are moderate predictive validities for agreeableness ($\rho =$ .30) and extraversion ($\rho = .36$). In contrast, the same meta-analysis found only small predictive validities for the other three Big Five personality traits - conscientiousness ($\rho =$ .15), emotional stability ($\rho = .11$), and openness ($\rho = .01$). Therefore, it appears as though agreeableness and extraversion will be more predictive of interpersonal adaptability when it is assessed over a broad range of interpersonal interactions.

As supported by Tett, Jackson, and Rothstein's (1991) meta-analysis, we expect personality traits to be predictive of interpersonal adaptability when there is also a clear theoretical link between personality traits and job demands identified from a job analysis. Many empirical studies have found that particular personality traits are more predictive of

interpersonal processes and interpersonal skills when they account for task-level demands (Bakker, Van Der Zee, Lewig, & Dollard, 2006; Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hogan & Holland, 2003; Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998), social-level demands (Liao, Joshi, & Chuang, 2004), and organizational-level demands (Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick, 2004; Witt, Kacmar, Carlson, & Zivnuska, 2002). For example, in a study of volunteer counselors, agreeableness reduced perceptions of burnout for those employees who had many difficult client experiences (e.g., working with ungrateful families), but was unrelated to burnout for those employees who had few difficult client experiences (Bakker et al., 2006). Therefore, though extraversion and agreeableness may be predictive of interpersonal processes and interpersonal skills across interpersonal interactions, the empirical evidence suggests that when personality factors are carefully matched with the situation, then they can be more strongly predictive of interpersonal processes and interpersonal skills (Penney et al., 2011).

Ability-based emotional intelligence

Ability-based emotional intelligence is an ability to perform the following four interpersonal processes: (1) perception and expression of emotion; (2) use emotions to facilitate task performance; (3) understand relationships between emotions, situations, and time courses; and (4) regulate and manage one's own and others' emotions (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios, 2003). It is a construct that has evolved from multiple intelligence theories (Gardner, 1999; Williams & Sternberg, 1988), thus it shares conceptual definitions with such constructs as practical intelligence and social

intelligence (for a review see Lievens & Chan, 2010)[2]. The underlying similarity between these constructs is that they can be broadly defined as 1) an individual ability to *process* which behaviors and emotions are appropriate in a given interpersonal interaction; 2) an individual ability to *express* the appropriate set of behaviors and emotions in the interpersonal interaction. Thus, conceptually, how we have modeled interpersonal adaptability overlaps considerably with ability-based emotional intelligence. Both concepts are ability-based individual differences to apply appropriate interpersonal processes and interpersonal skills within a particular interpersonal interaction.

As the term implies, ability-based emotional intelligence is as a form of interpersonal ability and is measured through performance-based tests. Ability-based emotional intelligence has been found to have convergent validity with cognitive ability and divergent validity with personality traits (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008; Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004). There has yet to be strong evidence supporting the incremental validity of ability-based emotional intelligence in predicting interpersonal performance over-and-above cognitive ability and personality. In a recent meta-analysis, ability-based emotional intelligence predicted little variance of job performance (0.2%) over cognitive ability and five-factor measures of personality (Joseph & Newman, 2010). As highlighted in our discussion of personality, part of the low incremental validity findings are likely due to a lack of criterion-specificity. This is supported from the

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[2] In contrast, trait emotional intelligence, the other popular model of emotional intelligence, has low convergent validity with cognitive ability and low divergent validity with personality (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004). As a result, the scientific community generally agrees that only ability-based emotional intelligence represents a distinct construct of intelligence, which conceptually should predict interpersonal performance over and above measures of personality and cognitive ability (Roberts, MacCann, Matthews, & Zeidner, 2010).

moderation analysis that found for jobs classified as having 'high-emotional labor', ability-based emotional intelligence was found to account for a small amount of incremental variance for job performance (1.5%). Therefore, if even more specific criterion measures of interpersonal processes and interpersonal skills were used, then stronger incremental validity should be expected (Lievens & Chan, 2010).

In summary, researchers have argued that for both personality and ability-based emotional intelligence there is an opportunity to find stronger predictive relationships to job performance when more specific interpersonal criteria are used. In the next section, we provide a more detailed description of how interpersonal adaptability can be assessed. In doing so, we attempt to clarify the relationship between the interpersonal aspects of job performance – interpersonal skills and interpersonal processes within interpersonal interactions – in order to help researchers and practitioners to establish more specific interpersonal criteria in the future.

Within-Situation Variables

In this section we discuss the functional component of our framework that comprises our concept of interpersonal adaptability. This includes a discussion of interpersonal skills, interpersonal processes, and the situational demands within interpersonal interactions.

Interpersonal Skills

Klein and colleagues (2006) conducted the most comprehensive review of interpersonal skills, which included a qualitative review of over 50 interpersonal skill models and taxonomies. On the basis of their review, they concluded that interpersonal skill consists of two conceptually distinct dimensions: *communication* and *relationship*

building. Communication was defined by five sub-skills; active listening, oral communication, written communication, assertive communication, and nonverbal communication. Relationship building was defined by six sub-skills; cooperation and coordination, trust, intercultural sensitivity, service orientation, self-presentation, social influence, and conflict resolution and negotiation. Validation of this competency model found that it was moderately related to FFM personality, particularly extraversion, and enhanced post-interpersonal-training job performance outcomes (Klein, 2009). Therefore, our framework of interpersonal adaptability will model performance based on two performance components: communication and relationship building.

As discussed earlier in the paper, interpersonal skills can be defined as goal directed behavior. Specifically, Klein et al., (2006) defined interpersonal skills performance as "goal-directed behaviors, including communication and relationship-building competencies, employed in interpersonal interaction episodes characterized by complex perceptual and cognitive processes, dynamic verbal and nonverbal interaction exchanges, diverse roles, motivations, and expectancies (p. 81)." Implied within this definition is that interpersonal skills are a function of the situation (i.e., interpersonal interaction episodes), and that interpersonal actions and behaviors that are appropriate for one situation may not be appropriate to the other situation. Thus, the conceptualization of interpersonal behavior is that of an ability to effectively adapt to the dynamics of the situational demands within interpersonal interactions.

The adaptive conceptualization of interpersonal skills is consistent across many models of interpersonal skills. As an example, as part of a generalized employee skill model, Mumford and colleagues (2007) defined interpersonal skills with four sub-skills:

a) negotiation, "bringing others together to reconcile differences"; b) persuasion "persuading others to change their minds or behavior"; c) social perspectiveness, "being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react as they do", d) coordination, "adjusting actions in relation to others' actions" (p. 160). The first two sub-skills are examples of adaptive skills, as the sub-skills clearly articulates a goal (i.e., to reconcile differences, to change the minds or behaviors of others); and the second two sub-skills represent more situationally-specific performance, as they require the individual to respond to aspects of the situation (i.e., being aware of others, adjusting actions in relation to others). However, in order to be a true measure of situational appropriateness and effectiveness, interpersonal skills need to be assessed within-the context of situational demands. This way, it is possible to assess whether an individual is attending to the appropriate goal (i.e., a cooperative-goal - reconciling differences, vs. a competitive goal - changing the minds of others), and it is possible to more accurately judge the effectiveness of the skill (i.e., did the individual respond to subtle cues from an interaction partner, or only exaggerated cues?).

Interpersonal Processes

The interpersonal processes most relevant to interpersonal interactions are situational perception and appraisal and strategy selection (Argyle et al., 1981; Hayes, 2002). Self-regulation and coping, and knowledge acquisition are other internal processes that are relevant to adaptability within interpersonal interactions (Arnoff, Stollak, & Woike, 1994; Kozlowski et al., 2001; Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). However, both of these processes are more conceptually relevant to other dimensions of adaptive performance (Pulakos et al., 2000) than they are to interpersonal adaptability. In particular, self-

regulation and coping is more relevant to the dimensions of adaptability to crisis situations and adaptability to handling work stress; whereas knowledge acquisition is more relevant to learning adaptability. As a result, we focus our discussion on the interpersonal processes of situational perception and appraisal and strategy selection.

According to the social skills model of social performance (Argyle et al., 1981), there are two main propositions that elucidate how cognitive and affective processes operate within interpersonal interactions. As a first proposition, people engage in social encounters to achieve particular goals. Therefore, people engage in strategy selection within interpersonal interactions. One aspect of strategy selection is selecting the overarching interpersonal goal for an interaction. The content of interpersonal goals can be conceptualized using three dimensions (Penney et al., 2011). The two most commonly conceptualized interpersonal goal dimensions are agency-striving and communion-striving (Bakan, 1966; Barrick, Mount, & Gupta, 2003; Hogan & Holland, 2003; Hogan & Shelton, 1998; Saucier & Goldberg, 1996). An agentic-striving goal, is characterized by motives of self-protection, self-assertion, and the desire to influence, control, or master over the self, other people, and the environment. Agentic-striving goals can range from being motivated to lead to being motivated to follow. A communal-striving goal is characterized by motives to be one with others, and to engage in more cooperative relationships with others. Communal-striving goals can range from cooperating with others to competing or being in conflict with others. This two-dimensional conceptualization has been empirically supported as a valid measure of interpersonal goals (Locke, 2000). A third interpersonal goal that is relevant to interpersonal processing

within the work place is accomplishment striving (Penney et al., 2011). Accomplishment-striving refers to the motivation directed at completing work tasks.

Another aspect of strategy selection is the process of monitoring goal progress and adjusting goals based on compatibility of goals within the interaction context. In most social situations, individuals have two or more goals each, and how much the goals complement or conflict with each other affects each individual's behaviors. For example, a leader (Alex) may have two goals when she interacts with her team. Alex wants her team to follow her directions (i.e., agentic-striving – leading), and she also wants to maintain a positive relationship with her team (i.e., communal-striving – cooperative). These goals can be incompatible because if Alex is too directive then she risks damaging her relationship with her team members, but if she is too friendly she risks undermining her authority to ensure compliance from her team members. In order to select the most appropriate of the two competing strategies, individuals will draw upon the situational demands within the interpersonal interaction. Thus, interpersonal interactions with similar situational demands will influence people to select similar goals (e.g., competitive vs. cooperative situations) across interpersonal interactions, which in turn will lead to behavioral consistency across situations (for a review, see Heller, Perunovic, & Reichman, 2009; Yang et al., 2009).

Apart from people engaging in social encounters to achieve particular goals, the second important proposition of Argyle and colleagues' (1981) model is related to situation perception and appraisal. Argyle's model proposes that in any social encounter each individual attempts to realize his or her goal through the continuous correction of his or her social performance (Hayes, 2002; Hargie, 2006). 'Continuous correction' is a

process that involves monitoring the other individual's reactions, being aware of one's own actions and cognitive-emotional processes, and adjusting one's behaviors and cognitive-emotional processes in response to his or her interaction partner. For example, if Alex perceives that her team members are disregarding her directions, she would likely adapt her behaviors to demonstrate more dominance in order to gain compliance; whereas if Alex perceives that her team members are cold and unfriendly towards her, she would likely adapt her behaviors to demonstrate more friendliness in order to improve the relationship with her team members. Therefore, the model illustrates that cognitive and affective processes are interdependent within the interpersonal interactions. Thus, in order for an individual to meet his or her goal(s) within an interpersonal interaction, he or she must be adaptive and flexible to meet the dynamic demands that are within his or her interpersonal interaction.

Characteristics of Interpersonal Situations

It has been argued that to date, social psychologists have failed to develop a reliable and comprehensive taxonomy of situation, akin to taxonomies of personality (Reis, 2008)[3]. Though the field of social psychology still lacks a strongly accepted taxonomy of situations, various situational taxonomies show promise at adequately organizing the wide range of situational features into a small set of meaningful categories (e.g., Kelley et al., 2003; Wagerman & Funder, 2009; Leary, 1957). Furthermore, in I/O

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[3] This is why, it is imperative that all assessment processes begin with a thorough job analysis to determine which processes and behaviors are appropriate to particular job-relevant situations (*Standards*, 1999). Two job analyses techniques that can produce such information are the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954) or functional job analysis (Fine & Cronshaw, 1999). Thus, a bottom-up approach is necessary in order to build an ecologically valid assessment of interpersonal adaptability for a given organization. However, a bottom-up process should still be guided by sound top-down theory in order to ensure that meaningful distinctions are being identified across situations.

psychology trait activation theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003) has recently emerged as a useful job-relevant framework to organize situational demands. As part of the trait activation framework, situational demands are modeled at three different levels within the workplace environment. The three levels of situational demands are: 1) *task demands*, which are features of the actual work, such as day-to-day tasks, responsibilities, and duties; 2) *social demands*, which are the behaviors and dispositions of the people that an individual interacts with on the job, such as peers, subordinates, supervisors, customers, and clients; 3) *organizational demands*, which are features of the climate and culture of an organization, profession, region, and workplace. We will draw on this framework to identify how situational demands from other social psychology theories can impact interpersonal adaptability.

Task demands. As the building block of a job or role, a task is an action or sequence of actions designed to contribute to a specified end result that will lead to the accomplishment of an objective (Fine & Cronshaw, 1999). Many tasks are highly interpersonal. They require an individual to coordinate his or her actions with others in order to accomplish his or her objective. As examples, a salesperson must promote a product to a customer in order to make a sale, a social worker must interview a client in order to determine which programs the client is eligible for, and a project manager must meet with her direct reports in order to communicate the project plan to her team. Although these tasks are similar in that they are all social in nature, there are differences in the *interdependence* between each party. Interdependence describes connectedness among job tasks, thus reflecting the degree to which a worker's job performance depends

on reciprocal interactions with others to achieve work goals (Dierdorff & Morgeson, 2007).

Interdependence theory (Kelley et al., 2003; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) can be fruitfully used to understand how the objective structure of work tasks influences the extent to which individuals emphasize competitive or cooperative goals when working with others. The objective structure of work tasks can be characterized along the following six dimensions in which interdependence can differ: 1) the extent to which an individual's outcome depends on the action of others; 2) whether individuals have mutual or asymmetric power over each other's outcome; 3) whether outcomes are equally desirable to all individuals; 4) the amount that individuals must coordinate their actions versus work autonomously; 5) whether it is a short-term or long-term relationship between individuals; 6) whether individuals are confident with the information they have to make a good decision and be certain of future outcomes. Kelley and colleagues' (2003) *Atlas of Interpersonal Situations* provides a framework for how these six dimensions, both singly, and in combination, effect how individuals work towards more agentic-, communal-, or achievement-striving goals in 20 of the most common social situations (De Dreu, Nijstad, & van Knippenberg, 2008; Weber, Kopelman, & Messick, 2004). Thus, the degree to which group outcomes are dependent on individuals' interpersonal skills is a function of the interdependence of group tasks (Langfred, 2005; Stewart & Barrick, 2000).

Social demands. One of the most salient situational demands individuals perceive is the behavior of the individual they are interacting with (Leary, 1957). Interpersonal theory (Sullivan, 1953; Horowitz & Strack, 2011) provides a framework for

understanding how the actions and dispositions of others in the workplace can require an individual to be interpersonally adaptive. The central principle of interpersonal theory is that dynamic interpersonal interactions can be understood through two dimensions: *agency* and *communion*. Agency involves concerns relating to autonomy and control and spans from submissiveness to dominance; communion involves concerns relating to affiliation and connection and spans from hostility to friendliness. Agency and communion are most commonly represented on a two dimensional circular space with agency representing the vertical dimension and communion representing the horizontal dimension (Wiggins, 1979). The vast majority of interpersonal characteristics can be represented on the circle based on their relationship to agency and communion (e.g., extraversion is a blend of agency and communion). A number of empirical studies have demonstrated that these two dimensions provide the content and organization to meaningfully measure interpersonal behavior (Markey, Funder, & Ozer, 2003; Moskowitz, 1994) and personality traits (Tracey & Schneider, 1995; Wiggins, 1979).

The interpersonal circle can be used as a framework not only for conceptualizing interpersonal behaviors and traits but also for conceptualizing interpersonal situations (Fournier, Moskowitz & Zuroff, 2008). According to this proposition, the behavior from the other party invites individuals to respond with a *complementary* class of behaviors in return (Tracey, 1994). For agency, complementarity operates through *reciprocity* (i.e., dominance from one party elicits submission from the other party); and for communion, complementarity operates through *correspondence* (i.e., friendliness from one party elicits friendliness from the other). Thus, friendly behavior tends to invite friendly responses and distancing behavior tends to invite distancing responses; in contrast,

dominant behavior tends to invite yielding responses and yielding behavior tends to invite dominant responses. The relationships proposed by complementarity have been generally supported in numerous empirical studies (Markey et al., 2003; Fournier et al., 2008; Sadler & Woody, 2003; Tracey, 1994; 2004; however, see Orford, 1986).

Organizational demands. Situations can differ at the organizational level in terms of climate and culture, environmental settings, organizational roles, organizational structure, and social norms and rules (Johns, 2006; Klein et al., 2006, Tett & Burnett, 2003). A number of lines of research demonstrate that organizational demands affect individuals' perceptions of the interactions. Argyle and colleagues (1981) review of interpersonal interactions (e.g., where the social interaction takes place, what objects are involved, lighting and temperature, etc.) found that environmental setting demands impact the perceived formality, pace, and timing of interactions. The research on organizational roles shows that across interpersonal interaction, individuals hold different sets of expectations about the responsibilities and requirements for each party involved (O'Driscoll, Ilgen, & Hildreth, 1992).

Even when task and social demands are held constant, changes in the organizational demands can impact the goals that are afforded by the interaction (Tett & Burnett, 2003). As an example, take a front-level manager in a flat organization with relatively few levels of hierarchy. In such organizations, decision making power is generally pushed more downward to the front-line employees (Johns & Saks, 2010). In such an organization, the manager is more likely to prioritize accomplishment-striving goals (e.g., set a meeting with direct reports to problem solve) when discussing a task problem with direct reports. In contrast, in a taller more hierarchical organization where

decision making is made from the top down, the manager faced with the same task problem with his or her direct reports is more likely to prioritize agency-striving goals (e.g., ensure direct reports follow policies and procedures). Thus, demands at the task, social, and organizational-level all should be taken into account when assessing interpersonal adaptability.

In our discussion of interpersonal situations, we provided an overview of a few top-down situational theories. By incorporating these theories within the task, social, and organizational demand framework from trait-activation theory, we intended to elucidate how various situational theories can be relevant to interpersonal adaptability within the workplace. Interdependence theory can be used to identify the goal affordances within objective situations that can lead individuals to form more cooperative or more competitive goals. Furthermore, interpersonal theory can be used to identify how broad differences in an interaction partner's behaviors can lead to unique requirements of an individuals' interpersonal skills and interpersonal processes. These theories can help identify the underlying goals within interpersonal interactions, and which situational demands may make it more or less difficult for individuals to achieve these goals. In conjunction with a thorough job analysis (as bottom-up approach), these theories can improve the assessment of interpersonal adaptability.

In sum, in this section we have provided an overview of interpersonal skills, interpersonal processes, and interpersonal situations. Interpersonal adaptability is a function of all three constructs. In order to determine whether particular interpersonal processes and/or interpersonal skills are interpersonally adaptive, it is necessary to assess such constructs within a specific interpersonal situation. If interpersonal skills or

interpersonal processes are assessed without a specified situational context, then interpersonal adaptability is not the construct that is being measured. In such cases, it is only an interpersonal process or an interpersonal skill that is being measured.

Between-Situation Variables

The third component to our model is the between-situation component. This component includes adaptive interpersonal performance and job performance. We differentiate adaptive interpersonal performance from interpersonal adaptability by the level that situation is accounted for by each construct. As discussed in previous sections, interpersonal adaptability is an individual's adjustment and fit with dynamic situational demands *within* an interpersonal interaction. In contrast, we conceptualize adaptive interpersonal performance as an individual's adjustment and fit *across* interpersonal interactions. Examples of interpersonal adaptability across situations include adjusting to a competitive interaction from a cooperative interaction, and from presenting a report to a group of senior leaders in one interaction to presenting the same report to a group of front-line employees in another interaction. In our framework, we conceptualize adaptive interpersonal performance as the between-situation extension of interpersonal adaptability. That is, in order to directly assess adaptive interpersonal performance, one would need to assess an individual's interpersonal adaptability across a range of broadly-diverse job relevant situations.

Existing measures can be used to assess adaptive interpersonal performance, however they do not directly measure the functional nature of adaptability. Measures of adaptive interpersonal performance have been developed within broader measures of adaptive performance, and several measures of adaptive interpersonal performance

already exist (Charbonnier-Voirin, & Roussel, in press; Griffin et al., 2007; Pulakos et al., 2000). A limitation of these measures is that they are designed to be assessed using situation-independent methods of measurement such as self- and other-reports. Using self- and other-reports means that the within-situation level aspects of adaptability are assessed more like a trait-like characteristic that is indicative of a general tendency to adapt appropriately across situations. This approach has been found to be deficient of assessing within-situation aspects of adaptability (Kaiser, Lindberg, & Craig, 2007). To explain this finding, let's take an example item: "Tailoring own behavior to persuade, influence, or work more effectively with [others]" (Pulakos et al., 2000, p. 617). Typically, performance ratings are used to rate employees based on their overall performance over a period of time (e.g., one year). During this period of time, raters have observed the employee demonstrate a skill, such as persuasiveness, across a range of individuals (i.e., roles - customer, manager, peer, direct report; situations – friendly individuals, unfriendly individuals, dominant individuals) where there has been a range of desired outcomes (i.e., more cooperative – such as learn from other *vs.* more competitive – such as persuade the other). An other-rating of a target of 4 out of 5 on "persuading others to change their minds or behavior" provides us with only a vague notion that, in general, this employee is fairly effective at being persuasive. This rating cannot answer a number of questions. Is the employee more persuasive with customers than with his or her manager? Is the employee effectively persuasive with dominant individuals, but too persuasive with warm individuals? Are there times when the employee believes the situations requires persuasiveness when it would be more effective to engage in more relationship building? Since self- and other-report ratings are context

independent, they do not directly assess the within-situation aspect of adaptive interpersonal performance, such as selecting an appropriate goal for the situation, or coping within the situation.

As illustrated by our model, strong adaptive interpersonal performance across a range of job relevant situations will contribute to strong job performance. Drawing upon Ployhart & Bliese's (2006) review of individual adaptability, we expect that adaptive interpersonal performance will positively impact not only task performance (e.g., Campbell et al., 1993), but also contextual performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and counterproductive work behavior. Research from the performance management literature suggests that interpersonal effectiveness is a key broad competency that is related to performance across all levels of the organization (Mumford et al., 2007), and that inabilities to be interpersonally effective across a range of situations are one of the leading contributors to job derailment (McCauley, Lombardo, & Usher, 1989). Thus, there is a real need to ensure that interpersonal adaptability - and by extension adaptive interpersonal performance – are directly assessed. In the following section we discuss how our framework can be used to develop more reliable and more valid ratings of variables related to interpersonal adaptability.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT OF A FUNCTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF INTERPERSONAL ADAPTABILITY

In this section, we suggest various implications of our functional framework of interpersonal adaptability as it relates to the assessment of interpersonal effectiveness. These implications are organized into three broad themes: (1) appropriately match

constructs to method, (2) design contextualized assessments, and (3) design dynamic assessments.

Appropriately Match Construct to Method

The functional framework of interpersonal adaptability is useful for illustrating the multidimensional nature of human behaviors and emotional-cognitive processes within interpersonal interactions. Interpersonal adaptability is a function of various interpersonal skills and interpersonal processes that occur within an interpersonal interaction. To produce reliable and valid assessments of the multiple constructs that constitute interpersonal adaptability, it is critical that the appropriate measures are selected to assess each specific construct (Arthur, Day, McNelly, & Edens, 2003; Chan & Schmitt, 2005; Lievens & Chan, 2010; Roberts, MacCann, Matthews, & Zeidner, 2010). At a practical level, we suggest that our distinction between distal and within-situation constructs is used to guide the choice of method.

As distal level constructs are independent of the situation, they can be assessed through measurement approaches that do not typically account for situations. Such measurement approaches include standardized tests, self-reports, and other-reports. Conversely, within-situation level constructs are dependent of the situation. Therefore, they should be assessed by measurement approaches that can account for the appropriateness of situational demands. This implies that to assess the appropriateness of a within-situation level variable the measurement approach must be able to incorporate ecologically valid situational characteristics. Simulations that can be defined as contextualized selection procedures that mimic key aspects of the job (Callinan & Robertson, 2000; Lievens & De Soete, 2011) satisfy this criterion. So, a key ingredient of

simulations as assessments of within-situation level variables is that they incorporate

some level of fidelity to the situational reality that is found in the workplace.

The fidelity of an assessment procedure can be broken down into both stimulus

(task) fidelity and response mode fidelity (Lievens & De Soete, 2012). The "fidelity of

the task stimulus" refers to the extent to which the format of the tasks and KSAs required

to accomplish the tasks are consistent with how the situation is encountered in the

workplace. Simulations might vary in terms of the fidelity with which they present those

task stimuli. In low-fidelity simulations, the situations might be presented in a paper-and-

pencil (written) mode. For example, a Situational Judgment Test (SJT) takes the form of

a written test as the scenarios are presented in a written format and applicants are asked to

indicate the appropriate response alternative. Hence, written SJTs have low stimulus

fidelity. Similarly, in situational interviews, candidates are orally presented with a

situation and have to indicate how to handle the situation. In video-based or multimedia

SJTs, stimulus fidelity is enhanced as a number of video scenarios describing a person

handling a critical job-related situation are shown (McHenry & Schmitt, 1994). At a

critical "moment of truth", the scenario freezes and applicants are asked to choose among

several courses of action. Thus, video-based and multimedia SJTs allow the item context

to be more richly portrayed, thereby increasing their stimulus fidelity (Funke & Schuler,

1998). Recently, organizations have even explored the use of 3D animation and virtual

characters in SJTs (Fetzer, Tuzinski, & Freeman, 2010). Contrary tot SJTs, assessment

center (AC) exercises and work samples are typically regarded as high-fidelity

simulations. In AC exercises, "live" and constantly changing stimuli (confederates, other

assessees) typically occur. In work samples, the level of fidelity might be the highest

because candidates are often confronted with the physical stimuli and hands-on tasks that are replicas of the real job tasks.

Apart from stimulus fidelity, simulations also differ in terms of response fidelity. This component of fidelity refers to the degree to which the response mode of the candidates is representative of the way of responding in the actual job. The response fidelity of low-fidelity simulations such as SJTs is typically lower because they have a close-ended (multiple-choice) item format. This means that applicants have to pick one response alternative from a list of different response options instead of generating their own solution. This cued and structured response format feature discriminates low-fidelity simulations from their high-fidelity counterparts such as AC exercises or work sample tests which provide applicants with the opportunity to respond in a manner mimicking actual job behavior. The open-ended format also gives candidates the discretion to generate their own solutions instead of being constrained to choose one of the predetermined response options.

In sum, assessment methods that have the capability to assess within-situation level variables within an ecologically valid context include situational interviews (e.g., Cronshaw, Ong, Chappell, 2007), SJTs (e.g., McDaniel, Hartman, Whetzel, & Grubb, 2007), AC exercises (e.g., Lievens, Tett, & Schleicher, 2009), and work samples. It is important to emphasize that the different level of fidelity of these assessment procedures directly impacts the constructs being measured. For instance, SJTs can be used as measures of within-situation performance because individuals indicate their situational perception and appraisal and their goal strategies by indicating through close-ended or forced-choice item response formats (e.g., Pulakos & Schmitt, 1996) or by evaluating the

effectiveness of a particular situational appraisal or goal for the situation (e.g., Chan &

Schmitt, 1997). However, SJTs measure essentially individuals' *procedural knowledge* of

effective cognitive-affective processes within a particular workplace situation

(Motowidlo & Beier, 2010; Motowidlo, Hooper, & Jackson, 2006). Conversely, AC

exercises (e.g., role-play, group discussion, presentation) assess individuals' *actual*

behaviors (i.e., *skills*) within a particular workplace situation (Thornton & Mueller-

Hanson, 2004). Thus, SJTs appear to be a more appropriate approach for measuring

knowledge about interpersonal processes, whereas AC exercises seem a more appropriate

approach for measuring the interpersonal skills themselves. If many AC exercises are

included, one can even measure not only interpersonal adaptability *within a situation* but

also interpersonal adaptability *across situations*.

Design Contextualized Assessments

As a second implication of our functional framework we suggest that it is

important to build contextualized assessments for assessing interpersonal adaptability.

The aforementioned simulation-based measures such as assessment center exercises are

methods that incorporate situational demands within the assessment. However, the

conceptual relationship between the demands of the situation within the exercise and the

dimensions that are to be rated within the exercise (be it dimensions relevant to

interpersonal skills or other job-relevant constructs) has received little attention in the

assessment literature (Lievens et al., 2009). As a result, the exercise has remained largely

a black box (Brummel, Rupp, & Spain, 2009; Howard, 2008; Lievens, 2008), which

limits its potential to provide a valid assessment of interpersonal adaptability.

Some research suggests that broad-differences across exercise predict significant variability in individuals' performance across exercises. Specifically, it has been found that exercises that differ in form (e.g., a leaderless group discussion with four candidates vs. a one-on-one role play) tend to be relevant to different traits and skills, which lead to between exercise differences (Melchers, Wirz, Schultheiss, & Kleinmann, 2012; Schneider & Schmitt, 1992). However, evidence from the assessment of interpersonal skills of medical physicians suggests that there is considerable between exercise differences in candidate performance even when the same exercise (i.e., role play) is used multiple times (Cohen, Colliver, Robbs, & Swartz, 1997; Guiton, Hodgson, Delandshere, & Wilkerson, 2004; Mazor, Ockene, Rogers, Carlin, & Quirk, 2005). This suggests that there still is a need for conceptual models to ascertain which situational demands are related to which behavioral skills and cognitive-emotional processes (Brummel, et al., 2009).

Along these lines, the use of situational taxonomies such as interdependence theory and interpersonal theory that we discussed above might serve as much needed conceptual guides for building situational demands into exercises as these taxonomies might make it possible to design same form exercises that emphasize different goals. As an example, the demands of the task to "sell a product or service to a customer" can fundamentally differ based on the dimension of mutuality of power over outcomes, so that in one sales exercise the candidate is in a low position of power (e.g., cold-call' sales exercises where the candidate interacts with customers who have no immediate need to make a purchase and can easily end the transaction prior to committing to a purchase) and in another situation the candidate is in a high position of power (e.g., customer

emergency situation, where the candidate interacts with a customer who is in desperate need to replace a broken-down product). According to the research from interpersonal theory (Kelley et al., 2003; Reis, 2008), we should expect differences across the two role-play exercise in how the candidates perceive and select agentic- and communal-striving goals, which should lead to differences in interpersonal skills demonstrations related to trust-behaviors, intercultural sensitivity, active listening, assertive communication, and social influence.

Situational demands can also be more strategically designed into exercises to make specific interpersonal skills more or less difficult for the candidate to effectively demonstrate. Drawing upon interpersonal theory, different situational demands can be created for role play actors to use across different exercises. For example, a conflict resolution role-play could be made more challenging if the role player acts more disagreeable or hostile towards the candidate (e.g., personalizes the conflict, uses insults, displays frustration). Though some evidence suggests that requiring candidates to participate in multiple same form exercises adds little validity to the assessment center process (Melchers et al., 2012; Schneider & Schmitt, 1992), we believe this is likely because past studies have failed to incorporate "real" differences in the situational demands across exercises. In the end, as per our framework of interpersonal adaptability, through exposing candidates to a variety of meaningfully different situational demands we believe we can assess adaptive interpersonal performance. The crux consists of discovering the key psychological situational demands that explain variation (or consistency) across situations (Brummel et al., 2009).

Design Dynamic Assessments

As part of our model of interpersonal adaptability we posited that in interpersonal interactions people are continually required to monitor the actions of others and adjust their own actions, thoughts, and emotions in order to effectively attempt to reach their goals for the interaction. Hence, a final implication of our functional approach to assessing interpersonal adaptability is to design specific dynamic situational demands within an exercise. This can be done in various ways in simulation-based techniques.

Traditionally, low-fidelity simulations such as SJTs have been conceived as linear. That is, all applicants receive the same set of predetermined item situations and item options. So, the presentation of items is not dependent on their responses to previous items. In some SJTs, however, the applicant's response to a situation determines the next situation that is presented. So, applicants are confronted with the consequences of their choices. This modality implies that all applicants do not respond to the same items. These SJTs are called "branched", "nested", or "interactive" SJTs (Kanning, Grewe, Hollenberg, & Hadouch, 2006; Olson-Buchanan et al., 1998). The technological possibility of developing interactive SJTs exists in multimedia SJTs which present different video fragments to an applicant, based on the applicant's response to earlier video fragments. This allows the SJT to better simulate the dynamics of interactions.

High-fidelity simulations and especially interpersonally-oriented AC exercises such as role-plays, oral presentations, fact-findings, and group discussions are inherently interactive as the candidates have to interact with role-players, resource persons, or other candidates who interfere with the candidates. Accordingly, the next question presented to a candidate might depend on what (s)he answered to a prior question. The same is true for interpersonal work samples such as a simulated telephone call. Research has shown

that training role players to demonstrate particular actions or statements, or altering exercise instructions or task demands before or during an exercise creates a complex and dynamic interpersonal demand (Schollaert & Lievens, 2011; 2012).

Similarly, computerized versions of individual AC exercises (e.g., PC in-baskets) have tried to incorporate interactivity by presenting information during the simulation (e.g., new incoming mail). However, it should be noted that in most cases this information is built in in advance and is not tailored to prior candidate responses (see Lievens, Van Keer, & Volckaert, 2010, for an exception). The information is also often factual instead of interpersonal.

Finally, recent advancements in interactive technologies for serious games and virtual adaptive simulations (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004) go even one step further. These serious games and virtual worlds demonstrate the value of building simulations that incorporate dynamic situational demands. Rayburn (2007) describes a process for team-based serious games where the nature of the interdependence between the game players (e.g., instructor limits the availability of a desirable resource creating conflict between players) can be altered during game play to alter the interpersonal processes and interpersonal skills of players.

Thus, conceptually defined situational demands can be built into simulation-based techniques to occur at particular points within a simulation in order to create a controlled dynamic aspect within a simulation. Incorporating such demands within assessments more explicitly assess individuals' ability to appropriately adjust through effective situational perception and appraisal and strategy selection.

CONCLUSION

Our framework for interpersonal adaptability adds to the considerable literature on effectiveness in social situations by providing a framework for operationalizing the functional aspect of interpersonal effectiveness. Interpersonal adaptability covers similar conceptual ground as established constructs such as interpersonal skills, ability-based emotional intelligence, and interpersonal adaptive performance. Two points are consistent with all these constructs: 1) the ability to be effective will be more discernible when interpersonal interactions are more dynamic and when an individual must operate between more varied interpersonal interactions; 2) a given interpersonal behavior, cognition, or emotional process will be differentially effective depending on the goals afforded by the situation (Klein et al., 2006). However, only through conceptualizing effectiveness in an interpersonal interaction as a functional construct, is it possible to operationalize the dynamic and adaptive nature of interpersonal performance.

As we highlighted in this chapter, many assessment methods can be used to assess the functional nature of constructs. However, it is first necessary to take a multi-method approach that matches appropriate measures to the differing constructs that are part of interpersonal adaptability. In addition we highlight that there is an opportunity to draw upon the social psychology literature to clearly operationalize the situational demands incorporated within these assessment measures. This approach should help researchers and practitioners to create assessments that include contextualized and more clearly defined dynamic interpersonal demands, which will give candidates more opportunity to demonstrate their ability to be interpersonally adaptive.

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Figure 1. Functional Framework of Interpersonal Adaptability