

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADAPTING TO OTHERS:  
INTERPERSONAL THEORY AS A MEANS TO EXAMINE INTERPERSONAL  
ADAPTABILITY AT WORK

By

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## ABSTRACT

### THE IMPORTANCE OF ADAPTING TO OTHERS: INTERPERSONAL THEORY AS A MEANS TO EXAMINE INTERPERSONAL ADAPTABILITY AT WORK

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Reflecting the highly interdependent context of the workplace, researchers and organizational leaders have increasingly recognized the importance of interpersonal adaptability for employee success. However, little is known about what interpersonal adaptability consists of, leaving it difficult to measure or train. The present study sought to address this gap by integrating interpersonal theory, a clinically-based perspective founded on a circumplex of interpersonal behavior, with organizational approaches.

As part of this integration, the present research used a newly created situational measure of interpersonal adaptability to investigate the ways in which such adaptability may relate to meaningful outcomes in the workplace. Specifically, mediation models proposed that an individual's perceptions of a coworker's interpersonal adaptability would be positively related to the extent to which he/she would want to work with the coworker on (if the coworker was a peer), or assign the coworker to (if the coworker was a direct report) tasks high in interpersonal content (e.g., leading a team), through the mechanisms of liking to work with the coworker and perceptions of the coworker's interpersonal effectiveness.

To test this model, a global sample of 208 executives from a large, multinational organization rated either a randomly assigned peer or direct report. Using a score of "warm adaptability" as the interpersonal adaptability measure, support for the mediation model was found for the group that rated direct reports, but was not found for the group that rated peers.

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## INTRODUCTION

The workplace represents an increasingly relational and interdependent context in which individuals function in their daily lives (Ragins & Dutton, 2007), necessitating the interaction of coworkers, supervisors, subordinates, and a multitude of other work-related roles. Work tasks, for example, often involve assisting coworkers, cooperating in teams, leading subordinates, and interacting with clients (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988). Indeed, organizations are built upon, and must leverage, collaboration among diverse employees in order to achieve far more than individuals could otherwise accomplish on their own. This interpersonal foundation is further enforced by the team-based structure and cross-functional work design of many modern organizations, as well as the rapid growth of globalization of the world's industries (Chen, Kanfer, DeShon, Mathieu, & Kozlowski, 2009; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006).

Reflecting this organizational reality, researchers and practitioners alike have emphasized the importance of interpersonal or social skill for the workplace (*e.g.*, Argyle, 1967; Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005; Morgeson, Reider, & Campion, 2005; Riggio, 1986; Schneider, 1992). For example, interpersonal skill is listed as an essential competency in most job postings, particularly those involving high interpersonal interaction, such as managing others, working with clients, and interacting with coworkers (Hogan & Brinkmeyer, 1994), and it is the most commonly assessed construct in highly structured selection interviews (Huffcutt, 2001). Further, a lack of interpersonal skill is a top employer explanation for poor performance of employees (Bureau of National Affairs, 1988). This suggests that employers may view interpersonal skill as the “single-most important characteristic determining employability” (Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic, & Kaiser, 2013, p. 8).



In particular, interpersonal adaptability, or the willingness and ability to change one's behavior to fit the social situation, has been cited as the lynchpin of social skill in the workplace (*e.g.*, Ferris et al., 2001; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006). This skill enables a person to adjust to the needs of diverse individuals and interpersonal situations (Pulakos et al., 2000), thereby addressing interpersonal demands (Leary, 1957) and achieving organizational objectives (Ahern et al., 2004).

However, despite the widespread acclaim, the content of such adaptability – the ways in which interpersonal behavior is actually altered to better fit the needs of others– has not been delineated in organizational research. Instead, organizational measures of interpersonal adaptability assess only the self-reported existence of change (*e.g.*, “I adapt my behavior to get along with others”), and empirical investigations into this area are lacking. Far more exploration is needed in order to thoroughly measure this skill and assess its relation to key workplace outcomes, as well as to purposefully develop it in employees.

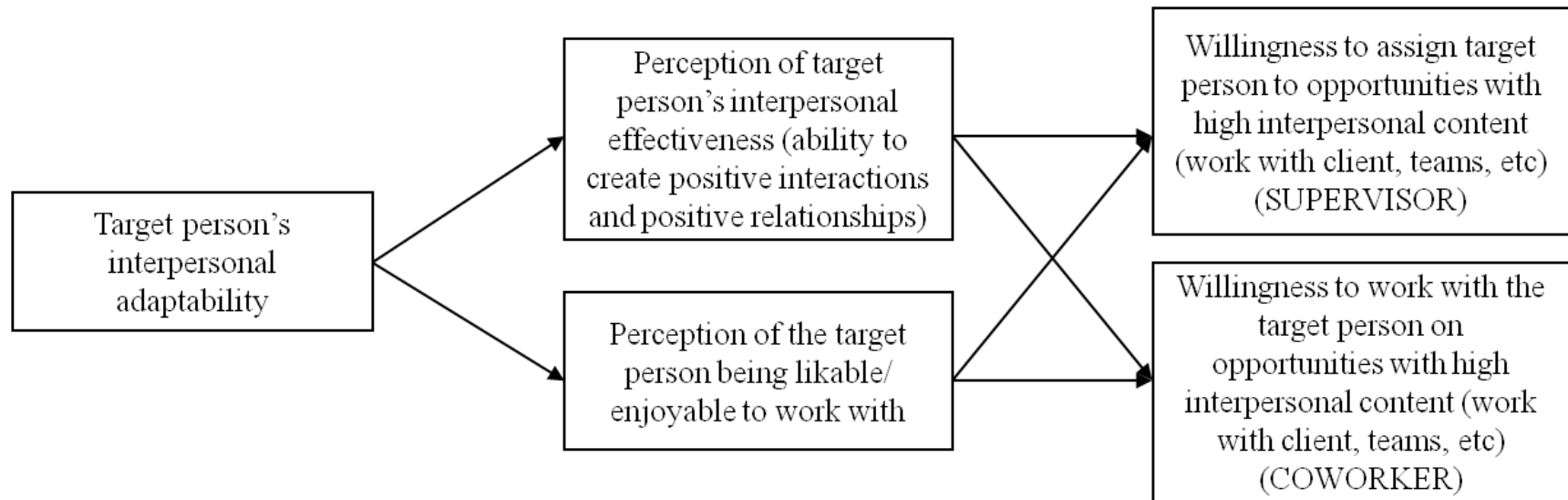
To begin to address these gaps in research and practice, the present study integrates interpersonal theory (Leary, 1957; Kiesler, 1996) with organizational adaptability research. Interpersonal theory, an approach with origins in clinical psychology (Leary, 1957; Sullivan, 1953), describes interpersonal interactions and relationships as emerging from behavioral “pulls” exchanged between interactants. From this perspective, the content of interpersonal behavior is the dominance and warmth displayed, and this dominance and warmth impacts one's interaction partner. Interpersonal adaptability, then, is the extent to which one can vary in these two qualities in response to the behavior of the partner.

In the pages that follow, I first discuss interpersonal theory, identifying key elements of this perspective. I then apply these elements to the organizational context to investigate (1) the

content of interpersonal adaptability; (2) the impact of interpersonal adaptability on interpersonal reactions of supervisors and coworkers (perceived interpersonal effectiveness and liking); and (3) how these interpersonal reactions are related to opportunities to participate in tasks high in interpersonal content (i.e., collaborative, interdependent tasks involving extensive social interaction).

Specifically, the present paper proposes that interpersonal adaptability will be positively related to supervisor willingness to assign an individual to tasks with high interpersonal content through the mechanisms of affective liking of the individual and cognitive perception of the individual's interpersonal effectiveness. Further, because interpersonal tasks generally necessitate working with coworkers, coworker willingness to work with an individual (coworker viability) also has implications for that person's assignment to, and success in, interpersonal tasks. In order to investigate this further, the present study examines the relationship between interpersonal adaptability and coworker viability through the same mechanisms of liking and perception of interpersonal effectiveness (see Figure 1 for the proposed model). In so doing, the goal of the present research is to further illuminate the content of interpersonal adaptability and its implications for the workplace, thereby explicating this critical area of workplace behavior and providing avenues for future research and development.

Figure 1: Proposed Model of Relationships



## **Interpersonal Adaptability as Social Skill**

Although described in a myriad of ways (*e.g.*, Argyle, 1967; Riggio, 1986; Schneider, 1992; Rubin & Martin, 1994; Ferris et al., 2005; Morgeson, 2005), social skill can generally be broken down into two key components: (1) social perceptiveness, by which a person recognizes and understands his or her social situation, and (2) interpersonal adaptability, through which a person adjusts his or her behavior to fit that situation (*e.g.*, Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewe, 2005; Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris et al., 2008; Pfeffer, 1992). For example, Riggio (1986) divides social skill into six components, which can be captured more broadly by (1) emotional and social sensitivity and expressivity and (2) control in one's behavior and communication. Similarly, Ferris, Witt, & Hochwarter (2001) describe social skill as "interpersonal perceptiveness and the capacity to adjust one's behavior to different situational demands," thereby influencing others. Applying this concept to the leadership domain, Yukl and Mashud (2010) use the term social intelligence to capture a combination of social perceptiveness and a willingness to be behaviorally flexible, an individual difference they posit to be necessary for effective leadership. Although both of these foundational aspects of social skill have been found to be important for workplace outcomes, interpersonal adaptability has been cited as perhaps the most critical aspect of social skill for effective performance in the workplace (*e.g.*, Ferris et al., 2001; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006).

Mirroring this sentiment, an interest in interpersonal adaptability has also emerged from the recently burgeoning area of adaptive performance. This recent emphasis on the importance of adjusting to one's work environment reflects the increasingly dynamic context of the workplace. Indeed, organizations and their employees face pressures to adjust, adapt, and evolve with regularity due to both internal and external pressures (Cascio, 2003; Edwards & Morrison, 1994;

Ilgen & Pulakos, 1999; Smith, Ford, & Kozlowski, 1997). This is due to a plethora of reasons, including the rapid rate of change in technology (Hollenbeck & McCall, 1999; Patrickson, 1987; Thach & Woodman, 1994), the pervasiveness of globalization (Cascio, 2003), and the need to continuously learn new skills to stay current in the knowledge-based work structure of modern organizations (Kinicki & Latack, 1990). Further, these also contribute to the need to interact with many diverse individuals with unique experiences, cultures, perspectives, and expertise (Black, 1990; Hesketh & Neal, 1999; Pearlman & Barney, 2000; Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). Taken together, this suggests that individual adaptability, defined as a relatively stable, composite capability representing one's "ability, skill, disposition, willingness, and/or motivation to change or fit different task, social, and environmental factors" (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006, p. 13), is necessary for effective performance in the workplace. In turn, the individual difference of *interpersonal* adaptability has been highlighted as an important construct for effectiveness at work (Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1982; Chan & Schmitt, 2002; Griffin & Hesketh, 2005; Ployhart & Bliese, 2006).

In sum, research streams addressing social skill and workplace adaptation have both indicated interpersonal adaptability as a centrally critical competency, suggesting that this area merits further investigation. In particular, further exploration of the proximal outcomes of such adaptability is needed. However, the context, content, and process of interpersonal adaptability have not been explicated, resulting in limited empirical investigation.

### **Lack of Clarity in Defining Interpersonal Adaptability**

Although interpersonal adaptability has been posited to relate to workplace outcomes (*e.g.*, Pulakos et al., 2000), and related research has indirectly support this proposition (*e.g.*, through general measures of social skill; Ferris et al., 2008; Laird, Zboja, & Ferris, 2012; van der

Heijde & van der Heijden; Zinko et al., 2012), the nature of this construct is unclear. It has been broadly defined as one's ability to be flexible with, and to adapt to, various individuals (Pulakos et al., 2000), yet this definition does not describe what interpersonal adaptability consists of or how it is demonstrated. That is, what actual behavior a person is adjusting, and in what ways that behavior is adjusted, has not been specified. For example, Pulakos et al. (2000) define interpersonal adaptation through citing a wide range of theoretical perspectives, including considering the opinions of others, being open-minded with working with others, accepting developmental feedback, developing effective relationships with diverse people, understanding others' behavior, and changing one's behavior to work effectively with others.

This inconsistency in definition makes it difficult to capture the specific behaviors that demonstrate interpersonal adaptability. Without a clear definition of this construct, it cannot be consistently assessed empirically, limiting the field's understanding of its organizational implications. Reflecting this, interpersonal adaptability research in the organizational sciences has been limited and largely conceptual. What few measures of the construct exist often group interpersonal adaptability items with other aspects of social skill, such as networking ability or social perceptiveness. Further, the measures that do specifically address interpersonal adaptability assess it at a very general level – the extent to which a person is “flexible when dealing with others” (see Table 1 for example organizational measures of interpersonal adaptability). This gives rise to the question of what such adaptation consists of; the content and context of interpersonal adaptation and dyadic interaction have been neither specified nor explored.

Interpersonal theory, a model that describes the antecedents, content, and dynamics of interpersonal interaction, can provide insight and clarity to the understanding of interpersonal

adaptability. In so doing, it offers a useful lens through which to assess and interpret interpersonal adaptability.

*Table 1: Example Measures of Interpersonal Adaptability (Organizational)*

Source	Construct/Facet	Items Related to Interpersonal Adaptability
*Ployhart & Bliese, 2006	Individual adaptability/ Interpersonal adaptability	I believe it is important to be flexible in dealing with others.
		I tend to be able to read others and understand how they are feeling at any particular moment.
		My insight helps me to work effectively with others.
		I am an open-minded person in dealing with others.
		I am perceptive of others and use that knowledge in interactions.
		I try to be flexible when dealing with others.
		I adapt my behavior to get along with others.
Riggio, 1986	Social skills/ Social control	I find it very easy to play different roles at different times.
		When in a group of friends, I am often spokesperson for the group.
		I can fit in with all types of people, young and old, rich and poor.
Ferris, 2001	Social skill/ items not directly labeled as a subfacet	In social situations, it is always clear to me exactly what to say and do.
		I am able to adjust my behavior and become the type of person dictated by any situation.




\* Facet is specifically focused on adaptability.

## Interpersonal Theory

Interpersonal theory is an interactionist perspective that describes a person's interpersonal behavior as resulting from the interaction of situational and individual factors. This theory is based on the foundational assumption that "by far the most important class of situations consists of 'other persons,' or more precisely, of the presenting interpersonal style of various interactants" (Kiesler, 1996, p.46). In brief, interpersonal theory is founded on the notion of interpersonal reciprocation. That is, interaction partners simultaneously affect, and are affected by, one another. Through a cycle of interpersonal transactions, interactants behave in particular ways that align with their self-schemas and their expectancies regarding one another. Each interactant's behavior then "invites" the other to act in a complementary way in order to reaffirm the self-schema of the other. This results in a *continual cycle of mutual "claiming" of oneself and evoking complementary responses in the other* (Kiesler, 1996). Over time, the resulting interactions between two individuals form the nature of their relationship, and a person who can engage in a wide range of behaviors will be able to form more relationships with behaviorally diverse people than a person who engages in a limited range of behaviors. In the sections that follow, I will describe interpersonal theory in more depth through an explanation of four core elements that capture fundamental assumptions of the theory. I will then draw these elements together to describe how they may help inform an understanding of interpersonal adaptability in the workplace. For a summary of these elements and their implications, see Table 2.



Table 2: Summary of the Application of Interpersonal Theory to Interpersonal Adaptability in the Workplace

	Element 1	Element 2	Element 3	Element 4
<i>Conceptual level</i>	Individual	Dyad	Dyad, over time	Multiple Dyads
<i>Building block</i>	Behavior 	Interaction 	Relationship 	Diverse Relationships
<i>Interpersonal theory</i>	Interpersonal behavior is motivated by two basic needs: need for control and need for affiliation. Blends of these two needs yield a circumplex that captures all interpersonal behavior. One's interpersonal style is based on these needs.	An individual's interpersonal behavior "pulls" or "invites" an interaction partner to behave in a way that "complements" the first interactant's behavior.	Dyads that are characterized by complementary interactions will form enduring and stable relationships, whereas dyads that are characterized by noncomplementary interactions will not.	Individuals who are behaviorally flexible in warmth and dominance will be able to form a greater range of stable relationships than a person who is behaviorally rigid.
<i>Implication for the workplace</i>	In the workplace, the content of a given interpersonal behavior can be described by its blend of dominance and warmth.	One coworker's behavior shapes an interactant's behavior in a probabilistic manner.	If two coworkers have consistently complementary interactions, they will be able to form a stable relationship.	Interpersonal adaptability will be related to the ability to form relationships with more, diverse individuals.
<i>Applied to interpersonal adaptability in the workplace</i>	Each behavior an employee enacts consists of a certain level of warmth and dominance.	In the workplace, employees face invitations for certain behavior from others, and must make a decision about how to adapt to that behavior.	Coworker dyads that are characterized by complementary interactions will be stable, whereas dyads characterized by noncomplementary interactions will be unstable.	Interpersonally adaptable employees (able to adjust the warmth/dominance of their behaviors to complement others' behaviors) will form relationships with more people than will non-adaptable individuals. Thus, they will be more successful in tasks high in interpersonal content.

## **The Content of Interpersonal Behavior**

*Element 1: There are two dimensions of interpersonal behavior that reflect two basic motivational needs: the need for control (agency dimension; dominance, power) and the need for affiliation (communion dimension; friendliness). These two dimensions blend together in varying degrees to capture a full range of interpersonal behavior and styles in a circular structure.*

Although interpersonal behavior can be defined as any behavior that is “overtly, consciously, ethically, or symbolically related to another human being (real, collective, or imagined)” (Leary, 1957, p. 4), a more basic definition describes it as “action in the presence of other humans—our social behavior” (Kiesler, 1996, p.5). This behavior, as a form of communication, provides information about the actor to others, whether intentionally or unintentionally, actively or passively, covertly or overtly. Others then react and respond to these messages, creating the basic unit of interactions: a behavioral transaction, in which one person acts and another person interprets the first person’s behavior and responds in kind.

In terms of overt behavior, both verbal and nonverbal communication discloses information to interactants. Because nonverbal messages “predominate in emotional and relational communication” (Kiesler, 1996, p. 5), understanding interpersonal behavior necessitates assessing both verbal and nonverbal behavior. Support for the influence of behavioral expression has been well documented. For example, van Baaren et al. (2004) found that mimicking a participant’s body language was related to participant helping behavior. Likewise, affective states can manifest through vocal cues, posture, and facial expressions (Cacioppo, Petty, Losch, & Kim, 1986; Matsumoto, 1987; Sy, Cote, & Saavedra, 2005), and

these cues have been found to be reliable indicators of mood (Sy, Cote, & Saavedra, 2005). Importantly, individuals are able to interpret the affective states of others (for a review, see Bartel & Saavedra, 2000) and can do so fairly accurately (Ekman, 2003).

Interpersonal theory is based upon a *two dimensional structure* of interpersonal behavior, which stem from two fundamental human needs. The first dimension is agency, based in the need for control, a well established human drive (Williams & Sommer, 1997). It is conceptualized as seeking differentiation, control, and mastery (Pincus, Lukowitzky, & Wright, 2010; Wiggins, 1991), and is demonstrated through acts ranging from dominant to submissive behavior. The second dimension is communion, stemming from the need of belongingness or affiliation. Defined as a “desire for frequent, positive, and stable interactions with others” (Williams & Sommer, 1997, p. 694), belongingness has long been cited as a critical human need (Baumister & Leary, 1995). This dimension ranges from quarrelsome/cold to friendly/warm behavior (Pincus, Lukowitzky, & Wright, 2010; for a detailed review of these two dimensions, see Wiggins, 1991).

Interpersonal theory suggests that although other aspects of personality exist, a large portion of variation in interpersonal behavior is proposed to occur along these two dimensions (Carson, 1969; Kiesler, 1996) and thus can be used to measure interpersonal behavior and traits (Kiesler, 1996; Pincus, Lukowitsky, & Wright, 2010). Reflecting this assertion, these two orthogonal motives and their integration have been consistently described across many areas of study, including personality and human development (*e.g.*, Adler, 1938; Erikson, 1950; Fromm, 1941), philosophy (*e.g.*, Confucius), language (*e.g.*, Benjafield & Carson, 1985; White, 1980), evolution (Darwin, 1859), and evolutionary psychology (Buss, 1991), as well as interpersonal behavior (*e.g.*, Freedman et al., 1951; Leary, 1957; Sullivan, 1953). Similar patterns of agency

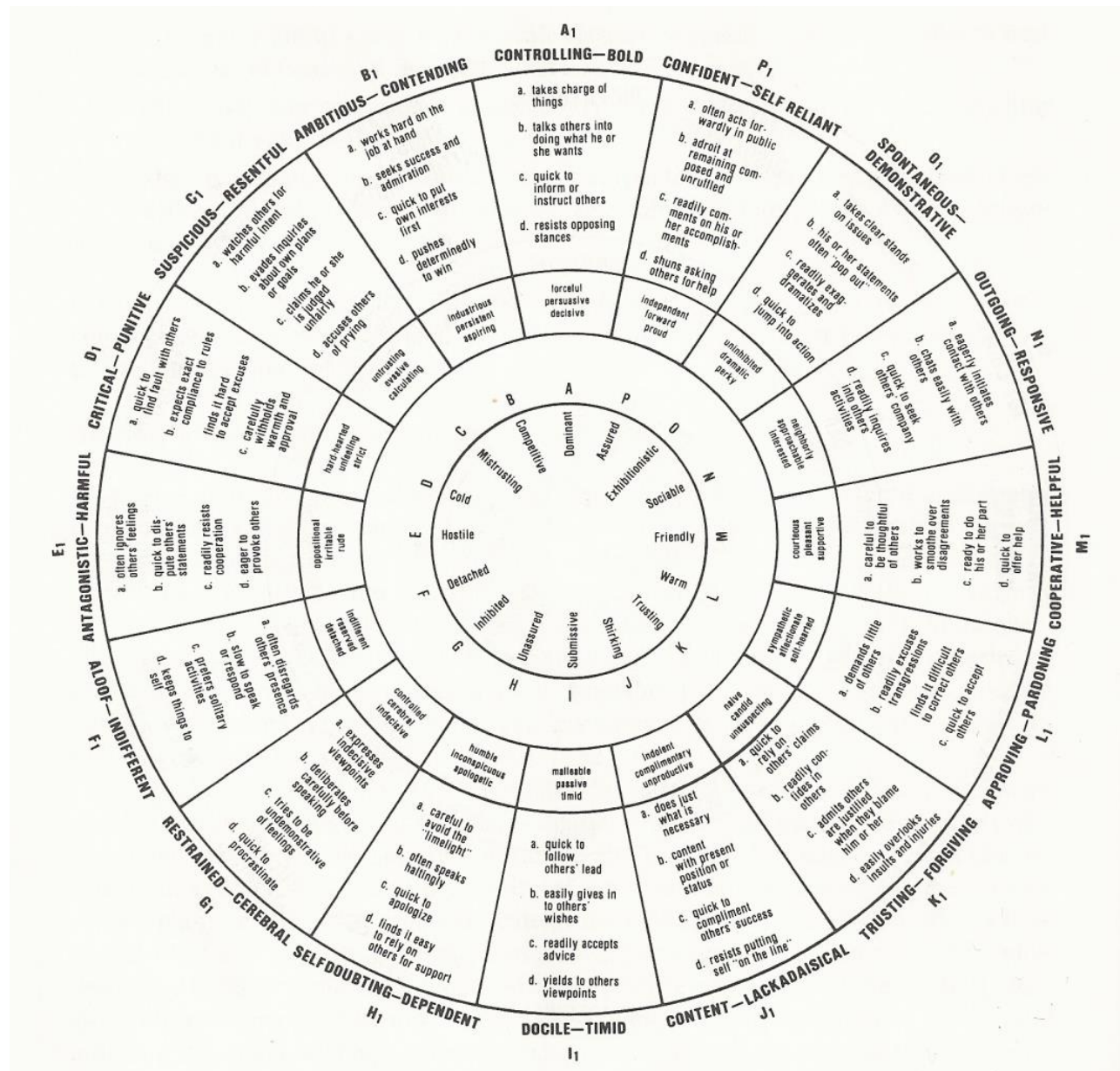
and communion as interpersonal, behavioral dimensions can be found in other literatures specific to organizational psychology as well. For example, the well known Ohio State University studies' model of leadership behavior is characterized by two dimensions: consideration (behavior indicating trust, respect and rapport; affiliation) and initiating structure (behavior that organizes and defines group activities; agency) (Fleishman & Harris, 1962).

As illustrated by these examples, interpersonal behavior can largely be captured by these two motives or dimensions. Interpersonal theory states that in each interaction or interactional transaction between individuals, each person negotiates the extent to which he or she will be friendly and the extent to which he or she will take control of the moment. By blending these together in ordered and varying degrees, these two dimensions compose the interpersonal circumplex of interpersonal behavior (Leary, 1957; Kiesler, 1983; 1996; Pincus et al., 2010; Wiggins, 1991).

The resulting interpersonal circumplex (or circle) can be viewed in terms of 16 segments that represent varying blends of these two dimensions. Such a circumplex model is considered to be the most appropriate for a two dimensional organization when the two dimensions are evenly distributed (i.e., the two dimensions do not fall into a clear simple structure) (McCrae & Costa, 1989). This allows for the “assessment of the full range of interpersonal behavior in a non-redundant fashion” (Wiggins & Broughton, 1985, p.2). There has been substantial evidence over decades of research supporting a circular structure of interpersonal behavior (Benjafield & Carson, 1985; Chapman, 1987, Gurtman, 1991; Kiesler, 1996; Berzins, 1977; Bierman, 1969; Carson, 1969; Kiesler, 1983; Kiesler & Chapman, 1988; Plutchik & Conte, 1986; Schaefer, 1961; Wiggins, Trapnell & Phillips, 1988).

One of the first interpersonal circles was provided by Leary (1957). Kiesler (1983) later reconstructed this model and provided elaborated circles containing example behaviors for each segment at two levels: mild/moderate and extreme. The mild/moderate version, which describes what would be considered within the normal range of behavior, is replicated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Kiesler's 1982 Mild/Moderate Interpersonal Circle



As illustrated in the circle, the 16 segments compose the range of agency and communion blends for interpersonal behavior. These move counterclockwise (A through P) from the top of the circle, which represents the mild/moderate level of the dominant vector, “controlling—bold.” As a result of the circumplex structure, adjacent segments are highly positively correlated, whereas opposite segments are highly negatively correlated. Between one segment and its opposite, the strength of correlation varies based on its distance from the original segment (Kiesler, 1996). Adjacent segments can also be combined into octants, which are labeled by their combined segment letters (counterclockwise; PA, BC, DE, FG, HI, JK, LM, NO). The octants can be further combined into quadrants, counterclockwise from the upper left (Cold Dominant, CD; Cold Submissive, CS; Warm Submissive, WS; and Warm Dominant, WD).

In addition to capturing each behavior of interacting individuals, these circles can also be used to describe a person’s *interpersonal style* or personality based on the extent to which a person typically engages in certain behaviors. This style, which is shaped by a person’s self-schema (how one views oneself), represents the basis from which a person will approach an interaction situation.

This reflects the perspective that individuals reaffirm their self schemas through social interaction (Goffman, 1959; Sullivan, 1953a, 1953b). Specifically, each interpersonal behavior can be seen as an “evoking message” – an acted out claim regarding one’s self-schema, which can be described as how one views oneself. These messages convey information regarding the “kind of reactions and relationships [individuals] seek” from others (Kiesler, 1996, p. 4). From this perspective, people want to behave in ways that align concordantly with their self-concept. For instance, if one sees oneself as friendly and in control, one will desire to act in a dominant and friendly way in order to confirm that self-concept.

Behaving in line with one's interpersonal style (self-schema) is posited to then lead to pleasant individual outcomes such as low anxiety and positive affect. Moskowitz and Cote (1995) found support for such behavioral concordance, demonstrating that participants felt unpleasant affect when behaving in ways that did not align with their interpersonal style, and felt pleasant affect when behaving in ways that did align. For example, a person who typically behaves within the Approving-Pardoning segment (segment L), through behaviors such as readily forgiving others and quickly accepting others, will feel anxious if he or she behaves in ways that would fall into the Critical-Punitive segment (segment D, a segment opposite segment L). In fact, all interpersonal behavior can be seen as "attempts to avoid anxiety or to establish and maintain self-esteem" (Leary, 1957, p. 16).

### **Behavioral Pulls**

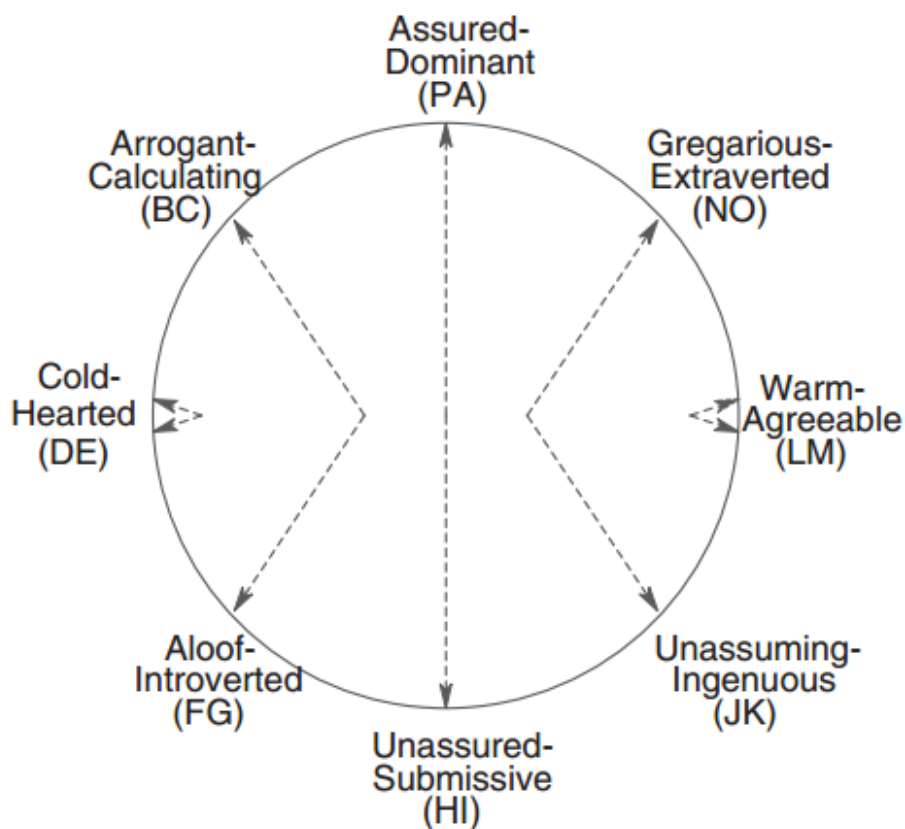
*Element 2: An individual's interpersonal behavior "pulls" or "invites" an interaction partner to behave in a way that "complements" the first interactant's behavior.*

To act in a way that fits one's self-schema or self-concept, an interaction partner must act in a way that allows one to do so. A core principle of interpersonal theory is that the *behavioral "complement" to one person's behavior is the behavior that will satisfy the first interactant's self-concept* (Horowitz et al., 2006) and familiar style of interacting (Kiesler, 1996). Each behavior is a statement of one's sense of self and views of the world, inviting the interaction partner to confirm this representation. These invitations are effective because a complementary behavior is the most likely response to another person's behavior, based on the extent to which the behavior is dominant and communal (Kiesler, 1996). Specifically, a complementary response to a behavior is one that is (a) corresponding on the communion dimension (friendliness

invites friendliness, whereas hostility invites hostility) and (b) reciprocal on the agency dimension (dominance invites submissiveness, whereas submissiveness invites dominance) (Kiesler, 1996; Pincus, Lukowitsky, & Wright, 2010).

The notion of interpersonal complementarity stems from Sullivan's (1953b) "theorem of reciprocal emotion" and Leary's "principle of reciprocal interpersonal relations." According to Kiesler (1996), the *exact* complement of a behavior is that segment which is vertically opposite the behavior's segment, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Complementarity within the Octant Level Interpersonal Circumplex



Note. Replicated from Ansell, Kurtz, and Markey (2008)



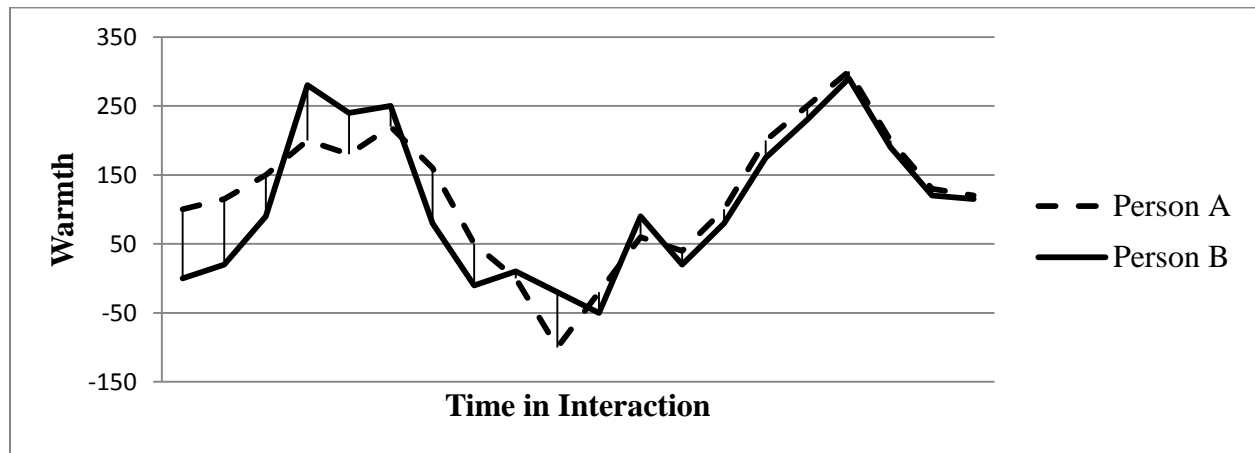
That is, a certain behavior invites a behavior that is exactly corresponding on the communion dimension (equally warm/friendly) and exactly reciprocal on the agency dimension (oppositely dominant/controlling). For instance, for behaviors such as accusing others and watching for harmful intent (Cold Dominant quadrant, Suspicious-Resentful segment C), the complementary or most probable response would be behaviors such as timidly expressing viewpoints (Cold Submissive quadrant, Restrained-Cerebral segment G). This “complement” of one person’s behavior is the most probable reaction or response to that behavioral invitation, given that it “fits” what is being requested (Kiesler, 1996). Additionally, a complementary behavior is one that mimics the extremity of the behavior. A mild or moderate behavior invites a complementary response that is mild or moderate in strength, whereas an extreme behavior invites a complementary response that is also extreme in strength (Kiesler, 1983).

In essence, interpersonal theory states that interactions represent a *reciprocal, unbroken loop of mutual influence in which both interactants are seeking to behave in ways that are familiar and reflective of their self-concepts*. In other words, the exchanges that occur within an interaction compose a “moment to moment interactive process in which our respective templates attempt to shape and alter each other’s reactions in self-confirming directions” (Kiesler, 1996, p.x). As a result, a person’s interpersonal behavior requests or “pulls” dyadic interaction partners to act in a particular “complementary” way.

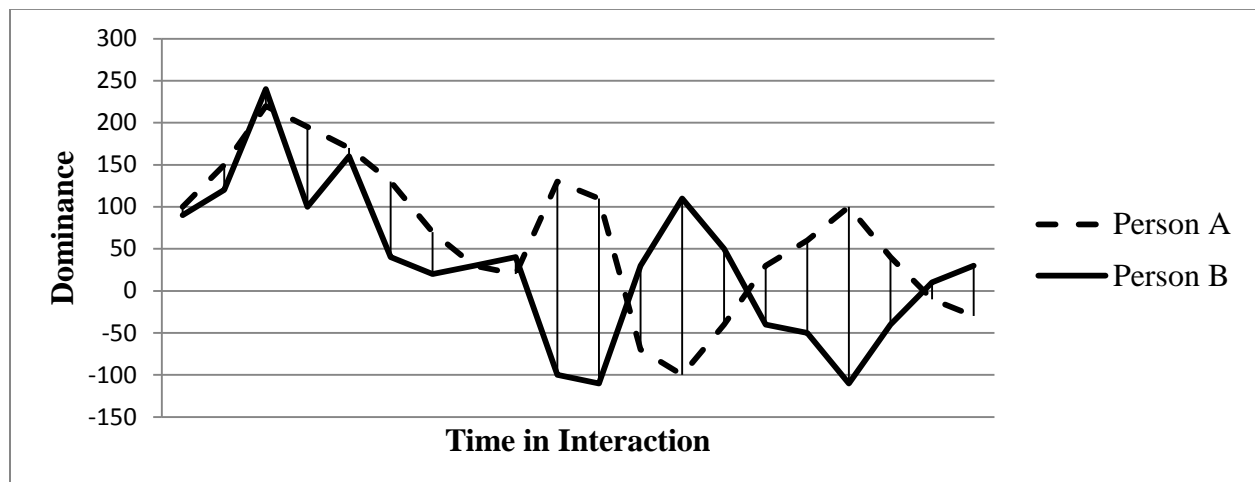
As Sadler and colleagues (2009) explain, when two people interact, they “engage in an ongoing give-and-take process that is based on mutual responsiveness to each other’s behavior” (p. 1005). This can be viewed as “training” another person over the course of the interaction to respond to oneself in a particular way (Leary, 1957). Through the course of the interaction, if it goes “well,” their behaviors moment-to-moment become in synch (Figure 4a and Figure 4b).

That is, their dominance- and affiliation-based behaviors “come to have strongly entrained cyclical patterns, making partners’ behaviors interlocked or interdependent” (Sadler et al., 2009, p. 1005). If this occurs, the interaction is said to be complementary.

*Figure 4a: Warmth Complementarity over Time in an Interaction*



*Figure 4b: Dominance Complementarity over Time in an Interaction*



The existence of such complementarity has been well supported (*e.g.*, Ansell, Kurtz, & Markey, 2008; Dryer & Horowitz, 1997; Estroff & Nowicki, 1992; Markey & Markey, 2010; Moskowitz et al., 2006; O'Connor & Dyce, 1997; Sadler et al., 2009; Sadler & Woody, 2003; Strong et al., 1988; Tracey, 1994; Tracey, 2004; Tracey, Ryan, & Jaschick-Herman, 2001). It has been to occur in previously unknown dyads (Tracey, 2004) and also to increase over time (Markey & Kurtz, 2006).

This is not to say that a particular behavior will, with certainty, draw a complementary response from an interaction partner. Instead, interpersonal theory proposes that interpersonal behavior from the first actor (Person A) *constrains or limits* the behavioral response options, in terms of dominance and warmth, available to the interaction partner (Person B; Pincus, 1994; Kiesler, 1996). It heightens the probability that that Person B will act in a way that confirms Person A's self-presentation and way of being, leading to a continuance of the same process or expression (Leary, 1957). Put another way, the self-confirming goal of behavior is "attained via the elicitation of a limited class of interpersonal reactions from others which are perceived as congruent with how one views oneself" (Pincus, 1994, p. 121). However, complementarity might not occur, given its probabilistic nature.

For example, Person A's behavior could invite a particular response from Person B, but might not fully pull Person B's behavior to the exact complement. For instance, in a single transaction (Person A acts, Person B responds), Person A could act cold submissive, the complement of which would be cold dominant. However, if Person B's typical interaction style falls within the Warm Dominant quadrant of the interpersonal circle, he or she may start out by acting slightly less friendly than is comfortable for him or her, rather than hostile – in this case,

Person A's behavior pulled Person's B behavior toward the complement, but has not yet achieved complementarity.

This example illustrates one form of noncomplementarity. There are two forms of noncomplementarity. An *acomplementary* response is one that is either reciprocal in control or corresponding in affiliation, but not both. The response answers Person A's "invitation" on one dimension but not the other. An *anticomplementary* response that is neither reciprocal in control nor corresponding in affiliation. For example, if Person A behaves in a spontaneous-demonstrative way (segment O, friendly and dominant) by taking clear stands on an issue and saying whatever comes to his or her mind, Person B might respond by acting critical-punitive (segment D, cold and dominant). This behavior is neither corresponding on the communion dimension nor reciprocal on the agency dimension.

However, because acting in line with one's self-schema (interpersonal style) is associated with positive outcomes such as positive affect (Moskowitz & Cote, 1995), interactions in which both interactants are able to act according to their interpersonal styles by eliciting complementary responses from the other are proposed to be characterized by positive outcomes such as low anxiety, and interactions characterized by noncomplementarity should demonstrate more negative outcomes (Kiesler, 1996; Leary, 1957; O'Connor & Dyce, 1997; Pincus, 1994, Sullivan, 1953b). In the case of complementarity, both interactants are requesting and receiving affirmation of their self-schemas and their desires for the interaction. Indicating support for this proposal, complementarity has been found to be related to many positive interpersonal outcomes, including positive regard (O'Connor & Dyce, 1997), closeness (Yaugn & Nowicki, 1999), cohesion (Ansell, Kurtz, & Morey, 2008), liking and feelings of comfortable interaction (Tiedens & Fragale, 2003), and positive evaluation of the interaction (Tracey, 2004).

It is important to note that complementarity in an interaction is best measured through *behavioral* complementarity, not *trait* complementarity (Tracey, 2004). Indeed, interpersonal transactions and their level of moment-to-moment complementarity have been found to mediate the relationship between trait-level complementarity of interactants and evaluation of interactions (Tracey, 2004). That is, behavior in interactions is a more proximal antecedent of outcomes than trait level interaction styles (personality). In interactions, people likely do not behave perfectly consistently throughout the length of the interaction. For example, over the course of an interaction, an interaction partner may propose an action plan for weekend activities (warm dominant), ask the other about his or her opinions (warm submissive), and so forth. Further, although an individual may have a certain interpersonal style or typical way of behaving, “there is no one-to-one correspondence between a single act and personality” (Kiesler, 1996, p. 40). Because of this variation, an interaction partner must also vary accordingly to establish complementarity throughout an interaction, as illustrated in Figures 4a and 4b.

### **Complementarity in Behaviors, Interactions, and Relationships**

*Element 3: Dyads that are characterized by complementary interactions will form enduring and stable relationships, whereas dyads that are characterized by noncomplementary interactions will not.*

The two dimensions of interpersonal behavior (Element 1) and the notion of complementarity (Element 2) may also provide insight into the function of interpersonal behavior in the development and maintenance of relationships (Ansell, Kurtz, & Markey, 2008; Carson, 1969; Kiesler, 1996; Peterson, 1982; Wagner, 1995). First, the two dimensions of affiliation and control can be viewed as relationship concerns that individuals seek to address

through interaction (Kiesler, 1996). Second, behavioral pulls used to establish complementarity through interaction describe the process of relationship development. Interpersonal interaction, in terms of behavioral transactions, can be seen as the building blocks of social relationships over time (Nelson, Basu, & Purdie, 1998). Together, these provide insight into how and why relationships are negotiated and maintained: when individuals interact, they are “continually negotiating” (Element 2) the two interpersonal motives of affiliation and control and their corresponding self-schemas (Element 1). A relationship, then, can be viewed as the *ongoing process of interactions that are shaped by the personalities and interaction behaviors of those involved*. Put another way, behaviors drive interactions, which in turn drive a relationship. If behaviors are running smoothly (i.e., in a complementary way), interactions and the resulting relationship run smoothly as well. In contrast, if behaviors disturb, interrupt, or halt complementarity, the entire process will be affected.

This is posited to occur because complementarity in interactions has been found to result in positive relational outcomes and evaluations of the interaction and interaction partners (Ansell, Kurtz, & Markey, 2008; Kiesler & Watkins, 1989; O’Conner & Dyce, 1997; Tiedens & Fragale, 2003; Yaugn & Nowicki, 1999), which in turn are posited to elicit approach behaviors from the interactants (Kiesler, 1996; Wagner, 1995). Put another way, because both members are being validated and both are in agreement on the nature of the relationship, the members of the dyad should evaluate their interactions and relationships highly and desire to “continue in relationships with those others that enable this self-validation” (Tracey, 2004, p. 1211). Reflecting this idea, Markey, Lowmaster, and Eichler (2010) proposed that “individuals will enjoy satisfying and lasting relationships when they interact with partners who tend to

complement their own interpersonal behavior” (p. 14). That is, it is likely that an individual will desire to continue interacting with a partner with whom he or she experiences complementarity.

Support for this relationship has been found through use of several different methods. For example, using a real-time assessment of complementarity through coding behavior as a continuous stream with computer joysticks, Markey, Lowmaster, and Eichler (2010) assessed relational outcomes of moment-to-moment complementarity. They found that same-sex dyads that were complementary in terms of warmth liked one another more. Similarly, Tracey (2004) found that moment-to-moment behavioral complementarity was related to positive ratings of the other person and the interaction, including items regarding the desire to interact with the person again in the future.

Additionally, complementary behavior can also shape the nature of a relationship by providing relational information. Human behavior, whether active or inactive, provides information and acts as communication that “simultaneously defines the relationship between interactants” (Kiesler, 1996, p. 218; Tracey, 2004). If one person responds in a complementary way to another person’s statement of the relationship, he or she essentially agrees to the relationship definition (Tracey, 2004, p. 1223) and the personality “claiming” messages of the other. The reciprocal process of establishing complementarity therefore provides relational information, and both members of the relationship “share the responsibility for its development – a mutual determining operation is occurring” (Leary 1957, p. 122).

From this perspective, interpersonal theory proposes that individuals drift toward and try to *maintain* relationships in which they usually encounter complementary interactions and *disengage* from relationships in which they usually encounter noncomplementary interactions. Thus, the patterns of complementarity that occur between two interactants “mold, maintain, and

destroy” relationships over time (Cappella, 1996, p. 355), making behavioral adaptation important for “relationship harmony and continuance” (Tracey, 1994, p. 864; Carson, 1969; Kiesler, 1983; Tracey & Ray, 1984).

### **Flexibility and Relationship Development**

*Element 4: Individuals who are behaviorally flexible in warmth and dominance will be able to form a greater range of stable relationships than a person who is behaviorally rigid.*

An additional consideration is the behavioral flexibility of interactants, as individuals can differ in their flexibility or rigidity in willingness to complement others, whether that adaptation is necessary moment-to-moment, interaction-to-interaction, or person-to-person. That is, whereas one individual may actively strive to operate within a narrow range of behaviors regardless of the pulls from his or her interaction partner, another person may easily adapt to such pulls (*e.g.*, Kiesler, 1996; Paulhus & Martin, 1987, 1988; Pincus, 1994).

Interpersonal theory suggests that individuals who are interpersonally flexible, in that they can adjust their expressed dominance and warmth toward others, will be able to form relationships with a wider range of individuals than those who rigidly engage in a limited range of behaviors. A rigid individual will be complementary with only a small group of people due to trait-level complementarity. For example, a person that types engages in cold, dominant behavior will only be naturally complementary with individuals who typically behave in cold submissive ways. For all other individuals, however, complementarity will end up being the responsibility of others interacting with the rigid person. This reasoning is based in the probabilistic nature of complementary responses; a rigid person will typically elicit similar behavior from others as a result of consistently behaving in a particular way (Kiesler, 1996; Leary, 1957). The more rigid a



person is in his or her behavior, “the greater [his or her] interpersonal pull” (Leary, 1957, p. 126). This suggests that the interaction partner of a very rigid person will be put into a position of needing to give far more than the rigid individual in order to establish complementarity. As a result, the rigid person will often pull extremely similar behavior from others who are more flexible, forcing those individuals to engage in behaviors that they may not wish to (Leary, 1957; O’Connor & Dyce, 1997; Wiggins, Phillips, & Trapnell, 1989).

Further, as a result of eliciting relatively consistent behavior from others, individuals develop expectancies for how others will behave—which then perpetuate themselves cyclically. For example, a person that often acts cold and submissive toward others will typically feel that others are cold and dominant, as a result of eliciting cold and dominant behavior from them. Such expectancies, in turn, then shape future behavior and future behavioral pulls toward others, creating a stable feedback system. Carson (1982) called this the cognitive statement of interpersonal complementarity, suggesting that there exists a continuous causal loop between (a) one’s social expectations, (b) one’s behavior, and (c) behavioral responses from interaction partners that confirm these expectancies. This cycle becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in which a person elicits the type of behavior he or she expects, further cementing his or her self-schema and social expectations (Carson, 1982; Kiesler, 1996).

As an example of this, if Person A sees herself as passive and humble and thus typically behaves in a submissive way, she will likely elicit dominant behavior from others. Because of this, Person A will likely form the generalization that most people are dominant. When Person A encounters Person B, she will then likely treat Person B in a way that demonstrates this expectation, notably by acting in a submissive, self-congruent way. As a result, Person B will likely respond by guiding the conversation and giving direction, reaffirming Person A’s ideas

about others (i.e., people are typically dominant and controlling). This affirmation about how others are (or how Person B is) justifies Person A's self-concept that she is submissive and cannot take control of interactions. There is a wide body of support for self-fulfilling prophecies (*e.g.*, Darley & Fazio, 1980; Jussim, 1986), including in organizational psychology, (*e.g.*, Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974), and particularly regarding interpersonal expectancies (see Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978, for a review).

Interpersonal self-fulfilling prophecies can be explained in large part by the finding that individuals are typically unaware that they are eliciting certain behavior and responses from others (Beier, 1966; Darley & Fazio, 1980). Instead, they may attribute the behavior of others to the personality or motives of those others, overlooking their own influence and reaffirming their expectations of others (Carson, 1982; Darley & Fazio, 1980; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Through doing so, individuals can “create the world they live in” by engaging in behaviors that confirm not only how they view themselves, but also their perceptions of the world and expectations regarding others in it.

Taking this one step further, these patterns can damage relationships if individuals rigidly request a very narrow range of behavior without answering an interaction partner's requests – failing to compromise. By consistently pulling interaction partners to act in ways that they would prefer not to, rigid individuals can lead their partners to disengage from the relationship. Further, if two rigid individuals that are not complementary at the trait-level interact, neither will be willing to adapt, and therefore will not be able to achieve complementarity.

In contrast, a flexible person will be able to both respond with a greater range of behaviors and elicit a greater range of behaviors from others, allowing him or her to successfully interact and thus form relationships with a wider range of individuals (Leary, 1957). An

illustration of this can be seen in a study of musical bands by O'Connor and Dyce (1997). The authors found that flexibility moderated the relationship between trait level complementarity and positive outcomes such as group integration and positive regard. In bands with rigid members, the extent to which trait-level interpersonal styles were complementary was more critical for positive outcomes, as the rigid individuals would not adjust their behavior to one another. Such flexibility is therefore an asset, in that it can establish complementarity in interactions with diverse others, thereby smoothing interactions and making them comfortable for both parties.

### **Interpersonal Theory and Interpersonal Adaptability in the Workplace**

Taken together, these core elements of interpersonal theory can inform an understanding of the content and process underlying interpersonal adaptability in the workplace. First, Element 1 suggests that (1) the behavior of an interaction partner in the workplace represents a “situation,” and that (2) each behavior in this situation expresses a blend of warmth and dominance, reflecting one’s perceptions of oneself and others. This insight into the nature of interpersonal behavior can thus identify the *content* of interpersonal adaptation, and thus provides a means through which to directly and specifically assess interpersonal adaptability. That is, researchers will be able to pinpoint what interpersonal adaptability consists of and move beyond current measurement of this construct, which almost exclusively consists of general-level statements (*e.g.*, whether a person is “able to adapt to others”).

Element 2 suggests that interpersonal adaptability (adjusting one’s behavior to “suit” the situation) consists of adjusting one’s own level of expressed warmth and dominance. Building upon this, the theory suggests that a behavior that is opposite on dominance and corresponding on warmth to another person’s behavior is the most probabilistic response. This understanding provides an understanding of the *process* of interpersonal interaction.

Element 3 suggests that if two coworkers are typically able to achieve behavioral complementarity in their interactions, they will be likely to form a stable relationship. In contrast, if they typically do not, their relationship will likely deteriorate. Given that positive relationships at work are important for career outcomes (Burt, 1992; Kraimer, & Liden, 2001; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Ng, & Feldman, 2010; Thareau, 1997; Wayne, Liden, Kraimer, & Graf, 1999) it would thus be advantageous to be able to create complementarity in interactions.

Finally, Element 4 builds upon the other three elements to suggest that individuals who are interpersonally adaptable in terms of dominance and warmth (Element 1) will be more able to establish complementarity in interactions (Element 2), thus forming strong relationships (Element 3) with a wide range of individuals (Element 4). Applying these elements to the workplace extends existing theory within the realm of organizational science by providing insight into the context, content, and process of interpersonal behavior and interpersonal adaptability (for a reference summarizing application of the interpersonal theory elements to the workplace, see Table 2).

In addition, the present study seeks to extend the interpersonal theory literature through the development of a situational measure of interpersonal adaptability. By definition, interpersonal adaptability involves a situational, dynamic altering of behavior based on the behaviors of others. However, most measures of interpersonal adaptability capture one's typical behavior or one's general behavior in one interaction (*e.g.*, Wiggins, 1988).

To address this need, I developed a situational measure founded in the interpersonal circumplex and interpersonal theory. Rather than self-report, this measure is completed by another individual who is familiar with the person to be assessed. Each item in the measure describes a different situation in which the ratee is collaborating with a theoretical peer-level

coworker on a work project. The peer-level specification is included to remove workplace hierarchy norms (*e.g.*, supervisors tend to behave dominantly toward subordinates, and not the other way around), and the interdependent task specification is included to set the context for the need to interact. The described behavior of the theoretical coworker is thus the “situation” in each item. This coworker behavior varies on both warmth and dominance to create four types of situations, which correspond to the four quadrants of the interpersonal circle: warm dominant, warm submissive, cold dominant, and cold submissive. The four response options for each stem likewise reflect these four quadrants, representing the ratee’s possible responses to the theoretical coworker’s behavior. Survey respondents complete the survey by indicating how likely the ratee would be to engage in each of the responses, and which response would be most likely for the ratee.

This new situational measure therefore addresses adaptability in ways that previous measures have not: (1) it captures the context or situation rather than typical behavior or behavior in only one interaction, and (2) these situations and the possible behavioral responses reflect blends of the two continuums of warmth and dominance.

This integration of organizational science with interpersonal theory and the newly developed situational measure provide a window through which to examine the relationship between interpersonal adaptability and critical interpersonal outcomes, a primary focus of the current study. Specifically, using interpersonal theory as a conceptual foundation, the following sections discuss (1) the linkages between interpersonal adaptability and two important social reactions from others (perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness and liking), and (2) the linkages between these reactions and a central workplace outcome: task assignments high in interpersonal content.

## **Adaptability and Reactions from Others in the Workplace**

Given the inherently social foundation of interpersonal adaptability, two interpersonal reactions from others are likely consequences, one cognitive and one affective. The first of these is perceptions of a person's interpersonal effectiveness, which I define as beliefs about an individual's ability to create effective, positive interactions and relationships. This represents a cognitive perception regarding an individual. This construct is often confounded with social skill (*e.g.*, Lievens & Sackett, 2012), combining this outcome (forming effective interactions and relationships) with antecedents of that outcome (the specific behaviors that *enable* a person to form effective interactions and relationships). I therefore distinguish interpersonal effectiveness from social skill in order to prevent conceptual and empirical dependence on potential antecedents (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). A second interpersonal reaction is liking, a positive/negative, affective evaluation of a person (Zajonc, 1980). Liking can be considered a "major currency in which social intercourse is transacted" (Zajonc, 1980, p. 153), and thus is an important consideration in understanding interpersonal interaction. I address each of these reactions in turn, below.

### **Interpersonal Adaptability and Perceptions of Interpersonal Effectiveness**

Although empirical research of workplace interpersonal adaptability is limited, work in related areas has shown that general social skills are associated with perceptions of a person's interpersonal abilities or reputation. For example, a body of research investigating political skill has emerged over the past decade, defining this skill as "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004, p. 311). From this perspective, political skill is composed of social astuteness (awareness

of self and social settings), interpersonal influence (adaptability, or behavioral flexibility), networking ability (building advantageous relationships), and apparent sincerity (appearing to be authentic). Using this definition, Ferris and colleagues (2005) assessed political skill in two samples of school administrators. The authors found that this social skill construct was related to supervisor ratings of effectiveness, one dimensions of which tapped into interpersonal relationship development.

Perceptions of effectiveness in a certain domain can also be considered a type of reputation, “the complex combination of salient personal characteristics and accomplishments, demonstrated behavior, and intended images presented over some period of time as observed directly and/or reported from secondary sources” (Ferris et al., 2003, p. 213). Conceptualizing interpersonal adaptability as one aspect of political skill, Laird, Zboja, and Ferris (2012) found that political skill was positively related to personal reputation. The authors operationalized reputation as a coworker’s perception that an individual is seen as effective (performance reputation) and highly regarded (character reputation).

Examining this relationship in both laboratory and field samples, Zinko et al. (2012) found further support for the relationships between social skill (broadly defined) and reputation. In a longitudinal laboratory study, the authors found that that social competency (defined as effective communication and self-efficacy) was positively related to reputation. Similarly, in a subsequent field study across three organizations, the authors found a positive relationship between self-reported political skill and coworker-reported reputation.

Taken together, this research provides insight into the relationship between an individual’s interpersonal skill – although defined in many ways – and supervisors’ and coworkers’ general perceptions of that individual’s capabilities. The present study builds upon

this research by moving to a level of greater specificity in terms of both the antecedent and criterion. That is, the present study examines the link between interpersonal adaptability (a facet of social skill) with perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness (essentially a reputation specifically about one's ability to form effective interactions and relationships). Given that task assignments can differ by what they require (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988), perceptions of a person's ability (reputation) in particular domains (*e.g.*, reputation for effectively performing in interpersonal contexts) merits investigation. Thus, I hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 1: Interpersonal adaptability will be positively related to supervisor perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness.*

*Hypothesis 2: Interpersonal adaptability will be positively related to coworker perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness.*

### **Interpersonal Adaptability and Liking**

Liking to work with a person is a second likely outcome of a person's interpersonal adaptability. Adjusting one's behavior to another person is by definition done to improve interactions or relationships (Canary & Stafford, 1994; Pulakos et al., 2000; Stafford & Canary, 1991), and as a result of high quality exchange, interactions, or relationships, should also be associated with interpersonal liking. Although interpersonal adaptability itself has received little empirical attention, research regarding constructs that include interpersonal adaptability can shed light on this potential relationship. For example, in a longitudinal study of two national retail chains, Shaughnessy et al. (2011) found a significant interaction between self-reported political skill, a characteristic that includes an interpersonal adaptability component, and ingratiation in predicting supervisor liking three months later. Specifically, individuals high in political skill and



ingratiation received higher reports of supervisor liking than individuals high in ingratiation but low in political skill.

Social exchange theory (Secord & Backman, 1964) can also provide insight into this relationship. From this perspective, individuals enjoy spending time with others whom they find rewarding. Interpersonal adaptability, as discussed previously, can be seen as rewarding, as it involves adjusting one's behavior to another person. In fact, liking or attraction is often described directly as finding interactions with a certain individual to be pleasurable (Huston & Levinger, 1978).

Research regarding interpersonal conflict can similarly inform the relationship between interpersonal adaptability and liking, as adaptability should limit or mitigate such conflict (Kiesler, 1996). For example, conflict has been found to be negatively related to liking in team contexts (*e.g.*, Jehn, 1995). Further, it has been consistently found that limiting relationship conflict in work groups is important for team viability (Jehn et al., 2008; Lehmann-Willenbrock; Grohman, & Kauffeld, 2011; Tekleab, Quigley, & Tesluk, 2009). Taking these together, because interpersonal adaptability is an inherently social and other-oriented construct that should enable high quality interactions and limit relationship conflict, I hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 3: Interpersonal adaptability will be positively related to supervisor liking.*

*Hypothesis 4: Interpersonal adaptability will be positively related to coworker liking.*

In turn, liking and perceptions of social effectiveness have important implications for success at work. In particular, these reactions will likely play into the extent to which supervisors and coworkers are willing to either (1) assign an individual or (2) work with an individual, respectively, on tasks high in interpersonal content. This is of central importance to success in

the workplace because of the relational nature of many work tasks (Ragins & Dutton, 2007), such as the increasing presence of team structures in organizations (Chen, Kanfer, DeShon, Mathieu, & Kozlowski, 2009; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006).

Reflecting this, recent research in several domains has begun to investigate and generate further interest in the relational qualities of many work tasks. For example, although job characteristics theory – a theory that captures jobs based on their characteristics, and the subsequent employee satisfaction resulting from those characteristics – historically ignored relational characteristics of work, recent work has delved into this area. For instance, this work stresses that jobs can also be characterized by the extent of interaction, interdependence, and social support necessary on the job (e.g., Dierdorff & Morgeson, 2013) and the extent to which the job includes prosocial tasks, such as helping others (e.g., Grant, 2008).

Similarly, research from the teams and training literatures likewise highlights interaction in work tasks. For example, although all teams are by definition interdependent to some extent (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006), team tasks can vary in the level of interdependence required. For example, some team tasks are additive, in which team members complete their respective work and later compile it (Steiner, 1972), which does not clearly necessitate extensive social interaction. Instead, such tasks can be done relatively independently. Conjunctive tasks, on the other hand, require members to each contribute, communicate, and share unique information and abilities in order for the team to succeed (Steiner, 1972). This distinction highlights differences in the extent to which individuals must interact and collaborate on a particular task.

Research in the training domain can also inform the understanding of what constitutes a task with high interpersonal content. Specifically, literature regarding on-the-job learning describes a variety of learning outcomes that align with certain job assignments, including setting

and implementing agendas (*e.g.*, developing solutions to problems), developing values (*e.g.*, management values), developing an “executive temperament” (*e.g.*, perseverance), fostering personal awareness (*e.g.*, realizing one’s strengths and weaknesses), and handling relationships (*e.g.*, dealing with others) (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988). This research takes a different approach than the job characteristics and team task perspectives, underscoring the communicative and relational aspects of tasks and assignments at work.

Drawing on these perspectives as a conceptual foundation, I define tasks with high interpersonal content as collaborative, interdependent work activities involving extensive interpersonal interaction and exchange. In the present study, these are limited to experiences such as working with others one-on-one and in team settings in a face-to-face environment, as much interpersonal communication is exchanged via nonverbal behavior (Cacioppo, Petty, Losch, & Kim, 1986; Matsumoto, 1987; Sy, Cote, & Saavedra, 2005; van Baaren et al., 2004). In fact, nonverbal messages “predominate in emotional and relational communication” (Kiesler, 1996, p. 5). In contrast, tasks low in interpersonal content do not require frequent or intensive interaction with others and are structured into independent tasks, rather than interdependent collaboration. Using this definition of interpersonal tasks, I next describe the value of these tasks for employees, as well as how the interpersonal reactions of supervisors and coworkers (liking and perceptions of social effectiveness) should relate to the extent to which employees are likely to receive them.

### **Interpersonal Task Experiences as Opportunities**

#### **The Benefit of Interpersonal Task Experiences at Work**

Although career success can take on many forms (Heslin, 2005), involvement in tasks high in interpersonal content is highlighted in this paper for three primary reasons. The first is

that participation in relationship or interpersonally oriented task assignments is particularly advantageous because of the interpersonal nature of the workplace (Ragins & Dutton, 2007). Such assignments provide relational opportunities, including (1) the opportunity to network and create both internal and external relationships, (2) further opportunity to demonstrate one's ability to work with teams, the common "building block" of modern organizations, and (3) further experience in leading others, which provides influential experience for future promotion. Second, being rewarded with task assignments is associated with a variety of other beneficial career outcomes, such as development and recognition, given that task assignments can be seen as the "most powerful tool" for developing employees (Bonoma & Lawler, 1989, p. 37). Finally, because receiving these tasks provides an opportunity to further demonstrate one's skills, they can contribute to receiving additional opportunities in the future. I will discuss each of these outcomes in turn, below.

**Opportunities to develop relationships and networks.** Participating in projects that involve working with others may provide opportunities to increase one's social capital through establishing relationships and networking, both internally and externally (Burt, 1992). Social capital, defined as aspects of a social structure that facilitate actions of an individual in the structure (Coleman, 1990), can take many forms, most notably through the provision of interpersonal resources such as relationships and support. Building social capital is one of the most effective ways to stimulate one's career (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001; Wayne, Liden, Kraimer, & Graf, 1999) and advancement (Burt, 1992, Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Seibert et al., 2001), making social capital highly advantageous in the workplace (Tharenou, 1997a; Zanzi, Arthur, & Shamir, 1991). For example, Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) found that social resources, defined as the extent of contacts in other functions or higher organizational levels,

were positively associated with promotions. Similarly, informal social connections have been found to be associated with promotion (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). This may be in part due to social ties allowing a person to hear about, and get, new positions or job opportunities (Granovetter, 1973; Marsden & Hurlbert, 1988; Zippay, 2001).

**Additional experience with teams and leadership.** Involvement in new job or task opportunities is a central avenue for additional on-the-job learning (Hunt, 1991; Keys & Wolfe, 1988; McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988; Wexley & Baldwin, 1986). In fact, such experiences have been found to account for a large amount of development on the job (Wick, 1989) and to be associated with higher income, promotion rates, and other rewards (Becker, 1993; Campion, Cheraskin, & Stevens, 1994; Orpen, 1994). In particular, working on interpersonal tasks likely represents greater experience with teams, leadership, and client relations. As teams have increasingly become a preferred work structure (Kozlowski, Gully, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers, 1996; Kozlowski & Igen, 2006), the opportunity to participate in, or lead them, can be both educational and useful. Engaging in team experiences is related to effective teamwork skills, and thus may potentially play a role in demonstrating and enhancing them (Rubin, Bommer, & Baldwin, 2002).

Likewise, having the opportunity to demonstrate one's leadership capabilities can allow supervisors to make decisions regarding one's future leadership potential, impacting succession planning opportunities. Leadership is undoubtedly one of the most valued skills in the workplace and one of the most researched topics in organizational research. Effective leadership is widely recognized as essential for the workplace (cf. Day, 2012), and thus, experiences in which one can continue to develop and demonstrate this competence is closely tied with further career advancement. As Bonoma and Lawler (1989) stressed, succeeding in the workplace "has more to

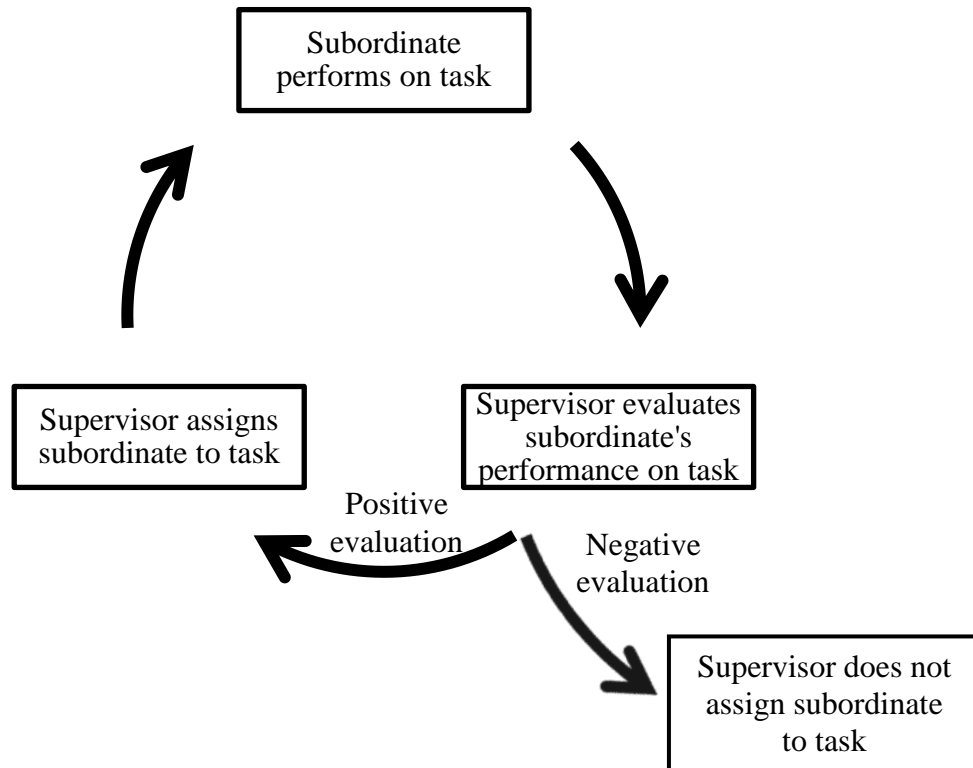
do with governing the efforts of others than it has to do with tasks, policies, or programs” (p. 30), suggesting that opportunities to both enhance and demonstrate one’s ability to effectively do so is advantageous.

In a similar vein, interpersonal task assignments could involve working with external stakeholders such as suppliers and clients. Demonstrated experience with such responsibilities may increase the likelihood that a person is promoted to higher-level positions, which often entails working increasingly with a wider group of contacts (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988).

**Contributing to a cycle of exchange.** Because task assignments provide a platform to further demonstrate the skills that earned those opportunities, the assignment of tasks can be described as a catalyst for an upward, positive spiral of behavior and reward. An example of this type of pattern can be seen in the leader-member exchange literature (LMX; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). In this model, “exchange” between a supervisor and subordinate can increase or diminish over time, with the supervisor providing more or less resources and opportunities in response to the performance of the subordinate. Specifically, as a subordinate does more and performs well, the supervisor invests more in the subordinate, which then allows the subordinate to accomplish even more. In this way, the LMX model can be seen as a spiral exchange model, in that “exchange” can increase continuously over time. This perspective can be applied directly to the understanding of task assignments as well, as illustrated in Figure 5. If a subordinate performs well on a given task, he or she will be more likely to be rewarded with another, similar task. This new task provides the opportunity to perform again, thereby representing a loop back to the supervisor’s decision to assign the subordinate to another task. This suggests, then, that if a

person is seen as performing effectively in tasks with high interpersonal content, that individual will continue to receive valued, interpersonal task assignments.

Figure 5: The Cyclical Process of Task Assignment and Performance



Such assignments also can be impactful through enhancing one's likelihood of getting additional and *increasingly high-status* interpersonal assignments in the future (Tharenou, 1997a, b). This idea is similarly reflected in career tournament theory, which proposes that being in a workplace can be described as being entered into a career tournament (Rosenbaum, 1990). From this perspective, receiving a special assignment (winning) allows a person to move on to increasingly selective "rounds." In contrast, by not receiving opportunities to demonstrate one's skills, a person is offered fewer opportunities for advancement in his or her career. Essentially, getting opportunities such as important interpersonal task assignments or projects makes one more likely to get further opportunities, which sets one's career on a "winning" or stagnant

trajectory (Tharenou, 1997b). This pattern can also be explained by reputation enhancement; reputation allows a person to be sought after for opportunities or promotions, which then gives them a record that increasingly enhances their reputation (Tsui, 1984).

### **Influences on Supervisor and Coworker Decision-Making regarding Employees**

Interpersonal task assignments are thus rewarding and valuable for employees to acquire. How or why they earn these assignments therefore becomes an important question. Although it may seem logical that task performance should be the primary component in deciding who receives opportunities in the workplace, this is often not the case. The influence of considerations *other* than task performance can be seen in three exemplar areas of managerial and coworker decision-making regarding employees: supervisor-rated performance appraisals, supervisor assignment of promotions or assignments, and coworker willingness to work with certain individuals on particular tasks. This is not to say that task performance is unimportant, but rather that it is not the sole contributor to decision-making.

In particular, interpersonal and relational influences of workplace decisions are pervasive (Ferris & Judge, 1991; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). In fact, decisions that reflect career success often are “based more on social factors than performance” (Zinko et al., 2012, p. 162). Two interpersonal themes, one cognitive and one affective, emerge consistently as determinants of supervisor decision-making (*e.g.*, performance appraisal and rewards decisions) and coworker viability (*e.g.*, willingness to work with an individual): perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness and interpersonal liking. In the following section, I will discuss the influence of these two factors in the context of supervisor assignment of individuals to tasks high in interpersonal content, and coworker willingness to work with individuals on such tasks, respectively.



## **Supervisor decision-making.**

*Supervisor decisions relevant to performance appraisal.* One example of managerial decision-making is performance appraisal of subordinates. Despite their name, performance appraisals do not represent pure measurement of performance itself. In fact, “ratings of job performance are widely viewed as poor measures of job performance” (Murphy, 2008, p. 148), in that such ratings contain additional information beyond task performance. This information is composed of more than simply inaccuracy or rater error (*e.g.*, the halo effect and measurement error (*e.g.*, random variance) however (Guion, 2011; Murphy, 2008). Instead, taking a multidimensional perspective of performance appraisal, ratings are also impacted by characteristics of the ratee (Murphy, 2008), particularly interpersonal factors (Ferris, Munyon et al., 2008a; Laird et al., 2012; Levy and Williams, 2004). For example, perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness and liking have been found to play a role in determining performance ratings.

*Interpersonal effectiveness perceptions on performance appraisal.* The extent to which a person is seen as interpersonally effective, or interpersonally competent, can affect manager ratings of that person’s performance. This can be seen through examining the impact of interpersonal organizational citizenship behaviors on performance appraisals. Organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB; Bateman & Organ, 1983; Organ, 1988; Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983) can be defined as discretionary behavior that promotes organizational functioning. More specifically, *interpersonal* OCBs, those behaviors directed toward specific individuals rather than the organization as a whole (Williams & Anderson, 1988), have consistently been found to influence performance appraisals (*e.g.*, Borman & Motowidlo, 1997; Borman, White, & Dorsey, 1995; Conway, 1999; Kiker & Motowidlo, 1999; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Fetter, 1991;

Podsakoff, & Fetter, 1991; Orr, Sackett, & Mercer, 1989; Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996; Werner, 1994). For example, in a field study across several diverse industries, Johnson (2001) found that interpersonal OCB, defined as helping and cooperation, explained significant variance in overall performance appraisals beyond task performance. In fact, perceptions of this behavior maintained “essentially equal weight” as a variety of task performance dimensions. Further, this cooperative behavior was particularly important to raters of employees in support roles, interpersonally intensive jobs “in which the main function is to help other people get work done” (p. 994). Similarly, Van Scotter and Motowidlo (1996) described interpersonal OCB as interpersonal facilitation, which they defined as including demonstrating interpersonal skill, helping others, and maintaining positive working relationships. Using ratings of airforce mechanics by their supervisors, they found that supervisor perception of mechanics’ interpersonal facilitation accounted for unique variance in ratings of overall performance beyond task performance.

Compounding these findings, Werner (1994) found in an experimental study of supervisors that more rating halo was evidenced for ratees that were described as engaging in high levels of interpersonal OCB than those described as engaging in average levels of interpersonal OCB. That is, employees who were believed to engage in more cooperative behavior received more consistent ratings across several dimensions than individuals who were known for average OCB levels. Further, the author found that not only were the raters influenced by their perceptions of an individual’s interpersonal OCB behavior, and also that the raters specifically requested interpersonal OCB information before providing ratings.

Together, these findings indicate that perceptions of a person’s cooperativeness or helpfulness, behavior that is generally described as “working well with others,” influence

performance ratings from his or her supervisor. This suggests that the extent to which a supervisor believes a person is interpersonally effective will impact the supervisor's performance rating of that person.

*Liking on perceptions of performance appraisal.* Affective reactions have also been found to impact performance appraisals (Cardy & Dobbins, 1986; Forgas & George, 2001). In particular, the affective reaction of liking has been found to be consistently related to these ratings (Alexander & Wilkins, 1982; Cardy & Dobbins, 1986; Kingstrom & Mainstone, 1985; Tsui & Barry, 1986; Varma, DeNisi, & Peters, 1996; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). For example, Tsui and Barry (1986) found that supervisors, peers, and subordinates in a large, national organization provided higher performance ratings for employees whom they liked than employees for whom they reported neutral or negative interpersonal affect. Further, agreement in performance ratings across raters was greater for those with similar levels of liking for the employee than for those with different levels of liking. This finding led the authors to question the ability to separate one's liking from ratings of performance.

Other authors have echoed this sentiment due to finding similar results in additional contexts. In a study of sales personnel, Kingstrom and Mainstone (1985) found that supervisor ratings for overall performance and for six specific domains of performance were all positively related to supervisor perceptions of personal acquaintance; the authors defined personal acquaintance as the closeness of the relationship between the supervisor and subordinate. Testing this relationship in both applied and laboratory settings, Wayne and Ferris (1990) also found that supervisor (rater) liking of a subordinate (ratee) was significantly related to performance ratings of that individual. Thus, research in this area supports the notion that liking impacts supervisor

ratings of performance. As a result, liking has even been included in models of performance appraisal (Dipboye, 1985).

*Supervisor decisions relevant to rewards and opportunities.* Other rewards in the workplace, such as promotions or task assignments, are likewise also shaped by factors other than task performance (Thareau, 1997). In fact, it is commonly noted in both research and organizations that promotion can be explained in terms of social and political processes (Ferris, Buckley, & Allen, 1992). Indeed, it has been suggested that opportunities such as promotions may be the most “political” or subjective organizational decisions (Ferris & Judge, 1991). Likewise, assignment to task groups is commonly not based on objective task performance either (Smith, 2005).

*Interpersonal effectiveness perceptions on rewards and opportunities.* As described above, performance appraisals may be impacted by perceptions of a person’s interpersonal effectiveness. Likewise, this can extend to receiving opportunities such as advantageous task assignments, the focus of the present study. Because performance perceptions may be affected by perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness, and because task assignments are theoretically provided based on perceptions of performance, perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness should likewise be related to receiving task assignments.

This can be seen by again examining perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness as a social reputation (Ferris et al., 2003; Zinko et al., 2012). Reputation has been described as being characterized not just in terms of one’s task competence, but also in terms of one’s social reputation (Ferris et al., 2003), which Zinko et al. (2007) describe as being known for generally working effectively with others. Using this definition, Zinko et al. (2007) found in a longitudinal examination that one’s reputation was related to a composite measure of career success, which

included supervisor ratings of promotion rate. This suggests that a similar relationship should emerge between perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness and task assignments, as these opportunities can be viewed as small-scale “promotions.”

Similarly, Tsui (1984) proposed that supervisors determine performance expectations and resulting performance perceptions based on the particular *role* of a subordinate, and provide rewards if the performance perceptions and expectations are aligned. The author found that managers who were rated by their supervisor and peers as having a good reputation for performance in their roles had significantly higher merit (pay) increases and promotion rates than their less reputationally effective counterparts.

Building upon this role framework, if a supervisor believes that a role requires extensive use of a certain competency, then the subordinate’s ability to effectively meet that requirement should impact the supervisor’s rating of his or her performance. This suggests that supervisors are aware of the content of given roles and tasks, and judge individuals based on those roles. Applied to the present paper, supervisors should take into account the respective needs of various tasks, and thus assign tasks with high interpersonal content (*e.g.*, leading teams, working with clients, working with a team) to individuals that they perceive to be interpersonally effective. This aligns with Smith’s (2005) proposal that managers should assign employees based on the match between their competencies and the needs of the task in order to maximize performance.

*Liking on rewards and opportunities.* Research indicates that being liked is associated with a wide range of rewards and opportunities (*e.g.*, Kipnis & Vanderveer, 1971; Pandey & Bohra, 1984; Podsakoff, 1982; Scott & Judge, 2009). For example, Shaughnessy et al. (2011) found that supervisor liking was positively related to perceptions of promotability. In line with

this finding, promotions may be based partially in supervisor comfort with and similarity to candidates, both of which are associated with liking (Ferris, Buckley, & Allen, 1992; Ruderman & Ohlott, 1994). Interpersonal liking has also been found to be associated with popularity and receiving organizational citizenship behaviors from others (Scott & Judge, 2009), as well as receiving less disciplinary action than others even when deserved (Fandt, Labig, & Urich, 1990).

Liking has also been found to be related to positive exchange in supervisor-subordinate dyads (Wayne & Ferris, 1990), which suggests that supervisors may provide more opportunities to liked individuals. A high quality relationship with one's supervisor, in turn, is also linked with receiving opportunities such as promotions and other forms of support in career development (Graen et al., 1990). For example, Graen et al. (1990) found that subordinates who had higher quality exchange relationships with their supervisors in the first three years of their employment were promoted more quickly and were rated higher in promotability over a span of 13 years than employees with low quality exchange relationships.

Together, these findings underscore the importance of affective reactions to others on the rewards (*e.g.*, opportunities) they are provided. Indeed, even perceiving that *others* like a person and thinking that the person is popular can affect how another person treats him or her (LaFontana & Cillessen, 1998). This relationship could likewise apply to receiving desirable task assignments, particularly assignments that are high in interpersonal content. This may be because these assignments are highly beneficial, given the importance of teams and leadership in the workplace, as well as because if one person likes someone, he or she assumes that others will as well (LaFontana & Cillessen, 1998).

***Linkage between supervisor reactions and decisions regarding interpersonal tasks.***

Because task assignments are valued, beneficial, and educational (McCall, Lombardo, &

Morrison, 1988), and because interpersonal task assignments in particular may enhance one's career (Burt, 1992; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Seibert et al., 2001; Tharenou, 1997a; Wayne, Liden, Kraimer, & Graf, 1999; Zanzi, Arthur, & Shamir, 1991), it is necessary to understand why certain individuals are awarded these assignments. Employees must rely on their supervisors for task assignments, promotions, and other rewards, which the research described above suggests are provided based more on social, interpersonal, and political influences than objective measures (Kanter, 1981). In particular, research in the areas of performance appraisal and rewards (*e.g.*, promotions and opportunities) suggest that perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness and liking are associated with supervisor decisions. This has implications for managerial decision-making regarding assignment to interpersonal task opportunities in particular, given the benefit of matching competencies to task requirements (Smith, 2005).

*Hypothesis 5: Supervisor perceived interpersonal effectiveness will be positively related to the extent to which supervisors are willing to assign an individual to task opportunities with high interpersonal content.*

*Hypothesis 6: Supervisor liking will be positively related to the extent to which supervisors are willing to assign an individual to tasks with high interpersonal content.*

**Coworker viability.** In addition to supervisor reactions, coworker perceptions of, and affective responses to, an employee also have important implications for that individual's interaction with others in the workplace. In particular, coworker viability, the extent to which other coworkers want to continue working with a person in the future (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006; Barrick, Stewart, Neubert, & Mount, 1998; Goodman, Ravlin, & Schminke, 1987), may

have important implications for an employee's success. For example, because supervisors take into account the opinions of other constituencies, such as coworkers, when making workplace decisions (Latham & Wexley, 1981; Tsui, 1984), viability may affect whether or not a certain employee is given particular opportunities (Burt 1993). Similarly, acceptance by peers may be the most important condition for earning an effective work reputation (Kanter, 1977).

In addition, viability is essential for the workplace, as teams high in viability are also found to be more effective than teams composed of members who do not want to continue working with one another (Barrick et al., 1998; Beal et al., 2003; Gully et al., 1995; Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Mullen & Copper, 1994). Thus, viability between coworkers is critical in the interdependent and relational context of the workplace (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003).

***Perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness on coworker viability.*** Perceptions of being an effective work partner is one potential influence on the extent to which others desire to work with an individual. An example of this can be seen in the relationship between team cohesion, defined as team members being united, “sticking together,” and forming social bonds in the pursuit of objectives (Casey-Campbell & Martens, 2009), and team performance. The linkage between these two constructs has been found across a variety of contexts (Beal et al., 2003; Chiocchio & Essiembre, 2009; Gully, Devine, & Whitney, 1995), and this relationship has been found to be bidirectional (Beal et al., 2003; Tekleab, Quigley, & Tesluk, 2009; see Casey-Campbell & Martens, 2009, for a review): although team cohesion may predict later team performance, team performance also predicts later team cohesion. That is, if everyone on a team succeeds together, they will be more likely to desire working with one another. In the case of interpersonal tasks, performing well implies working effectively with others – being interpersonally effective. Thus, on tasks with high interpersonal content, an individual will be



more likely to desire working with an interpersonally effective individual than an interpersonally ineffective individual.

***Liking on coworker viability.*** Not surprisingly, liking has long been found to be positively associated with the desire to spend time with, and form relationships with, another person. Most people cite liking as a primary reason for friendship, for example (Blieszner, 1995). Closeness between two people is also related to commitment to their relationship (*e.g.*, Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). Similarly, affection, a form of liking, is linked with relationship maintenance and longevity (Canary & Dainton, 2006). In contrast, a loss of liking and attraction to another person is a primary reason why relationships dissolve (Coleman, Ganong, & Leon, 2006).

Similar results have been found in team contexts. For example, a meta analysis of work team studies showed that teams with dense, close interpersonal ties between the team members were more committed to continuing to work together than teams without close ties (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006). In particular, expressive ties (friendships) were especially predictive of team viability.

Further, this applies to the choice of a specific individual as a work partner as well. For example, Casciaro and Lobo (2008) examined task-related networks across three diverse organizations (a technology firm, staff at a university, and a large information technology company). The authors investigated networks of which employees worked together, both in terms of general work (*e.g.*, “we interact at work”) and in terms of specific work tasks (*e.g.*, “when I have a question... I choose to go to this person for advice or help”). The researchers also assessed the extent to which each employee liked or enjoyed working with every other employee and the perceived task competence of every other employee. The authors found that the

coefficient for interpersonal affect (the perception that an individual was enjoyable to work with) was significantly greater than perceived task competence for predicting task-related interaction. Further, there was a significant interaction between interpersonal affect and perceived task competence, in that if a person was not positively liked, they were not selected as work partners, no matter their task competence. In contrast, if a person was positively liked, task competence and selection as a work partner were positively related.

***Linkage between coworker reactions and decisions regarding interpersonal tasks.***

Together, this research suggests that both perceptions of a person's interpersonal effectiveness and interpersonal liking should be positively related to coworker desire to continue working with that individual. Although this may occur across all tasks, this is especially true for tasks with high interpersonal content. This is because "task competence" in this case will at least partially consist of working effectively with others, thus making effective interpersonal interaction both informally beneficial (cooperative, collaborative) and formally necessary (working together to achieve group goals).

*Hypothesis 7: Coworker perceived interpersonal effectiveness will be positively related to the extent to which coworkers are willing to work with an individual on tasks with high interpersonal content.*

*Hypothesis 8: Coworker liking will be positively related to the extent to which coworkers are willing to work with an individual on tasks with high interpersonal content.*

Through these mechanisms, then, interpersonal adaptability should also be related to being assigned to interpersonal work tasks.

*Hypothesis 9: Interpersonal adaptability will be positively related to supervisor willingness to assign an individual to tasks with high interpersonal content.*

*Hypothesis 10: Interpersonal adaptability will be positively related to coworker willingness to work with an individual on tasks with high interpersonal content.*

*Hypothesis 11: Supervisor perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness will partially mediate the relationship between interpersonal adaptability and supervisor willingness to assign an individual to tasks with high interpersonal content.*

*Hypothesis 12: Supervisor liking will partially mediate the relationship between interpersonal adaptability and supervisor willingness to assign an individual to tasks with high interpersonal content.*

*Hypothesis 13: Coworker perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness will partially mediate the relationship between interpersonal adaptability and coworker willingness to work with an individual on tasks with high interpersonal content.*

*Hypothesis 14: Coworker liking will partially mediate the relationship between interpersonal adaptability and coworker willingness to work with an individual on tasks with high interpersonal content.*

### **The Workplace as a Unique Environment: Additional Research Questions**

Although interpersonal theory is informative and provides insight regarding the content and process of interpersonal adaptation, this construct may operate in a different way related to supervisory and coworker perceptions and the demands created by workplace norms. The workplace is a context that is unique and distinct from a counseling environment, the domain from which the theory emerged (*e.g.*, Leary, 1957). There are many characteristics of the workplace that are relevant for interpreting interaction and complementarity (*e.g.*, hierarchy;

Moskowitz, RingoHo, Turcotte, & Tremblay, 2006), including two that may be particularly important for understanding interpersonal adaptability.

First, in contrast to a counseling environment, the workplace is structured around group goal attainment beyond individual and interpersonal development or growth. In organizational environments, individuals collaborating at work must keep task goals in mind in addition to the social interaction itself. Employees are hired and paid specifically to “get things done” for the organization, from completing projects to increasing revenue. As a result, the interaction between two people may take a backseat to this goal attainment. For example, if a coworker is behaving in a very dominant manner, directing others regarding steps to accomplish for a project, yet that coworker has little experience in the area and may be incorrect, the most “effective” behavior for completing the project may not be a complementary (submissive) response. Instead, it may be more appropriate to respond in a slightly or equally dominant way, such as by making different suggestions or disputing the plan. This means that the most effective behavioral response for *stabilizing the interpersonal interaction* may not always be the most effective behavioral response for *achieving task goals*. Instead, dominant behavior across situations could be seen as more effective in the workplace than sometimes engaging in submissive behavior. This dilemma can be described in terms of a balance between proactively adapting to a situation (altering the other person’s behavior through use of one’s own behavior), rather than reactively adapting to a situation (altering one’s own behavior to complement the other person’s behavior). This distinction is a critical concern for the workplace.

Second, given that the workplace is a highly interdependent environment in which collaboration and cooperation may be critical to success, warm behaviors may consistently be more effective than cold behaviors. That is, although a cold behavior is the most probable

response to a similarly cold behavior, and from some clinical perspectives, the most appropriate response, a warm response may be more *effective* in the workplace or be considered part of the norms of the organization. This can be seen by the extensive literature of conflict management, close relationships, communication, and team effectiveness. Research findings in these areas suggest that warm behavior is related to increased liking, relationship length, relationship satisfaction, and the inhibition of negative behavior spirals (*e.g.*, Fincham, 2003; Kenny, 1994; Weiss & Heyman, 1990; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974).

For example, research examining interpersonal attraction has consistently found that an individual will be more likely to like someone who he or she feels liked by (Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Hallinan & Williams, 1987; Hays, 1984; Kenny, 1994; Kenny & La Voie, 1982; Kubitschek & Hallinan, 1998; Secord & Backman, 1964). Thus, warm, friendly behaviors, because they convey liking, should also stimulate liking of the friendly person. This aligns with the finding that liking of a relationship partner is most strongly predicted by positivity, defined as making interactions pleasant through being kind and cheerful, over and above other relationship management strategies (Canary & Stafford, 1994).

Similarly, as suggested by interpersonal theory, warm behaviors also promote warm, friendly behaviors from others. Word, Zanna, and Cooper (1974) found that when interviewers engaged in friendly behaviors (*e.g.*, smiling, leaning forward, nodding), applicants reciprocated those behaviors and were more highly rated by the interviewers. Likewise, sales employees have been found to report being more agreeable when the customer they have just interacted with is friendly (Huang & Ryan, 2011). These patterns align also with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and norms of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960).

This pattern also highlights the presence of behavioral spirals – that is, that behaviors between individuals not only build off one another, but can also *increase* in intensity. As a positive example, Fredrickson’s (2001, 2003) Broaden and Build model of positive affect suggests that displaying positive behaviors stimulates interpersonal interactions and the development of resources, which in turn promotes increasingly positive behaviors. Warm behaviors could also function by “breaking” spirals of hostility. For example, the personal relationships literature has consistently found that couples who respond to conflict by using positive, affiliative behaviors are more satisfied with their relationships and stay together longer (*e.g.*, Weiss & Heyman, 1990). In contrast, couples who “spiral” with increasingly cold or hostile behaviors are more likely to disengage and separate (*e.g.*, Christensen & Heavy, 1990; Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Fincham, 2003). Taking these findings together suggests that warm behaviors may be advantageous in the workplace, given the importance of continuing positive relationships at work (*e.g.*, leader-member exchange relationships, Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Although responding to a cold behavior with a similarly cold behavior may reduce anxiety by reducing *unpredictability*, responding to a cold behavior with similarly cold behavior may not necessarily be good for relationship development at work.

These two characteristics of the workplace have implications for interpersonal dynamics in organizations. As described above, organizations have an additional need in interactions beyond interaction comfort: task goal achievement. Second, research indicates that friendly, warm behaviors are conducive to relationship-building in the workplace, which suggests that cold behavior may rarely be considered an appropriate response in collaborative or interdependent work contexts. Therefore, although interpersonal theory provides many insights into interaction and interpersonal adaptability, interaction may operate different in the workplace

than counseling, clinical, or informal settings. As little has been done to examine this perspective in the workplace, I will examine in an exploratory manner, (1) whether being perceived as likely to engage in dominant behaviors across situations is more highly related to the mediators and outcomes than interpersonal theory's complementarity and (2) whether being perceived as likely to engage in warm behaviors across situations is more highly related to the mediators and outcomes than interpersonal theory's complementarity.

## **METHOD**

### **Pilot Study 1**

I first conducted an initial pilot study to ensure that each interpersonal adaptability item stem (the situation, theoretical coworker behavior) and each response option (predicted behavioral response of the focal coworker) reflected their intended levels of dominance and warmth.

#### **Participants**

Seven subject matter experts (SMEs) in item design participated to pilot test the interpersonal adaptability situational measure. The SMEs were doctoral students in organizational psychology, and all were experienced in developing and validating employee surveys. Of these SMEs, four were female and three were male. Four of these experts were Caucasian, one was African American, and one was of Middle Eastern descent.

#### **Procedure and Results**

The subject matter experts coded each situational item stem and response option on both warmth (1, extremely cold to 5, extremely warm) and dominance (1, extremely submissive to 5, extremely dominant). Item stems (situations) and response options were separated in the coding survey so that response options would not be coded in relation to one another or to the stems. Overall, most stems and response options fell into their intended quadrant (warm dominant, warm submissive, cold dominant, or cold submissive). However, the warmth and dominance levels of some of the stems and responses options were unclear. To address this, I edited each stem and response option that yielded a dominance or warmth mean across coders of between 2.25-3.75 (i.e., unclear dominance or warmth). For example, the cold submissive response option for third item stem received an average score of 2.71 for warmth, indicating an unclear level of warmth. To address this, I changed the response option from “[*inputted ratee name*] would



accept the to-do list and be hesitant to express opinions about the report” to “[*inputted ratee name*] would act detached, accepting the to-do list and withholding any opinions about the report.” Through such edits, Pilot Study 1 enabled me to create a clearer set of situations with which to use in a next phase of preparation: Pilot Study 2. Please see Appendix A for the original measure with dominance and warmth SME coding scores, and Appendix B for the edited measure.

### **Pilot Study 2**

I then conducted a second pilot study with a student population to examine internal consistency (reliability, or Cronbach’s alpha, which indicates the extent to which items are measuring the same construct), clarity of items, and average time necessary to complete the survey. Given that many students would be unlikely to have experience with leading direct reports, this pilot study focused on rating peers only.

### **Participants**

One hundred and seventy six undergraduate students and 18 MBA students enrolled at Michigan State University participated in a pilot study of the survey. Participants were recruited through either the university human research system (undergraduates) or through a human relations MBA course, and had to have previous or current work experience to enroll. Of these participants, 118 (60.8%) were female, 57 (29.4%) were male, and 19 (9.8%) did not report their gender. The sample was somewhat diverse in terms of ethnicity, with 17 (8.8%) African American, 24 (12.4%) Asian, 120 (61.9%) Caucasian, six (3.1%) Hispanic, two (1%) Pacific Islander, six (3.1%) “other,” and 19 (9.8%) unreported. Participants reported an average age of 20.76 years ( $sd = 2.76$ ) and average tenure of 1.88 years at their organization ( $sd = 1.52$ ). They reported having worked with the person they rated for an average of 12.82 ( $sd = 12.15$ ) months,

and working with that person an average of 12.08 ( $sd = 12.11$ ) hours per week. Of these participants, I dropped 19 from the final sample for taking less than 10 minutes to complete the survey or for rating someone other than a peer.

### **Procedure and Results**

In lab sessions of 10-20 students each, I explained to participants that the purpose of the study was to understand typical employee behavior, and that they would be filling out the survey about a peer with whom they work or have worked in the past. I then told them that they could pick any peer they have worked with, so long as they were familiar enough with that peer's typical behavior to rate them. After instructing them on how to interpret and answer to the interpersonal adaptability situational items, I handed out hard copies of the surveys and allowed the participants 30 minutes to complete them.

Table 3 lists the descriptive statistics, reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha), and interrelationships of these variables. All measures demonstrated adequate internal reliability ( $> .70$ ). This final stage of initial preparation indicated that scale reliabilities were adequate, that the measures were operating effectively, that the survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete. I then used this information to hone and shorten the study further for use in the main study.

Table 3: Pilot Study 2 Descriptives, Reliabilities, and Correlations

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Liking	3.78	1.05	<i>.95</i>							
2 Interpersonal Effectiveness	3.66	.80	<i>.86**</i>	<i>.92</i>						
3 Want to Work with on Interpersonal Tasks	3.32	.90	<i>.82**</i>	<i>.83**</i>	<i>.92</i>					
4 Want to Work with on Individual Tasks	3.60	.86	<i>.41**</i>	<i>.40**</i>	<i>.48**</i>	<i>.93</i>				
5 Adaptability (Likert measure)	3.46	.96	<i>.82**</i>	<i>.80**</i>	<i>.79**</i>	<i>.39**</i>	<i>.94</i>			
6 In-Role Performance	4.09	.79	<i>.53**</i>	<i>.53**</i>	<i>.59**</i>	<i>.40**</i>	<i>.49**</i>	<i>.91</i>		
7 Trait Dominance	3.55	.81	<i>.03</i>	<i>.14</i>	<i>.17*</i>	<i>.19*</i>	<i>-.02</i>	<i>.23**</i>	<i>.84</i>	
8 Trait Warmth	3.68	.98	<i>.76**</i>	<i>.76**</i>	<i>.70**</i>	<i>.30**</i>	<i>.77**</i>	<i>.37**</i>	<i>-.11</i>	<i>.91</i>

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Numbers in italics along the diagonal represent Cronbach's alphas

## Main Study

### Participants

Participants of the main study sample were employees at a large, multinational health and wellness organization. More specifically, the 396 invited participants were directors or vice presidents that were former graduates of, or current participants in, a leadership development program offered within the organization. To request participation, the “owner” of the leadership development program and I emailed each potential participant individually, explaining the purpose of the study and providing the time required, the online survey link, and the randomly assigned name of a peer or direct report whom the participant was asked to rate in the survey.

Two hundred and eight of the invited 396 participants took the online survey, yielding a 51.5% response rate. Of these 208, 121 (58.2%) were male, 61 (29.3%) were female, and 26 did not report their gender. The sample had an average age of 41 years ( $sd = 4.04$ ) and an average tenure at the company of 10.3 years ( $sd = 4.98$ ). Participants reported working within the Consumer (57, 27.4%), Medical Devices & Diagnostics (75, 36.1%), or Pharmaceutical (59, 28.6%) sectors, or the supply chain (2, 1%) or corporate (*e.g.*, finance, human resources) (1, .5%) functions. Twelve participants did not report a sector/function, and two selected the “other” option.

The sample was very diverse in terms of global region in which they worked. Specifically, participants reported working in the Asia Pacific (APAC; 65, 31.3%), Europe-Middle East-Africa (EMEA; 69, 33.2%), North America (50, 25%), and Latin America (13, 6.5%) regions. Eleven (5.3%) participants did not report their region, or reported working “globally.” For a full list of countries that participants worked in at the time of completing the survey, see Table 4.

Table 4: Main Study Work Country Frequencies

Country	Frequency	%	Country	Frequency	%
Argentina	3	1.5	The Netherlands	1	0.5
Australia	10	4.8	Turkey	3	1.4
Benelux	1	0.5	United Arab Emirates	2	1
Belgium	5	2.4	United Kingdom	6	2.9
Brazil	6	2.9	United States	44	21.3
Canada	4	2			
China	12	5.8			
Colombia	3	1.4			
Egypt	1	0.5			
France	11	4.3			
Germany	2	1			
Greece	2	1			
Hong Kong	1	0.5			
India	8	3.9			
Indonesia	4	1.9			
Ireland	1	0.5			
Italy	5	2.4			
Japan	10	4.8			
Korea	5	2.4			
Malaysia	3	1.5			
Mexico	1	0.5			
New Zealand	1	0.5			
Norway	1	0.5			
Philippines	2	1			
Portugal	3	1.4			
Romania	1	0.5			
Russia	2	1			
Singapore	3	1.4			
South Africa	3	1.5			
South Korea	1	0.5			
Spain	3	1.4			
Sweden	2	1			
Switzerland	6	2.8			
Taiwan	1	0.5			
Thailand	2	1			

One hundred and ninety one (91.8%) participants rated the person who was randomly assigned to them, and 17 (8.2%) rated someone else in the case that they didn't know the assigned ratee well enough to rate. Approximately half of the participants (94; 45.2%) rated a direct report, and half (95; 45.7%) rated a peer, although 19 rated an employee that did not precisely fall into these categories. These 19, through question "logic" in the online survey, were routed into the group that rated peers, and therefore received outcome questions of wanting to *work with* the individual on interpersonal tasks, rather than wanting to *assign* them to interpersonal tasks. This is because they may not have had the ability to assign the assigned ratee to tasks, but would have been able to judge whether or not they would want to work with the individual on such tasks. Participants reported working with the ratees an average of 3.41 years ( $sd = 3.99$ ), and reported working with the ratees an average of 7.63 ( $sd = 9.26$ ) hours per week. Participants reported that 116 (55.8%) of the ratees were male, 63 (30.3%) were female, and 19 participants did not report ratee gender. Ratees had an average approximated age (as estimated by the participants) of 40.7 years ( $sd = 6.87$ ).

## **Procedure**

After potential participants were identified, I randomly assigned all participants to one of two groups: those who would rate a peer or those who would rate a direct report. I then used the organization's online organizational chart tool to randomly assign one specific peer or direct report to each participant to rate. When I individually contacted each participant to participate, I included the name of the assigned peer or direct report; this was so that they participants could reach out to me to request a new ratee if he or she did not know the assigned person well enough to rate.

The email invitation also included a link to the online survey, which was created using the platform system Qualtrics. I chose this system for its ability to “pipe” question responses. That is, by entering the first name or initials of the peer or direct report a participant was going to rate at the beginning of the survey, that name or initials would then appear throughout the rest of the survey, such as in the interpersonal adaptability situational items. Two weeks after the original participation requests went out, I sent an individual reminder to every participant. After a third and final week, the participation period ended and I close the survey.

## **Measures**

The final list of items I used for employee sample is listed in Appendix C. I shortened all measures following the second pilot study (MBA/undergraduate sample) and prior to the main study (employee sample) per the request of the organization to provide a questionnaire that would take less than 15 minutes to complete. To do so, I first removed items from each measure based on their contribution to the measure’s internal reliability (Cronbach’s alpha). After this, I removed additional items based on any content overlap between them. I also removed one set of interpersonal adaptability items (four items) from the final survey; as described in more detail below, this set was exploratory and the least aligned with interpersonal theory, and therefore was the set removed in order to further shorten the survey.

**Interpersonal adaptability.** To address the dynamic nature of adaptability, I created a situational measure of interpersonal adaptability based on the interpersonal circumplex and interpersonal theory. Each item in the assessment describes a situation – namely, the behavior of a peer-level coworker. This coworker behavior varies on warmth and dominance to create four types of coworker behavior stems reflecting the four quadrants of the interpersonal circle: warm dominant, warm submissive, cold dominant, and cold submissive. Likewise each stem has four

response options regarding the behavior that the focal person would be most likely to enact in response to the stem, also varying along the same four quadrants of behavior. All items refer to the focal employee (known to the participant) interacting with a theoretical, peer-level coworker on collaborative, interdependent tasks. The peer-level specification is included to remove workplace hierarchy norms (*e.g.*, supervisors tend to behave dominantly toward subordinates, and not the other way around), and the interdependent task specification is included to set the context for the need to interact.

I created three sets of situations, with each set containing four items (one warm dominant, one warm submissive, one cold dominant, and one cold submissive situation). I originally included the three sets to examine different kinds of common dynamics at work. The first set contained items in which one interactant (the focal employee or the theoretical employee) has greater knowledge, expertise, or background information that might impact the extent to which he/she should be dominant or directive. That is, the theoretical coworker behaves dominantly when he or she holds specialized expertise that the focal employee does not, and behaves submissively when the focal employee holds the specialized expertise. This can be seen as a straightforward complementarity situation, in which the complementary response would seem appropriate achieving task goals. The second set contained items in which neither interactant has greater expertise. The final set included items in which the coworker is behaving in a way that is contrary a specified expertise level. That is, the coworker behaves dominantly when he or she has less knowledge or expertise than the focal coworker, or behaves submissively when he or she holds unique knowledge needed to achieve a goal. Following the MBA/undergraduate pilot test, I dropped the third set of situations (in which the theoretical coworker behaves in a way that is misaligned with his or her expertise) to conserve participant time for the employee study.



I then calculated three separate scores for this measure in order to explore the nature of interpersonal adaptability at work. The first was fully based on interpersonal theory and the interpersonal circle. That is, for each situation, I assigned three points if the ratee was rated as most likely to engage in the fully complementary response to the situation (opposite on dominance, similar on affiliation, one point was given if the ratee was rated as most likely to engage in a response that was complementary to the situation (complementary on one dimension, but not on the other), and zero points were given if the ratee was rated as most likely to engage in a response that was noncomplementary to the situation (similar on dominance, opposite on affiliation). I then summed the points for each situation to create an overall score for adaptability (henceforth referred to “circle adaptability score”).

Given that the workplace is a unique situation in which cooperation and collaboration, and therefore likely warmth, is valued, I also calculated a “warm adaptability score.” In this case, I gave the highest score for each situation for the response that was complementary to the situation on dominance (opposite on dominance), but always warm. I gave the lowest score to the response that was cold and complementary on dominance.

Finally, because being directive, and therefore dominant, is also valued in the workplace, I also calculated a “dominant adaptability score.” To do so, the highest number of points was awarded to the response that was complementary to the situation in terms of warmth (similar on warmth), but always dominant. I gave the lowest score to the response that was submissive and complementary on warmth.

**Liking.** Liking, or perceptions regarding enjoying working with a person, was assessed using an adapted version of McCroskey, McCroskey, and Richmond’s (2006) measure of attraction. This measure includes items from McCroskey et al.’s (2006) dimensions of task

attraction and social attraction, all of which were adapted for the workplace. The response scale was a five point Likert scale, from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. An example item includes “I enjoy working with him/her.” I used six of these items for the MBA/undergraduate pilot study ( $\alpha = .95$ ), and reduced it to four items for the final employee study ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

**Perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness.** I created a measure of perceived interpersonal effectiveness through adapting items from the social skill dimension of Sheldon and Kasser’s (1998) Life Skills measure and the interpersonal influence dimension of Ferris et al.’s (2005) Political Skill Inventory. The response scale was a five point Likert scale, from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. I adapted these items to assess skill in creating comfortable and positive relationships (*e.g.*, “this person is effective at forming positive working relationships with fellow employees”) and skill in creating comfortable and positive interactions (*e.g.*, “this person is skilled at making conversations comfortable for others”). I used ten items for the MBA/undergraduate pilot study ( $\alpha = .92$ ), and then reduced this to five items for the employee study ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

**Willingness to assign to/work with on interpersonal tasks.** To assess willingness to assign a person to tasks with high interpersonal content (if rating a direct report) or willingness to work with a person on tasks with high interpersonal content (if rating a peer), I developed a measure based on McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison’s (1988) taxonomy of task characteristics and task lessons. For this measure, participants rated their willingness to assign (if rating a direct report) or work with (if rating a peer) an individual on tasks with high interpersonal content, such as tasks requiring “motivating people to implement solutions,” “leading and motivating a team,” and “working with clients or stakeholders.” I also included a second scale of tasks low in interpersonal content to serve as a comparison. Example items of the latter scale include tasks

involving “generating ideas by oneself” and “creating initiatives on one’s own.” The response scale was a five point Likert scale from (1) not at all willing to (5) extremely willing. For the MBA/undergraduate pilot study, the two measures were only framed as “want to work with,” given that this sample only rated peers. The interpersonal task measure was composed of eleven items ( $\alpha = .92$ ), and the independent task measure was composed of seven items ( $\alpha = .93$ ). For the employee study, I reduced the measures to seven and four items, respectively. For the group that rated direct reports, the interpersonal task measure and the independent task measure (“want to assign to”) yielded adequate reliabilities ( $\alpha = .87$  and  $\alpha = .82$ , respectively). The group that rated peers did as well ( $\alpha = .91$  and  $\alpha = .87$ , respectively).

**Additional measures.** In order to further examine the variables of interest in this study, I also included several control measures. Because of the focus of this study on interpersonal behavior in terms of warmth and dominance, it was important to control for interpersonal style, or trait warmth and dominance orientation. To assess this, I used a sample of items from Wiggins et al.’s (1988) Interpersonal Adjective Scales (IAS-R), which asks raters to rate the focal person on a range of adjectives from all eight octants of the interpersonal circumplex. The adjectives in the shortened measure included six dominance items (*e.g.*, self-confident, assertive, firm) and six warmth items (*e.g.*, friendly, kind, warm). These adjectives were rated on the accuracy with which they described the focal person, from (1) not at all accurate to (5) extremely accurate. For the dominance measure, I primarily pulled adjectives from the assured-dominant segment list developed by Wiggins (1988). For the warmth measure, I pulled adjectives from both the warm-agreeable and gregarious-extraverted octants of Wiggins’ (1988) measure to capture a range of warmth behaviors that would not portray dominance or submissiveness. The reliabilities for

dominance ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and warmth ( $\alpha = .91$ ) in the MBA study were adequate, as were the reliabilities for the shortened measures in the full study ( $\alpha = .76$  and  $\alpha = .84$ , respectively).

I also included perceived in-role performance, as this characteristic could potential relate to being assigned to tasks in the workplace. For this measure, I used items from William and Anderson's (1991) commonly-used performance scale. For this measure, participants rated the extent to which they agreed with the items on a five point Likert scale, (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. An example item includes "fulfills responsibilities specified in the job description." For the MBA/undergraduate sample, the measure included five items ( $\alpha = .91$ ), which I then reduced to three items for the employee study ( $\alpha = .86$ ).

I also collected demographics in order to control for differences across these variables. These include age, gender, world region, organizational sector, ratee age, ratee gender, and tenure in the organization. The number of years the rater has known the ratee and average number of hours the rater works with the ratee per week were also assessed.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Results

Due to a request from the organization in which the main study was conducted, I shortened the survey for the main study sample: employees at a large, multinational health and wellness organization. For this sample, all measures demonstrated acceptable inter-item reliability (Cronbach's alphas). These reliabilities, along with descriptive statistics, are listed in Table 5.

*Table 5: Main Study Descriptives and Reliabilities*

	<i>Alpha</i>	<i># items</i>	Group that rated direct reports		Group that rated peers	
			<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Liking	.87	4	3.74	.40	3.65	.51
Interpersonal Effectiveness	.87	5	3.69	.52	3.52	.61
Want to Work with on Interpersonal Tasks	.91	7			3.77	.83
Want to Work with on Independent Tasks	.87	4			3.90	.79
Want to Assign to Interpersonal Tasks	.87	7	3.91	.71		
Want to Assign to Independent Tasks	.82	4	3.97	.74		
Adaptability (Likert measure)	.89	7	3.83	.58	3.74	.70
In-Role Performance	.86	3	3.34	.32	3.34	.42
Trait Dominance	.76	3	3.24	.82	3.29	.80
Trait Warmth	.84	3	4.10	.75	3.96	.72

A clear pattern emerged in the endorsement of likely responses to the situational items. For the strong situations, in which the theoretical coworker's and ratee's expertise is discussed (situations 1-4, with expertise described as high to support dominance or low to support submissiveness), a pattern of "warm adaptability" emerged. That is, the response option that was complementary on dominance (opposite on dominance) but always warm was most commonly listed as the most likely response. For example, for the first situation, in which the theoretical coworker behaves in a warm dominant way, the most commonly reported response for the ratee was warm submissive ( $n = 117, 56.3\%$ ). Likewise, for the second situation, in which the theoretical coworker behaves in a warm submissive way, the most commonly reported response for the ratee was warm dominant ( $n = 121, 58.2\%$ ). For the third situation, in which the theoretical coworker behaves in a cold dominant way, the most commonly reported response for the ratee was warm submissive ( $n = 85, 40.9\%$ ). For the fourth situation, in which the theoretical coworker behaves in a cold submissive way, the most commonly reported response for the ratee was warm dominant ( $n = 147, 70.7\%$ ). For the weak situations however, in which expertise levels are not mentioned, the most likely response across all situations was warm dominant.

### **Demographic Comparisons**

Next, I used T-tests and one-way ANOVAs to assess the presence of any differences in the variables of interest across demographic groups. Only two significant differences emerged: one in the group that rated peers, and one in the group that rated direct reports. For the group that rated peers, there were no significant differences in scale variables by gender, ratee gender, sector, age, or ratee age. However, there was a significant difference in willingness to work with ratees on interpersonal tasks (the outcome variable) by region ( $F[3,102]=2.31, p < .05$ ). A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that this was because willingness to work with a ratee on interpersonal

tasks was statistically significantly lower for the Asia Pacific (APAC) region ( $m = 3.41$ ) than for the Europe-Middle East-Africa (EMEA) region ( $m = 3.95, p < .05$ ).

For the group that rated direct reports, there were no significant differences in scale variables by gender, ratee gender, region, sector, or age. However, estimated ratee age was significantly negatively related to in-role performance ( $r = -.32, p < .05$ ). That is, as reported ratee age increased, perceived in-role performance decreased.

### **Correlations**

I then examined correlations among the variables to get an initial sense of relationships among the variables of interest. These are included in Table 6 (for the sample that rated direct reports) and Table 7 (for the sample that rated peers). Many of the correlations among the variables were quite high for both the group that rated peers and the group that rated direct reports. In particular, the relationship between the two mediators, liking and perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness were quite high, at .79 for the group that rated direct reports, and .86 for the group that rated peers. Similarly, the control variables of trait warmth and in-role performance were both strongly positively related to many of the other variables in both groups. This suggests that, despite little similarity in items, there may be some extent conceptual or methodological overlap between some of the variables.

Table 6: Main Study Correlations, Direct Report Group

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Liking											
2 Interpersonal Effectiveness	.79**										
3 Want to Assign to Interpersonal Tasks	.72**	.79**									
4 Want to Assign to Independent Tasks	.23*	.14	.35**								
5 Adaptability (Likert measure)	.73**	.78**	.78**	.27**							
6 In-Role Performance	.59**	.59**	.66**	.26*	.61**						
7 Trait Dominance	.24*	.29**	.49**	.21*	.31**	.39**					
8 Trait Warmth	.63**	.61**	.43**	.20	.64**	.35**	.04				
9 Circle Adaptability Score	.18	.07	.02	.03	.14	-.03	-.13	.15			
10 Warm Adaptability Score	.39**	.33**	.23*	.06	.41**	.16	-.12	.28**	.78**		
11 Dominant Adaptability Score	.41**	.41**	.45**	.09	.36**	.41**	.47**	.19	.29**	.21*	

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$



Table 7: Main Study Correlations, Peer Group

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 Liking											
2 Interpersonal Effectiveness	.86**										
3 Want to Work with on Interpersonal Tasks	.79**	.78**									
4 Want to Work with on Independent Tasks	.48**	.44**	.67**								
5 Adaptability (Likert measure)	.79**	.75**	.76**	.52**							
6 In-Role Performance	.67**	.70**	.62**	.39**	.56**						
7 Trait Dominance	.14	.14	.21*	.22*	-.05	.22*					
8 Trait Warmth	.76**	.68**	.64**	.34**	.75**	.52**	-.02				
9 Circle Adaptability Score	.09	.10	-.05	.01	.05	.04	.03	.00			
10 Warm Adaptability Score	.54**	.48**	.39**	.28**	.51**	.40**	-.13	.49**	.58**		
11 Dominant Adaptability Score	.12	.17	.16	.18	.05	.15	.40**	-.05	.45**	.14	

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

### **Relationships between the Antecedent and Mediators**

Hypotheses 1 and 3 predicted that interpersonal adaptability would be positively related to perceived interpersonal effectiveness and liking of ratees, as rated by individuals rating direct reports. Likewise, hypotheses 2 and 4 predicted that interpersonal adaptability would be positively related to perceived interpersonal effectiveness and liking of ratees, as rated by individuals rating peers.

Correlation analyses indicated that for both the group that rated direct reports and the group that rated peers, interpersonal adaptability as scored based on the original interpersonal theory framework (circle adaptability score) was not related to liking or perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness. However, the warm adaptability score was related to both of these variables for both groups. Interestingly, the dominance adaptability score was related to liking and perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness for the group that rated direct reports, but was not related to these variables for the group that rated peers.

Thus, although hypotheses 1-4 were not supported when using circle adaptability scores, they were each supported when using warm adaptability scores. Therefore, I used warm adaptability as the antecedent for the rest of the study's analyses.

### **Relationships between the Mediators and Outcome**

Hypotheses 5 and 6 predicted that for the group that rated direct reports, perceived interpersonal effectiveness and liking, respectively, would be related to willingness to assign an individual to tasks with high interpersonal content ("interpersonal tasks"). Similarly, hypotheses 7 and 8 predicted that for the group that rated peers, perceived interpersonal effectiveness and liking, respectively, would be related to willingness to work with an individual to tasks with high interpersonal content.

Correlations indicated that each of these relationships was supported. That is, for the group that rated direct reports, perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness and liking were both significantly positively related to willingness to assign ratees to interpersonal tasks. Similarly, for the group that rated peers, perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness and liking were both significantly positively related to willingness to work with ratees on interpersonal tasks.

### **Relationships between the Antecedent and Outcome**

Hypothesis 9 predicted that for the group that rated direct reports, interpersonal adaptability would be positively related to willingness to assign the ratee to interpersonal tasks. Using correlation, this relationship was supported using the warm adaptability score ( $r = .39, p < .01$ ). Hypothesis 10 predicted that for the group that rated peers, interpersonal adaptability would be positively related to willingness to assign the ratee to interpersonal tasks. This relationship was similarly supported using the warm adaptability score ( $r = .23, p < .05$ ).

### **Regressions (with Warm Adaptability)**

I then conducted hierarchical multiple regressions for both samples to predict willingness to assign a ratee to, or work with a ratee on, interpersonal tasks.

First, I examined the sample that rated direct reports to investigate the predictors of willingness to assign a ratee to interpersonal tasks. In the first step, I entered interpersonal adaptability (warm adaptability score), which accounted for 5.2% of the variance in willingness to assign a ratee to interpersonal tasks. In the second step, I added liking and interpersonal effectiveness, yielding a statistically significant increase in predicted variance (60.6%). In the final model, interpersonal adaptability was no longer a significant predictor. The  $R^2$  for the final model was .67,  $p < .001$  (Table 8).

I then examined the sample that rated peers to investigate the predictors of willingness to work with a ratee on interpersonal tasks. In the first step, interpersonal adaptability as measured by the warm adaptability score accounted for 15.3% of the variance in willingness to work with a ratee on interpersonal tasks. In the second step, in which liking and interpersonal effectiveness were added, there was a statistically significant increase in predicted variance (51.6%). In the final model, interpersonal adaptability was no longer a significant predictor of willingness to work with a ratee on interpersonal tasks. The regression coefficient signs were all in the expected direction, reflecting positive relationships among the variables. The  $R^2$  for the final model was .67,  $p < .001$  (Table 9).

Table 8: Main Study Hierarchical Linear Regression, Direct Report Group

Predictor variables	B	SE	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
<i>Step 1</i>				.05*
Warm Adaptability	.05	.02	.23*	
<i>Step 2</i>				.61***
Warm Adaptability	-.02	.01	-.08	
Liking	.31	.12	.27*	
Interpersonal Effectiveness	.58	.10	.61***	
R <sup>2</sup> for final model				.66***

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ,  $N=94$

Table 9: Main Study Hierarchical Linear Regression, Peer Group

Predictor variables	B	SE	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
<i>Step 1</i>				.15***
Warm Adaptability	.08	.02	.39***	
<i>Step 2</i>				.52***
Warm Adaptability	-.01	.01	-.05	
Liking	.51	.13	.47***	
Interpersonal Effectiveness	.43	.12	.41***	
R <sup>2</sup> for final model				.67***

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ,  $N=114$

To further investigate these relationships, I then re-ran the hierarchical multiple regressions to include control variables of in-role performance, trait dominance, and trait warmth as a first step. For the group that rated direct reports, these control variables each predicted significant variance in willingness to assign a ratee to interpersonal tasks. Collectively, this step predicted 56.6% of the variance in the outcome. Step 2, in which interpersonal adaptability was added, yielded a statistically significant increase in predicted variance (2%). Finally, step 3, which included liking and interpersonal effectiveness, yielded a further statistically significant increase in predicted variance (16.8%). In this final step, only in-role performance, trait dominance, liking, and interpersonal effectiveness were significant. The  $R^2$  for the final model was .75,  $p < .001$  (Table 10).

Table 10: Main Study Hierarchical Linear Regression with Controls, Direct Report Group

Predictor variables	B	SE	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
<i>Step 1</i>				.57***
In-Role Performance	.47	.09	.46***	
Trait Dominance	.28	.07	.31***	
Trait Warmth	.25	.07	.26**	
<i>Step 2</i>				.02***
In-Role Performance	.45	.09	.44***	
Trait Dominance	.30	.07	.34***	
Trait Warmth	.21	.07	.23**	
Warm Adaptability	.03	.02	.15*	
<i>Step 3</i>				.17***
In-Role Performance	.18	.08	.18*	
Trait Dominance	.22	.06	.24***	
Trait Warmth	-.07	.07	-.08	
Warm Adaptability	.00	.01	.01	
Liking	.25	.12	.21*	
Interpersonal Effectiveness	.48	.09	.50***	
R <sup>2</sup> for final model				.75***

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ,  $N=94$

For the group that rated peers, both in-role performance and trait warmth accounted for a statistically significant amount of variance in willingness to work with a ratee on interpersonal tasks; collectively, the step accounted for 53.6% of the variance. When interpersonal adaptability was added in the second step, it did not statistically significantly increase the  $R^2$ . However, step 3, in which liking and interpersonal effectiveness were both added, predicted an additional 14.1% of variance in the outcome, with both of these variables yielding significant regression coefficients. In this step, the control variables of in-role performance and trait warmth were no longer significant predictors. The  $R^2$  for the final model was .68,  $p < .001$  (Table 11).

*Table 11: Main Study Hierarchical Linear Regression with Controls, Peer Group*

Predictor variables	B	SE	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
<i>Step 1</i>				.54***
In-Role Performance	.39	.09	.36***	
Trait Dominance	.13	.07	.13	
Trait Warmth	.52	.09	.45***	
<i>Step 2</i>				.00
In-Role Performance	.37	.09	.34***	
Trait Dominance	.15	.07	.14	
Trait Warmth	.50	.10	.43***	
Warm Adaptability	.01	.02	.06	
<i>Step 3</i>				.14***
In-Role Performance	.08	.09	.07	
Trait Dominance	.08	.06	.08	
Trait Warmth	.10	.10	.09	
Warm Adaptability	-.01	.01	-.04	
Liking	.41	.14	.38**	
Interpersonal Effectiveness	.38	.13	.36**	
$R^2$ for final model				.68***

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$



Because there was a significant difference in willingness to work with a ratee on interpersonal tasks between two regions for the group that rated peers, and a significant relationship between age and in-role performance for the group that rated direct reports, I ran these regressions a third time controlling for region and age. However, this did not affect the results, and thus were not included in the final reported analyses or the mediation models.

### **Mediations (with Warm Adaptability)**

Hypotheses 11 and 12 predicted that, for the group that rated direct reports, perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness and liking would each partially mediate the relationship between interpersonal adaptability and willingness to assign a ratee to interpersonal tasks. Likewise, Hypotheses 13 and 14 predicted that, for the group that rated peers, perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness and liking would each partially mediate the relationship between interpersonal adaptability and willingness to work with ratee on interpersonal tasks. These models are depicted in Figures 6a and 6b, respectively. Each path in these figures represents a key relationship in the mediation model. For example, in Figure 6a, the path coefficient indicated by the letter (c) represents the total relationship between interpersonal adaptability and willingness to assign a ratee to interpersonal tasks. The path marked (c') represents the direct relationship between these two variables when the mediators are included in the model, accounting for some of the total relationship. The (a) paths represent the relationships between the antecedent (interpersonal adaptability) with the mediators (perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness and liking), and the (b) paths represent the relationships between the mediators and the outcome (willingness to assign a ratee to interpersonal tasks). Multiplying an (a) and (b) path produces the strength of the indirect, or mediated, relationship of the antecedent to the outcome through that mediator.

Figure 6a: Main Study General Mediation Model, Direct Report Group

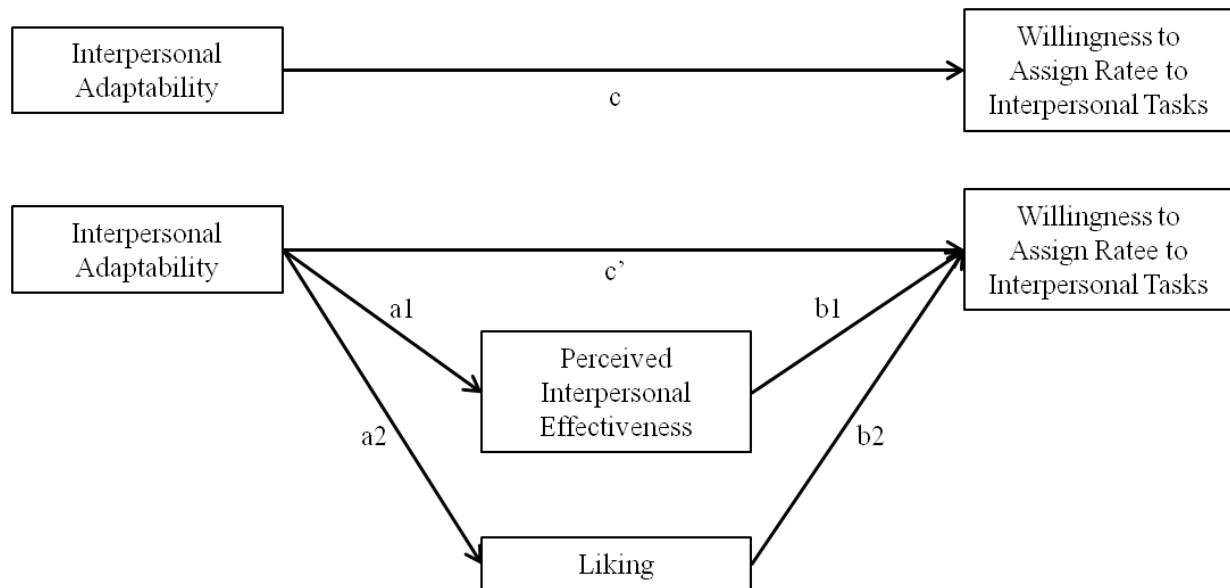
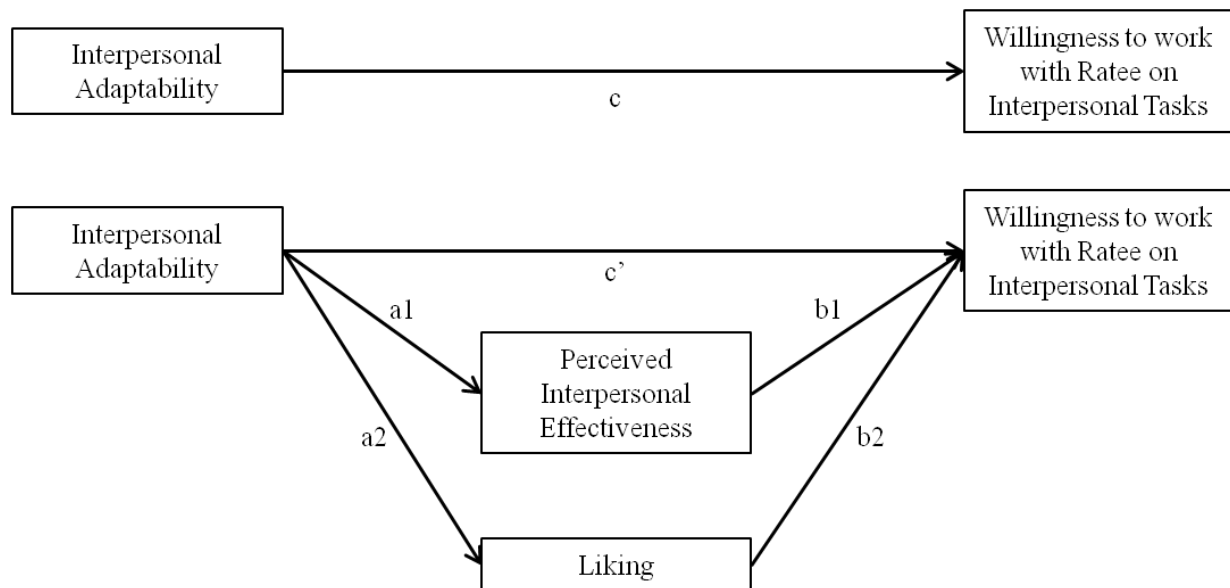


Figure 6b: Main Study General Mediation Model, Peer Group



In order to investigate the hypothesized mediation models, I utilized the SPSS INDIRECT script by Preacher & Hayes (2008). This script calculates all direct and indirect effects of the antecedent (interpersonal adaptability) with the outcome (willingness to work with a ratee on, or assign a ratee to, interpersonal tasks), including multiple mediators (liking and perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness). This approach allows for multiple mediators to be assessed simultaneously, and utilizes bootstrapping to address potential violations of the assumption of normal score distributions. Specifically, bootstrapping is used to calculate confidence intervals for the estimates of paths (the products of a x b path coefficients).

The results for the mediation model for the group that rated direct reports is listed in Table 12 and depicted in Figure 7 (note: all coefficients are unstandardized). The total  $R^2$  for this model was .66,  $p < .001$ . The coefficients for all (a), (b), and (a x b) paths were significant. Further, the total effect (c) of interpersonal adaptability on willingness to work with a ratee on interpersonal tasks was significant, whereas the direct effect (c') of this relationship was not significant.

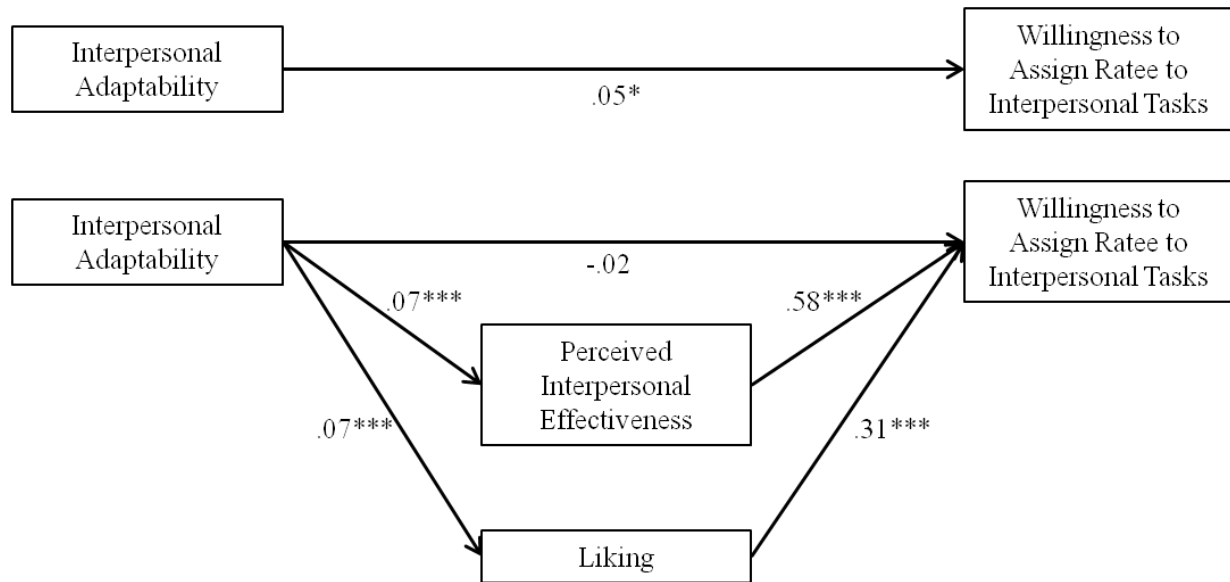
Bootstrapping with 1,000 samples and a confidence interval of 95% indicated that both mediated paths were statistically significant, as the confidence intervals did not include zero. For liking, the estimated indirect effect was .022, with a confidence interval of .006 to .053. For perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness, the estimated indirect effect was .042, with a confidence interval of .017 to .082. Sobel tests of these indirect effects further supported their significance (Liking:  $z = 2.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ; interpersonal effectiveness:  $z = 2.85$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This suggests that together, liking and perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness fully mediated the relationship between interpersonal adaptability and willingness to assign a ratee to interpersonal tasks.

Table 12: Main Study Mediation, Direct Report Group

Total effect of IV	Direct effect of IV	Mediation by Liking			Mediation by Interpersonal Effectiveness			Total $R^2$
		a1	b1	a1 x b1	a2	b2	a2 x b2	
.05*	-.02, <i>ns</i>	.07***	.31***	.02*	.07**	.58***	.04**	.66***

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ,  $N=94$

Figure 7: Main Study Mediation Model, Direct Report Group



The results for the mediation model for the group that rated peers is listed in Table 13 and depicted in Figure 8. The total  $R^2$  for this model was .67,  $p < .001$ . The coefficients for all (a), (b), and (a x b) paths were significant. Similar to the group that rated direct reports, the total effect (c) of interpersonal adaptability on willingness to work with a ratee on interpersonal tasks was significant, whereas the direct effect (c') of this relationship was not significant.

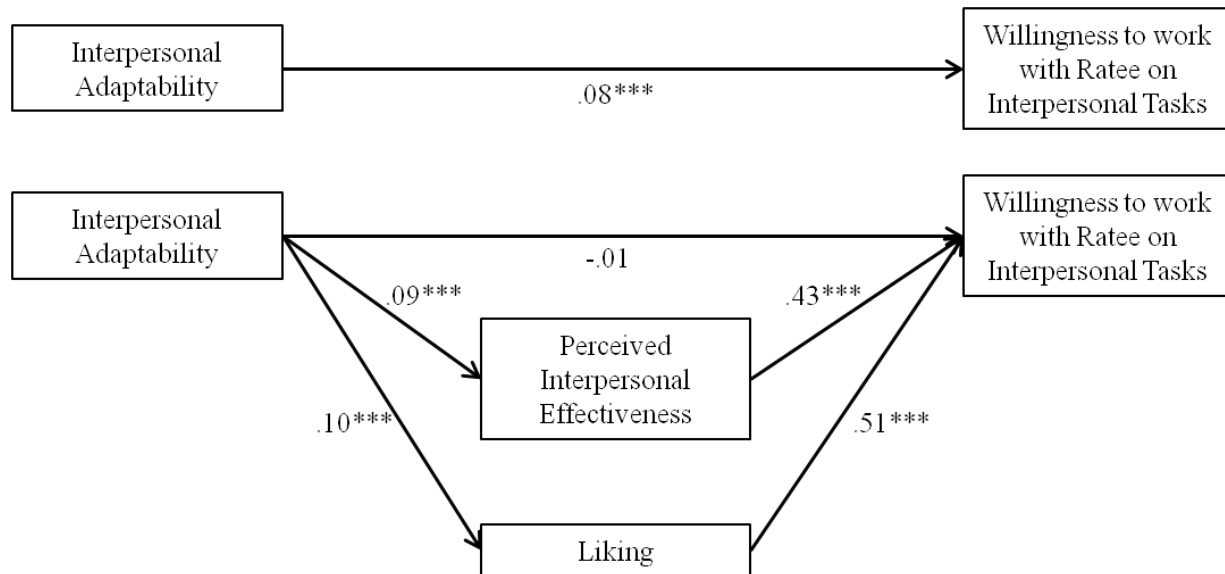
Bootstrapping with 1,000 samples and a confidence interval of 95% indicated that both mediated paths were statistically significant. For liking, the estimated indirect effect was .049, with a confidence interval of .024 to .082. For perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness, the estimated indirect effect was .049, with a confidence interval of .017 to .064. Sobel tests of these indirect effects further supported their significance (Liking:  $z = 3.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ; interpersonal effectiveness:  $z = 3.08$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This suggests that together, liking and perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness fully mediated the relationship between interpersonal adaptability and willingness to work with a ratee on interpersonal tasks.

Table 13: Main Study Mediation, Peer Group

Total effect of IV	Direct effect of IV	Mediation by Liking			Mediation by Interpersonal Effectiveness			Total $R^2$
		a1	b1	a1 x b1	a2	b2	a2 x b2	
.08***	-.01, <i>ns</i>	.10***	.51***	.05***	.09***	.43***	.04**	.67***

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ,  $N=114$

Figure 8: Main Study Mediation Model, Peer Group



Next, I ran these mediation analyses a second time to include in-role performance, trait dominance, and trait warmth as control variables. Overall, this had a notable impact for the group that rated peers, but not for the group that rated direct reports.

The results for the mediation model with control variables for the group that rated direct reports is listed in Table 14 and depicted in Figure 9. The total  $R^2$  for this model was .75,  $p < .001$ . Although the coefficients of the control variables in-role performance and trait dominance were significant, the coefficients for all (a), (b), and (a x b) paths were also still significant. Similar to the model that did not include the control variables, the total effect (c) of interpersonal adaptability on willingness to work with a ratee on interpersonal tasks was significant, and the direct effect (c') of this relationship was not significant. This indicates that together, liking and perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness fully mediated the relationship between interpersonal adaptability and willingness to work with a ratee on interpersonal tasks.

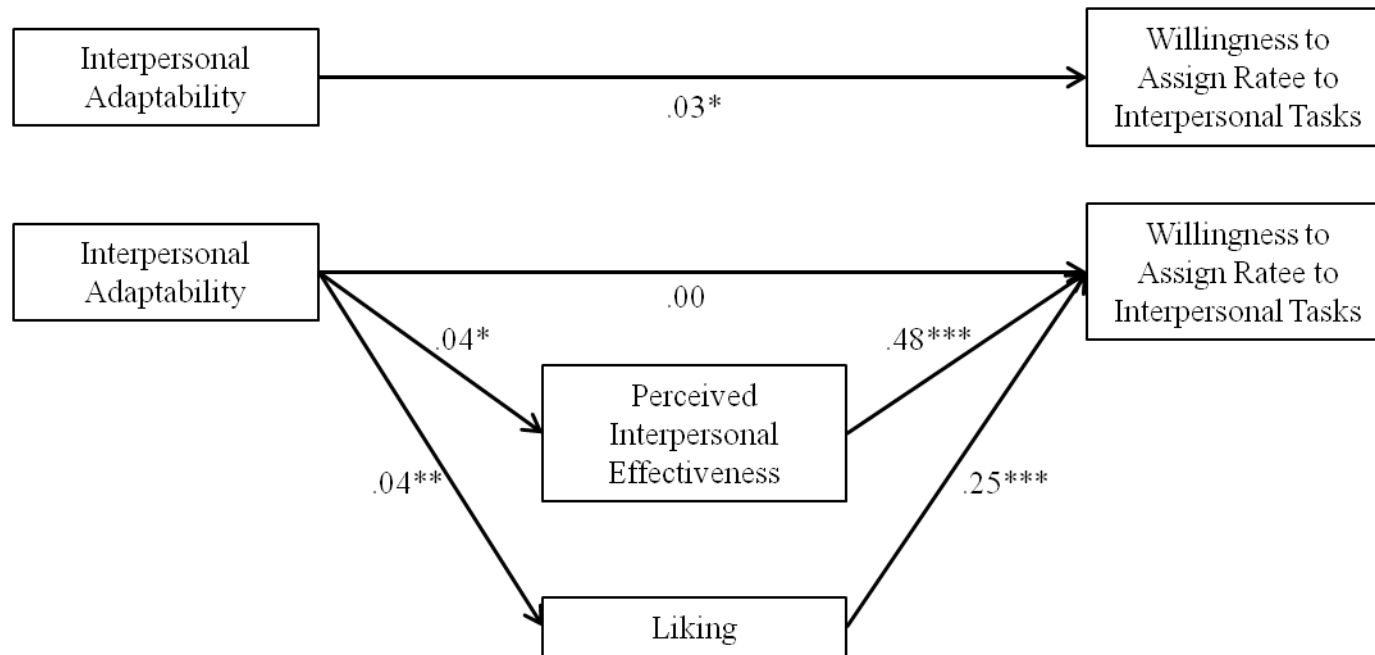
Bootstrapping with 1,000 samples and a confidence interval of 95% indicated that both mediated paths were statistically significant. For liking, the estimated indirect effect was .010, with a confidence interval of .001 to .025. For perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness, the estimated indirect effect was .018, with a confidence interval of .004 to .042.

Table 14: Main Study Mediation with Controls, Direct Report Group

Total effect of IV	Direct effect of IV	Mediation by Liking			Mediation by Interpersonal Effectiveness			Partial Effects of Control Variables			Total $R^2$
		a1	b1	a1 x b1	a2	b2	a2 x b2	In-Role	Dominance	Warmth	
.03*	.00, <i>ns</i>	.04**	.25*	.01*	.04*	.48***	.02*	.18*	.22***	-.07	.75***

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ,  $N=94$

Figure 9: Main Study Mediation Model with Controls, Direct Report Group





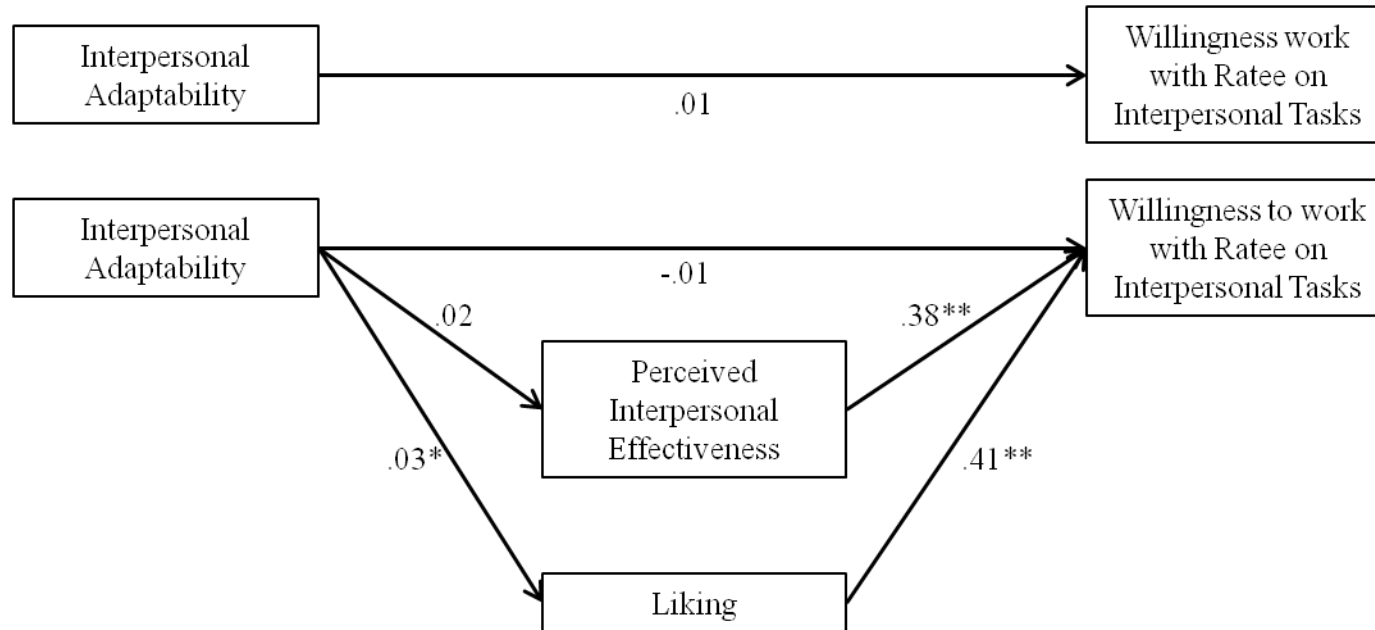
The results for the mediation model for the group that rated peers is listed in Table 15 and depicted in Figure 10. Although the control variables did not have a significant partial effect on willingness to work with a ratee on interpersonal tasks, their inclusion in the model resulted in non-significant relationships between interpersonal adaptability with interpersonal effectiveness (a2), and between interpersonal adaptability with willingness to work with a ratee on interpersonal tasks (c). The  $R^2$  for the overall model was significant however (.68,  $p < .001$ ). Further, bootstrapping with 1,000 samples and a confidence interval of 95% indicated that the mediated path through liking was significant. The estimated indirect effect was .012, with a confidence interval of .003 to .031.

Table 15: Main Study Mediation with Controls, Peer Group

Total effect of IV	Direct effect of IV	Mediation by Liking			Mediation by Interpersonal Effectiveness			Partial Effects of Control Variables			Total $R^2$
		a1	b1	a1 x b1	a2	b2	a2 x b2	In-Role	Dominance	Warmth	
.01, <i>ns</i>	-.01, <i>ns</i>	.03*	.41**	.01*	.02	.38**	.01*	.08	.08	.10	.68***

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ,  $N=114$

Figure 10: Main Study Mediation Model with Controls, Peer Group



Thus, if using the models that include the control variables of in-role performance, trait dominance, and trait warmth, a different pattern emerges for the group that rated direct reports than for the group that rated peers. Among those who rated direct reports, liking and perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness both partially mediated the relationship between interpersonal adaptability (using warm adaptability) and willingness to assign the ratee to tasks high in interpersonal content. Hypotheses 11 and 12 were therefore supported. However, when the control variables were included for those who rated peers, the mediation did not operate as predicted, given that the relationship between interpersonal adaptability (warm adaptability) and willingness to work with the ratee (c path) was not significant.

## **DISCUSSION**

The present study sought to better explicate the meaning of interpersonal adaptability at work. Although interpersonal adaptability is purported to be a valuable asset for the workplace and performance (*e.g.*, Ferris et al., 2001; Van der Heijde & Van der Heijden, 2006), little organizational research has delved into what such “adaptability” consists of, and as a result, there is a dearth of insight into how to develop oneself, or train others, to become more interpersonally adaptable. This project used a new measurement approach to study interpersonal adaptability, and endeavored to integrate organizational science and clinical psychology’s interpersonal theory for the benefit and growth of both fields. Further, the present study incorporated two samples, one in which participants rated peers, and one in which participants rated direct reports, to illuminate a likely positive outcome of interpersonal adaptability at work: the willingness of a peer to work with an individual on, or the willingness of a supervisor to assign an individual to, important interpersonal tasks, such as leading a team. To explain why this relationship may exist, the present study tested a mediation model for each group, using liking and perceived interpersonal effectiveness as two means through which the relationship may operate.

### **Summary of Findings**

In general, I found support for the hypothesized models and relationships between the study’s variables of interest, with a couple exceptions. First, the predicted relationships between interpersonal adaptability and the mediators (liking and perceived interpersonal effectiveness; hypotheses 1-4) were not supported when using adaptability scores based fully on interpersonal theory. That is, when the behavioral response option that was opposite on dominance and similar on affiliation to the situation (theoretical coworker behavior) received the highest number of points, the resulting score was not related to either liking or perceived interpersonal effectiveness

for either the group that rated peers or the group that rated direct reports. However, for both the group that rated peers and the group that rated direct reports, scores based on “warm adaptability” were positively related to these variables. I created these “warm adaptability” scores to reflect previous research findings that positive, friendly behaviors may be conducive to effective relationships in a collaborative, relational setting (*e.g.*, Fincham, 2003; Weiss & Heyman, 1990), such as the workplace. This finding suggests that in workplace situations involving collaborative project work, warm behaviors are generally well-received, whereas cold, unfriendly behaviors negatively affects the extent to which a person is liked or considered effective in interactions and relationships.

The predicted relationships between the mediators and the outcome (hypotheses 5-8) were supported. For both the group that rated peers and the group that rated direct reports, liking and perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness were positively significantly related to willingness to work with an individual on, or assign an individual to, tasks high in interpersonal content (*e.g.*, working with clients, leading a team, influencing others). These relationships remained significant even when controlling for trait dominance, trait warmth, and the extent to which the individual successfully fulfilled the tasks in his or her job description (in-role performance). This suggests that simply “doing one’s job” may not be enough to be awarded new responsibilities at work, or to be sought after as a work partner. Instead, it may be critical to pay heed to the extent to which one is liked or perceived as being skilled in interacting and building relationships with others. This finding aligns with previous research that has indicated a strong role of liking or bias with positive outcomes at work, such as performance ratings (Ferris & Judge, 1991; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Zinko et al., 2012).

Likewise, the relationship between interpersonal adaptability (using warm adaptability) and the outcome was supported. For the group that rated direct reports, interpersonal adaptability was positively significantly related to willingness to assign an individual to tasks high in interpersonal content. Further, this relationship remained significant when controlling for in-role performance, trait warmth, and trait dominance. Similarly, for the group that rated peers, interpersonal adaptability was significantly positively related to willingness to work with an individual on tasks high in interpersonal content. However, when controlling for in-role performance, trait warmth, and trait dominance, this relationship was no longer significant. In particular, trait warmth and in-role performance accounted for much of the variance in the outcome, suggesting that these may be particularly influential in predicting whether or not one employee wishes to work with another in certain contexts.

However, participant interpretation of the in-role performance measure may partially explain this finding. At the director and vice president levels, forming and maintaining relationships often represent key “in-role” tasks. That is, leaders at that level are often selected to, and rated on their ability to, have effective interactions with others, including developing their direct reports, forming client relationships, and leading teams. Because of this, there may have been some conceptual overlap between the content of in-role performance and interpersonal adaptability, limiting the relationship between adaptability and the outcome.

Extending these results, the mediation model for the group that rated direct reports (hypotheses 11 and 12) was supported, with liking and perceived interpersonal effectiveness fully mediating the relationship between interpersonal adaptability (using warm adaptability) and willingness to assign an individual to tasks high in interpersonal content. This model remained fully supported even after I reran the analyses to include the control variables of in-role

performance, trait warmth, and trait dominance. Although I found support for the original mediation model for the group that rated peers, including control variables disrupted the model, in that the warm adaptability score was no longer significantly related to willingness to work with a peer on tasks high in interpersonal content. Thus, hypotheses 13 and 14 were not supported.

This difference between the group that rated direct reports and the group that rated peers could suggest that interpersonal adaptability may play a larger role in being assigned to tasks high in interpersonal content than being desired as a work partner in such tasks. This could reflect a higher level of selectivity on the part of supervisors, given the criticality of assigning the most appropriate person to a task for success.

### **Contributions and Implications**

The results of the present study provide several contributions to both research and practice domains. For example, one contribution is the creation of a new measure of interpersonal adaptability that makes it possible to examine the construct in a way that aligns with its underlying theory: situationally. The positive, significant relationship between this situational measure and a Likert measure of interpersonal adaptability (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006) provides construct validation evidence of this measure. However, this situational method provides additional information, enabling researchers to investigate the *content* of interpersonal behavior, as well as antecedents and outcomes of such behavior. Further, by taking a similar approach, future research will be able to examine other forms of adaptability situationally, driving greater awareness of what precisely “adaptability” consists of.

In addition to providing a means through which to conduct research in this area, I used this method to identify a form of adaptability that was impactful in the workplace: warm

adaptability. This insight can inform future research and generate new questions regarding the most advantageous way to act in a specific work situation to achieve positive outcomes. The present study investigated the willingness of coworkers to work with a person on, and the willingness of supervisors to assign a person to, tasks high in interpersonal content. Given that such opportunities are valuable in the workplace (Bonoma & Lawler 1989; McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988), this is an outcome worth pursuing.

Another contribution of this research was the integration of two distinct fields of social science: interpersonal theory from clinical psychology and adaptability research from organizational psychology (Table 1). This study illuminated how each of these two areas could inform, expand, and improve the other, thereby creating new avenues of research; incorporating both of these perspectives provides a foundation for rich, robust theory and investigations that move beyond academic silos.

The findings from this study also represent practical implications for the workplace. For example, the results suggest that in general, warm (friendly) behaviors are much better-received than cold (unfriendly) behaviors, even when interacting with a coworker who is behaving in an unfriendly way. This aligns with communication and relationship research (*e.g.*, Kenny, 1994; Kenny & La Voie, 1982; Weiss & Heyman, 1990) which has found that positive, friendly behaviors can diffuse conflict and improve relationship satisfaction.

Thus, if an employee wishes to be well liked and perceived as socially effective, he or she may do well to behave in a friendly way at work, even if another employee behaves coldly toward him or her. This may then have an effect on whether or not he or she receives opportunities at work that involve working with others (*e.g.*, leading a team, working with clients). The findings also suggest that at least at director levels and above in an organizational



hierarchy, being known for behaving in a confident, assertive way may increase one's likelihood to be awarded new interpersonal opportunities by one's supervisor.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

One limitation of the current study is the high correlations between several of the variables of interest. For example, among the group that rated peers, in-role performance was very strongly related to both liking ( $r = .67$ ) and perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness ( $r = .70$ ). This may be the result of conceptual overlap between these measures within this group. Specifically, when rating their peers, participants in this group may have included interacting effectively with others as one's job expectations (in-role performance), resulting in a strong relationship between these variables.

Likewise, the correlation between the two study mediators, liking and perceptions of interpersonal effectiveness, was very strong in both the group that rated direct reports and the group that rated peers (.79 and .86, respectively). This may be another example of conceptual overlap, or instead, may be the result of common method variance, the inflation of relationships due to collecting data from the same source, using the same means, at the same time. That is, although the content in the items in the liking scale and interpersonal effectiveness scale are quite different, a relationship may have appeared simply because of the way in which the data was collected. In either case, future researchers should consider combining these two mediators as one variable, or collecting data from additional sources or through other types of measures, such as situational judgment scales.

Another potential limitation of this research is the specific sample of participants. Although this sample was an appropriate context for investigating interpersonal adaptability at work, and was diverse in terms of national background, I pulled it from a population of high-

level leaders only (vice presidents and directors). As a result, by rating peers and direct reports, these participants rated similarly high-level leaders. This could partially explain why, in addition to warm adaptability, dominant adaptability was positively related to positive outcomes for the group that rated direct reports. Given that the ratees were generally leaders of others, assertiveness on their part may be well perceived. Future research should explore the extent to which this result is replicated with lower levels of employees, where dominance may not be expected or perceived as positively.

Future research should also examine a greater variety of situations. The present study, an initial application of the situational item format, focused solely on strong and weak situations. Specifically, the situations described circumstances in which one person clearly had more expertise (strong situations) or circumstances in which expertise was not apparently different (weak situations). Moving forward, it would be informative to investigate an even wider range of situations or dynamics that are common in the workplace, such as when leaders are trying to develop their direct reports.

Another opportunity would be to explore other ways by which to assess interpersonal adaptability at work. For example, this could involve providing more response options beyond strongly warm dominant, warm submissive, cold dominant, or cold submissive. Response options that are less overt and more subtle may provide additional insight. Additionally, different approaches, such as video methods, may prove useful for examining interpersonal interactions in the workplace. This could take the form of viewing video interactions and rating the warmth and dominance of the observed behaviors, similar to the clinical psychology work of Sadler and colleagues (*e.g.*, Sadler, *et al.*, 2009). Although this approach may impact the behavior of interactants (*i.e.*, by being aware of being recorded), and may not involve gathering perceptions

and reactions of the interactants, the situations can be tightly controlled and varied. In combination, various methods can jointly elucidate the dynamics of interpersonal interactions at work.

Future research should also investigate the implications of using other criteria as the outcome variable of interest. The focus of the current study was the willingness to assign a coworker to, or work with a coworker on, tasks high in interpersonal content. By definition, this criterion is linked with collaborative effort, perhaps necessitating a stronger emphasis on warm versus cold behaviors. This may explain why warm adaptability was positively related to the assignment of interpersonal tasks, whereas circle adaptability (allowing for cold behaviors depending on the situation) was not. In contrast, this may not be the case for situations with different criteria. For example, in a negotiation context, with monetary gains as the outcome, it may be more beneficial on occasion to engage in cold behaviors; such interpersonal adaptability (engaging in behaviors throughout the interpersonal circumplex, rather than limiting behavior to war, behaviors) may be appropriate in this context.

### **Conclusion**

Through this research, I sought to illuminate the content and process of interpersonal adaptability at work by infusing interpersonal theory from clinical psychology with organizational research and exploring potential meaningful outcomes of such adaptability. This integration expanded the boundaries of each area of research. First, bringing interpersonal theory to an organizational setting provided a window through which to investigate of the content of interpersonal adaptability, a skill purported as critical for the workplace, but one that is not well understood. Second, creating a situational measure of interpersonal adaptability moved beyond

the static and personality-based assessments commonly used by clinical psychologists studying interpersonal theory.

Further, by combining these two fields, this study has begun to address questions of how interpersonal theory may apply uniquely in settings other than clinical environments.

Specifically, the results indicate that warm adaptability (aligning with interpersonal theory in terms of behaving oppositely on dominance, but contradicting interpersonal theory in terms of always responding warmly) was related to positive outcomes, whereas circle adaptability (aligning with interpersonal theory fully by behaving oppositely on dominance and similar on affiliation) was not. This difference across environments has the potential to expand researchers' understanding of interpersonal dynamics.

Finally, beyond the specific findings of the present study, a greater purpose of this work was to stimulate new research questions that will continue to bridge the two fields of interpersonal theory and organizational science. Such a stream of research would provide many opportunities to further explicate the fundamental, dynamic process through which work is achieved and organizations operate: the millions of employee interactions that occur every moment of every day.

## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Original Interpersonal Adaptability Measure

Items with means between 2.5 and 3.5 (or close to this range) could be considered unclear in terms of dominance or warmth, and thus were edited.

*Table 16: Original Interpersonal Adaptability Measure with Study 1 Scores*

<b><i>Situations in which the partner is behaving in alignment with expertise/competence</i></b> <i>(dominant when has the expertise, submissive when has no expertise)</i>			
	<b>Meant to be:</b>	<b>Dom.</b>	<b>Warm.</b>
<b>1. (Warm dominant, appropriate for expertise level) Imagine that a coworker has been given the lead on a task, given that he/she has much greater knowledge and expertise in the task's content than [TARGET NAME]. During a meeting, the coworker provides progress updates and describes the plan he/she has developed for completing the task.</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>3.86</b>	<b>3.14</b>
a. [Name] would excitedly let the coworker know what he/she thinks about what to do next instead. (warm dominant)	WD	3.86	3.86
b. [Name] would carefully listen to the update, commend the coworker's hard work, and agree to the plans given the coworker's expertise. (Warm submissive)	WS	2.29	4.14
c. [Name] would point out the flaws in the coworker's idea, and emphasize a different plan to take instead. (cold dominant)	CD	4.43	2
d. [Name] would be distant and quiet, accepting the proposed plan. (cold submissive)	CS	1.14	2.29
<b>2. (Warm submissive, appropriate for expertise level) Imagine that a coworker is unsure about how to proceed on a task that both individuals are supposed to collaborate on, because he/she has never done anything like it before. The task regards [TARGET NAME'S] area of expertise, so the coworker, nervous about making a decision about the task, asks [TARGET NAME] for how to proceed.</b>	<b>WS</b>	<b>2.29</b>	<b>3.14</b>
a. [Name] would take charge of the task, kindly outlining his/her ideas about the task and instructing the coworker on what to do next. (warm dominant)	WD	4.71	3.86
b. [Name] would ask the coworker what he/she thinks about it, and say that he/she would be happy to go along with what the coworker decides. (warm submissive)	WS	1.86	4.57
c. [Name] would briskly assign responsibilities, telling the coworker exactly what to do. (cold dominant)	CD	5	1.86
d. [Name] would be fairly unresponsive, trying to dismiss the coworker so that he/she can focus on other, more pressing tasks. (cold submissive)	CS	3	1.43

Table 16 (cont'd)

3. (Cold dominant, appropriate for expertise level) <b>Imagine that a coworker and [TARGET NAME] have been assigned to collaboratively create a report that will be given to another department. The other department will be using this report to make a series of critical decisions, and thus the information within it must be accurate and carefully completed. The coworker decides to take the lead on the project, given that he/she is the expert regarding the report's topic. In a meeting about the report with [TARGET NAME], the coworker gives [TARGET NAME] a to-do list and tells [TARGET NAME] to get started.</b>	CD	4.86	1.86
a. [Name] would excitedly let the coworker know what he/she thinks about what should be done next instead and what should be included in the report. (warm dominant)	WD	4.14	3.71
b. [Name] would listen thoughtfully to the to-do list that the coworker provided and would say that he/she would be happy to get started on the tasks. (Warm submissive)	WS	2.43	4.57
c. [Name] would point out the flaws in the coworker's plan for the report, and would stress how it should be done instead, creating a new to-do list. (cold dominant)	CD	4.71	1.71
d. [Name] would accept the to-do list and be hesitant to express opinions about the report. (cold submissive)	CS	1.14	2.71

4. (Cold submissive, appropriate for expertise level) <b>Imagine that [TARGET NAME] and a coworker have been assigned to develop a presentation together. The topic of the presentation is the results of a project that [TARGET NAME] developed previously, which the coworker knows little about. During a meeting a few days after the presentation was assigned to them, the coworker looks to [TARGET NAME] for a plan for the presentation and asks what they should do to prepare.</b>	CS	2.29	3
a. [Name] would take charge of planning the presentation, warmly outlining his/her opinions about how to proceed and offering advice for how the coworker could contribute. (warm dominant)	WD	4.43	4.71
b. [Name] would ask the coworker what he/she thinks about it, and say that he/she would be happy to go along with what the coworker decides. (warm submissive)	WS	2	4.57
c. [Name] would briskly assign responsibilities, telling the coworker exactly what to do. (cold dominant)	CD	4.5	2.33
d. [Name] would be fairly unresponsive, trying to dismiss the coworker so that he/she can focus on other, more pressing tasks. (cold submissive)	CS	3.33	1.17

Table 16 (cont'd)

<i><b>Situations that have unclear differences in expertise/competence</b></i>			
1. (Warm dominant, ambiguous situation) <b>Imagine that a coworker and [TARGET NAME] are creating a report together. During a meeting about the report, the coworker lists what needs to be done and assigns tasks to [TARGET NAME].</b>	WD	4.5	2.5
a. [Name] would say that the plan for the report is a great start, and then enthusiastically describe how they could split up the tasks to do the report a different way. (warm dominant)	WD	3.5	4.33
b. [Name] would listen thoughtfully to the list of tasks, and would say that he/she would be happy to get started on them. (Warm submissive)	WS	2.33	4.17
c. [Name] would disagree with the task assignments and say that assert that it should be done differently instead. (cold dominant)	CD	4.33	1.33
d. [Name] would be distant and quiet and say that he/she would do the tasks the coworker assigned him/her. (cold submissive)	CS	1.5	2.5
2. (Warm submissive, ambiguous situation) <b>Imagine that a coworker and [TARGET NAME] are working together to plan a large social event for their department. At a planning meeting for the event, the coworker says that he/she doesn't really know how to get started, and asks [TARGET NAME] what they should do to plan the event.</b>	WS	2	3.17
a. [Name] would take charge of the task, enthusiastically outlining his/her ideas for the event and pointing out what the coworker could do to contribute to the planning. (warm dominant)	WD	4	3.67
b. [Name] would ask the coworker what he/she thinks about it, and say that he/she would be happy to go along with what the coworker decides. (warm submissive)	WS	2.17	4
c. [Name] would briskly assign responsibilities, telling the coworker exactly what to do to start organizing the event. (cold dominant)	CD	4.83	2
d. [Name] would try to keep opinions about the event to himself/herself to avoid having to make a decision. (cold submissive)	CS	1.67	2.83



Table 16 (cont'd)

3. (Cold dominant, ambiguous situation) <b>Imagine that a coworker and [TARGET NAME] are working together to pick a new member for their workgroup. The coworker insists on one potential new member and points out negative attributes of all the other potential new members.</b>	CD	4.17	1.83
a. [Name] would point out the good qualities in the potential new members and enthusiastically outline his/her opinions about what qualities of a potential new member would be most important to consider. (warm dominant)	WD	3.67	4.67
b. [Name] would listen carefully to coworker's points and agree that the coworker is probably right. (Warm submissive)	WS	2.5	3.83
c. [Name] would point out the flaws in the coworker's arguments, and would say that other potential new members would be just as good or better. (cold dominant)	CD	4	2.5
d. [Name] would be hesitant to propose a different opinion and would go along with the coworker's choice. (cold submissive)	CS	1.17	3

4. (Cold submissive, ambiguous situation) <b>Imagine that [TARGET NAME] and a coworker have been assigned to come up with potential solutions of a major problem at work. In a brainstorming meeting, the coworker acts indifferent and preoccupied, and expresses indecisive viewpoints about what to do.</b>	CS	2.17	2
a. [Name] would excitedly list out possible solutions and the reasoning behind them to the coworker. (warm dominant)	WD	3.83	3.67
b. [Name] would ask the coworker what he/she thinks about it, and say that he/she would be happy to go along with what the coworker thinks. (warm submissive)	WS	2.17	4.17
c. [Name] would briskly outline possible solutions and tell the coworker that he/she needs to work harder to come up with more. (cold dominant)	CD	4.33	1.67
d. [Name] would try to keep opinions about solutions to himself/herself to avoid having to make a decision about the problem. (cold submissive)	CS	1.67	2.67

Table 16 (cont'd)

<b><i>Situations in which the partner is behaving in a way that is misaligned with expertise/competence</i></b> <i>(submissive when has the expertise, dominant when no expertise)</i>			
<b>1.</b> (Warm dominant, inappropriate for expertise level) <b>Imagine that a coworker decides to take charge of a task that both individuals are supposed to be working on together, even though he/she has never done something like it before. When discussing the task with [TARGET NAME], the coworker excitedly lists his/her accomplishments on it so far, and does not ask for assistance.</b>	<b>WD</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>3</b>
a. [Name] would inquire about why the proposed plan is the best approach, and excitedly let the coworker know what he/she thinks about what to do next instead. (warm dominant)	WD	3.57	4
b. [Name] would carefully listen to the update, commend the coworker's hard work, and agree to the plans. (Warm Submissive)	WS	2.29	4.86
c. [Name] would point out the flaws in the coworker's idea, and emphasize a different plan to take instead. (cold dominant)	CD	4.2	2
d. [Name] would be distant and quiet, accepting the proposed plan. (cold submissive)	CS	1.33	2.5
<b>2.</b> (Warm submissive, inappropriate for expertise level) <b>Imagine that a coworker doesn't want to take the lead on it, even though it is his/her assigned task and based in his/her area of expertise. The coworker has been waffling and not making a decision about how to move forward. The coworker looks to [TARGET NAME] for answers and full support, including having [TARGET NAME] do much of the work that the coworker is supposed to be doing.</b>	<b>WS</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>2.5</b>
a. [Name] would take charge of the task, warmly outlining his/her ideas about the task and instructing the coworker on what to do next. (warm dominant)	WD	4.57	4
b. [Name] would ask the coworker what he/she thinks about it, and say that he/she would be happy to go along with what the coworker decides. (warm submissive)	WS	1.83	4.17
c. [Name] would briskly assign responsibilities, telling the coworker exactly what to do. (cold dominant)	CD	5	1.83
d. [Name] would be fairly unresponsive, trying to dismiss the coworker so that he/she can focus on other, more pressing tasks. (cold submissive)	CS	3	1.17

Table 16 (cont'd)

3. (Cold dominant, inappropriate for expertise level) <b>Imagine that a coworker and [TARGET NAME] have been assigned to collaboratively create a report that will be given to another department. The other department will be using this report to make a series of critical decisions, and thus the information within it must be accurate and carefully completed. The coworker decides to take the lead on the project, even though he/she has very little experience in the topic of the report. In a meeting about the report with [TARGET NAME], the coworker gives [TARGET NAME] a to-do list and tells [TARGET NAME] to get started.</b>	CD	4.83	2
a. [Name] would explain why another approach would likely be more effective, kindly describing what he/she thinks about what should be done next instead and what should be included in the report. (warm dominant)	WD	4	4.67
b. [Name] would listen thoughtfully to the to-do list that the coworker provided and would say that he/she would be happy to get started on the tasks. (Warm submissive)	WS	2	4.33
c. [Name] would point out the flaws in the coworker's plan for the report, and would stress how it should be done instead, creating a new to-do list. (cold dominant)	CD	4.5	1.83
d. [Name] would accept the to-do list and be hesitant to express opinions about the report. (cold submissive)	CS	1.17	2.67

4. (Cold submissive, inappropriate for expertise level) <b>Imagine that [TARGET NAME] and a coworker have been assigned to develop a presentation together. The topic of the presentation is the results of a project that [TARGET NAME] developed previously, which the coworker knows little about. During a meeting a few days after the presentation was assigned to them, the coworker looks to [TARGET NAME] for a plan for the presentation and asks what they should do to prepare.</b>	CS	1.5	3.17
a. [Name] would take charge of planning the presentation, warmly outlining his/her opinions about how to proceed and offering advice for how the coworker could contribute. (warm dominant)	WD	4.33	4.33
b. [Name] would ask the coworker what he/she thinks about it, and say that he/she would be happy to go along with what the coworker decides. (warm submissive)	WS	1.83	4.17
c. [Name] would briskly assign responsibilities, telling the coworker exactly what to do. (cold dominant)	CD	4.83	2
d. [Name] would be fairly unresponsive, trying to dismiss the coworker so that he/she can focus on other, more pressing tasks. (cold submissive)	CS	3	1.83

## APPENDIX B

### Edited Interpersonal Adaptability Measure

**\*Note:** Edits following the SME study are listed in *italics*.

**PROMPT:** For each situation below, please select the response you think your coworker would be MOST LIKELY to do:

**Situations in which the partner is behaving in alignment with expertise/competence**  
(dominant when has the expertise, submissive when has no expertise)

1. (Warm dominant, appropriate for expertise level) **Imagine that a coworker has been given the lead on a task, given that he/she has much greater knowledge and expertise in the task's content than [TARGET NAME]. During a meeting, the coworker *pleasantly provides progress updates and enthusiastically dictates tasks he/she has developed for [TARGET NAME] for completing the task.***
  - a. [Name] would be *congenial*, excitedly *emphasizing* what he/she thinks about what to do next instead. (warm dominant)
  - b. [Name] would *politely* listen to the update, *compliment* the coworker's hard work, and *go along with* the plans given the coworker's expertise. (Warm submissive)
  - c. [Name] would point out the flaws in the coworker's idea, and emphasize a different plan to take instead. (cold dominant)
  - d. [Name] would be distant and quiet, *unemotionally* accepting the proposed plan. (cold submissive)
2. (Warm submissive, appropriate for expertise level) **Imagine that a coworker is unsure about how to proceed on a task that both individuals are supposed to collaborate on, because he/she has never done anything like it before. The task regards [TARGET NAME'S] area of expertise, so the coworker, nervous and unsure about making a decision about the task, *smiles and politely waits for [TARGET NAME] to decide how to proceed.***
  - a. [Name] would take charge of the task, kindly outlining his/her ideas about the task and instructing the coworker on what to do next *in a friendly way*. (warm dominant)
  - b. [Name] would ask the coworker what he/she thinks about it, and say that he/she would be happy to go along with what the coworker decides. (warm submissive)
  - c. [Name] would briskly assign responsibilities, telling the coworker exactly what to do. (cold dominant)
  - d. [Name] would be fairly unresponsive, *hoping the coworker would leave him/her alone* so that he/she can focus on other, more pressing tasks. (cold submissive)

3. (Cold dominant, appropriate for expertise level) **Imagine that a coworker and [TARGET NAME] have been assigned to collaboratively create a report that will be given to another department. The other department will be using this report to make a series of critical decisions, and thus the information within it must be accurate and carefully completed. The coworker decides to take the lead on the project, given that he/she is the expert regarding the report's topic. In a meeting about the report with [TARGET NAME], the coworker gives [TARGET NAME] a to-do list and tells [TARGET NAME] to get started.**
- a. [Name] would excitedly let the coworker know what he/she thinks about what should be done next instead and what should be included in the report. (warm dominant)
  - b. [Name] would *politely listen* to the to-do list that the coworker provided and *respectfully* say that he/she would be happy to get started on the tasks. (Warm submissive)
  - c. [Name] would point out the flaws in the coworker's plan for the report, and would stress how it should be done instead, creating a new to-do list. (cold dominant)
  - d. [Name] would act *detached, accepting* the to-do list and *withholding any* opinions about the report. (cold submissive)
4. (Cold submissive, appropriate for expertise level) **Imagine that [TARGET NAME] and a coworker have been assigned to develop a presentation together. The topic of the presentation is the results of a project that [TARGET NAME] developed previously, which the coworker knows little about. During a meeting a few days after the presentation was assigned to them, the coworker *waits in a taciturn way* for [TARGET NAME] to develop a plan for the presentation and *apathetically* asks what they should do to prepare.**
- a. [Name] would take charge of planning the presentation, warmly outlining his/her opinions about how to proceed and offering advice for how the coworker could contribute. (warm dominant)
  - b. [Name] would ask the coworker what he/she thinks about it, and say that he/she would be happy to go along with what the coworker decides. (warm submissive)
  - c. [Name] would briskly assign responsibilities, *coarsely* telling the coworker exactly what to do. (cold dominant)
  - d. [Name] would *act withdrawn and fairly* unresponsive, *hoping the coworker will leave him/her alone* so that he/she can work on other tasks. (cold submissive)

### **Situations that have unclear differences in expertise/competence**

1. (Warm dominant, ambiguous situation) **Imagine that a coworker and [TARGET NAME] are creating a report together. During a meeting about the report, the coworker *affably* lists what needs to be done and assigns tasks to [TARGET NAME] in a good-natured way.**
  - a. [Name] would say that the plan for the report is a great start, and then enthusiastically assert the way he/she thought they should split the tasks. (warm dominant)
  - b. [Name] would *politely* listen to the coworker and *contentedly go along with the tasks assignments*. (Warm submissive)
  - c. [Name] would disagree with the task assignments and say that assert that it should be done differently instead. (cold dominant)
  - d. [Name] would be *taciturn*, *saying in a detached way* that he/she would do the tasks the coworker assigned him/her. (cold submissive)
2. (Warm submissive, ambiguous situation) **Imagine that a coworker and [TARGET NAME] are working together to plan a large social event for their department. At a planning meeting for the event, the coworker *mentions politely* that he/she doesn't really know how to get started, and cordially asks [TARGET NAME] *what he/she thinks they should do to plan the event*.**
  - a. [Name] would take charge of the task, enthusiastically outlining his/her ideas for the event and *amiably* pointing out what the coworker could do to contribute to the planning. (warm dominant)
  - b. [Name] would *defer to the coworker*, saying that he/she would be happy to go along with what the coworker decides. (warm submissive)
  - c. [Name] would briskly assign responsibilities, telling the coworker exactly what to do to start organizing the event. (cold dominant)
  - d. [Name] would be *impassive*, *keeping* opinions about the event to himself/herself to avoid having to make a decision. (cold submissive)
3. (Cold dominant, ambiguous situation) **Imagine that a coworker and [TARGET NAME] are working together to pick a new member for their workgroup. The coworker insists on one potential new member and points out negative attributes of all the other potential new members.**
  - a. [Name] would *cheerfully* point of the good qualities in the potential new members and enthusiastically outline his/her opinions about what qualities of a potential new member would be most important to consider. (warm dominant)
  - b. [Name] would *cordially* listen to the coworker's points and *respectfully* agree that the coworker is probably right, *deferring to his/her opinion*. (Warm submissive)
  - c. [Name] would *brusquely dispute* in the coworker's *points* and *argue* that other potential new members would be just as good or better. (cold dominant)
  - d. [Name] would listen *unresponsively* and would *begrudgingly* go along with the coworker's choice. (cold submissive)

4. (Cold submissive, ambiguous situation) **Imagine that [TARGET NAME] and a coworker have been assigned to come up with potential solutions of a major problem at work. In a brainstorming meeting, the coworker acts indifferent and expresses indecisive viewpoints about what to do.**
- [Name] would *congenially* list out possible solutions and describe the reasoning behind them to the coworker *in a friendly way*. (warm dominant)
  - [Name] would *defer to the* coworker what he/she thinks about it, and say that he/she would be happy to go along with *whatever* the coworker thinks. (warm submissive)
  - [Name] would briskly outline possible solutions and tell the coworker that he/she should work harder to come up with more. (cold dominant)
  - [Name] would be *withdrawn, coolly keeping* opinions about solutions to himself/herself to avoid having to make a decision about the problem. (cold submissive)

**Situations in which the partner is behaving in a way that is misaligned with expertise/competence** (*submissive when has the expertise, dominant when no expertise*)

- (Warm dominant, inappropriate for expertise level) **Imagine that a coworker decides to take charge of a task that both individuals are supposed to be working on together, even though he/she has never done something like it before. When discussing the task with [TARGET NAME], the coworker cheerfully describes his/her plan for completing it in a good-natured way, and says that he/say would be happy to finish the project on his/her own.**
  - [Name] would *affably state that another approach would be better, sociably* describing what that approach would entail. (warm dominant)
  - [Name] would listen *cordially* to the update and go along with the plans. (Warm Submissive)
  - [Name] would *list out the problems* in the coworker's *plan*, and emphasize a different plan to take instead. (cold dominant)
  - [Name] would be distant and *aloof, disinterestedly going along with* the proposed plan. (cold submissive)
- (Warm submissive, inappropriate for expertise level) **Imagine that a coworker doesn't want to take the lead on it, even though it is his/her assigned task and based in his/her area of expertise. The coworker has been waffling and not making a decision about how to move forward. The coworker compliments [TARGET NAME]'s expertise and looks to [TARGET NAME] for answers and full support, including congenially asking [TARGET NAME] to do much of the work.**
  - [Name] would warmly describe his/her ideas about the task and instruct the coworker on what to do next. (warm dominant)
  - [Name] would ask the coworker what he/she thinks about it, and say that he/she would be happy to go along with what the coworker decides. (warm submissive)
  - [Name] would briskly *list what the coworker would need to do to make the decision and would tell him/her get started.* (cold dominant)

- d. [Name] would act *withdrawn, disregarding* the coworker *and hoping he/she would go do the task on his/her own.* (cold submissive)
3. (Cold dominant, inappropriate for expertise level) **Imagine that a coworker and [TARGET NAME] have been assigned to collaboratively develop a process for another department. The other department will need the process to accomplish its goals for the quarter. The coworker decides to take the lead on developing the process, even though he/she has very little experience in the topic. In a meeting about the process with [TARGET NAME], the coworker gives [TARGET NAME] a to-do list and tells [TARGET NAME] to get started.**
  - a. [Name] would explain why another approach would likely be more effective, kindly describing what he/she thinks about what should be done next instead and what should be incorporated into the process. (warm dominant)
  - b. [Name] would listen thoughtfully to the to-do list that the coworker provided and would say that he/she would be happy to get started on the tasks. (Warm submissive)
  - c. [Name] would point out the flaws in the coworker's plan for the report, and would stress how it should be done instead, creating a new to-do list. (cold dominant)
  - d. [Name] would be *taciturn, coolly* going along with the to-do list. (cold submissive)
4. (Cold submissive, inappropriate for expertise level) **Imagine that [TARGET NAME] and a coworker have been assigned to develop a presentation together. The topic of the presentation is the results of a project that the coworker developed previously, which [TARGET NAME] knows little about. During a meeting a few days after the presentation was assigned to them, the coworker is *withdrawn and aloof, waiting for [TARGET NAME] to come up with a plan.***
  - a. [Name] would take charge of planning the presentation, warmly outlining his/her ideas about how to proceed and offering advice for how the coworker could contribute. (warm dominant)
  - b. [Name] would ask the coworker what he/she thinks about it, and say that he/she would be happy to go along with what the coworker decides. (warm submissive)
  - c. [Name] would briskly assign responsibilities, telling the coworker exactly what to do. (cold dominant)
  - d. [Name] would be fairly *distant and reserved, waiting for the coworker to come up with an idea.* (cold submissive)



## APPENDIX C

### Final Items Used for Main Study

**\*Note:** [TARGET NAME] was automatically filled in throughout the online survey with the ratee's first name via question "piping." Scale labels were not included in the survey.

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#### **The first part of this survey describes 8 theoretical work situations.**

In these situations, you will be asked to rate how likely it is that the person you have been asked to rate will respond in various ways.

Please **refer to the email** you received that had the link to this survey; it provides the name of the coworker you have been asked to rate.

If you don't know your assigned person well enough to rate on his/her general characteristics or behavior, please choose someone else that you work with often.

**Please enter the first name or initials of the person you've been asked to rate below.** This name is just to help you while you complete the survey, and will **NOT** be used in the data in any way.

<b>First name of the coworker you are rating:</b>	
---	--

<b>Is this the person you were assigned to rate, or did you need to pick someone else?</b>
--

- ☐ This is the person I was assigned to rate.
- ☐ I don't know the assigned person well enough to rate, so I chose someone else.

<b>What is this person's role in relation to you?</b>
---

- ☐ He/she is my peer (we both report to the same person).
- ☐ He/she is my direct report (he/she reports to me).
- ☐ Other:

The next 2 pages contain 4 theoretical situations in which [TARGET NAME] is interacting with another peer-level coworker (*coworker W, X, Y, or Z*) on a variety of collaborative projects.

Please rate the likelihood that [TARGET NAME] would respond in the described ways. You may feel that none of the responses are exactly right for [TARGET NAME], but try to consider the 'essence' of the kind of response that he/she would have.

1	2	3	4	5
Extremely Unlikely	Somewhat Unlikely	Neither Unlikely nor Likely	Somewhat Likely	Extremely Likely

- 1 **Imagine that Coworker W has been given the lead on a task because he/she has much greater knowledge and expertise in the task's content than [TARGET NAME]. During a meeting, Coworker W pleasantly provides progress updates and enthusiastically dictates tasks he/she has developed for [TARGET NAME] for completing the task.**

- \_\_\_\_a. [Target Name] would be congenial, excitedly emphasizing what he/she thinks about what to do next instead.
- \_\_\_\_b. [Target Name] would politely listen to the update, compliment the coworker's hard work, and go along with the plans given the coworker's expertise.
- \_\_\_\_c. [Target Name] would point out the flaws in the coworker's idea, and emphasize a different plan to take instead.
- \_\_\_\_d. [Target Name] would be distant and quiet, unemotionally accepting the proposed plan.

Which response would [Target Name] (the coworker you are thinking about) be **MOST** likely to do? (a,b,c,d): \_\_\_\_

- 2 **Imagine that Coworker X is unsure about how to proceed on a task that both individuals are supposed to collaborate on, because he/she has never done anything like it before. The task regards [TARGET NAME'S] area of expertise, so Coworker X, nervous and unsure about making a decision about the task, approaches [TARGET NAME], and politely requests [TARGET NAME] to decide how to proceed.**

- \_\_\_\_a. [Target Name] would take charge of the task, kindly outlining his/her ideas about the task and instructing the coworker on what to do next in a friendly way.
- \_\_\_\_b. [Target Name] would ask the coworker what he/she thinks about it, and say that he/she would be happy to go along with what the coworker decides.
- \_\_\_\_c. [Target Name] would briskly assign responsibilities, telling the coworker exactly what to do.
- \_\_\_\_d. [Target Name] would be fairly unresponsive, hoping the coworker would leave him/her alone so that he/she can focus on other, more pressing tasks.

Which response would [Target Name] (the coworker you are thinking about) be **MOST** likely to do? (a,b,c,d): \_\_\_\_

- 3 **Imagine that Coworker Y and [TARGET NAME] have been assigned to collaboratively create a report that will be given to another department. The other department will be using this report to make a series of critical decisions, and thus the information within it must be accurate and carefully completed. Coworker Y decides to take the lead on the project, given that he/she is the expert regarding the report's topic. In a meeting about the report with [TARGET NAME], the coworker gives [TARGET NAME] a to-do list and tells [TARGET NAME] to get started.**
- \_\_\_\_\_a. [Target Name] would excitedly let the coworker know what he/she thinks about what should be done next instead and what should be included in the report.
  - \_\_\_\_\_b. [Target Name] would politely listen to the to-do list that the coworker provided and respectfully say that he/she would be happy to get started on the tasks.
  - \_\_\_\_\_c. [Target Name] would point out the flaws in the coworker's plan for the report, and would stress how it should be done instead, creating a new to-do list.
  - \_\_\_\_\_d. [Target Name] would act detached, accepting the to-do list and withholding any opinions about the report.
- Which response would [Target Name] (the coworker you are thinking about) be **MOST** likely to do?  
(a,b,c,d): \_\_\_\_\_

- 4 **Imagine that [TARGET NAME] and Coworker Z have been assigned to develop a presentation together. The topic of the presentation is the results of a project that [TARGET NAME] developed previously, which Coworker Z knows little about. During a meeting a few days after the presentation was assigned to them, Coworker Z waits in a taciturn way for [TARGET NAME] to develop a plan for the presentation and apathetically asks what they should do to prepare.**
- \_\_\_\_\_a. [Target Name] would take charge of planning the presentation, warmly outlining his/her opinions about how to proceed and offering advice for how the coworker could contribute.
  - \_\_\_\_\_b. [Target Name] would ask the coworker what he/she thinks about it, and say that he/she would be happy to go along with what the coworker decides.
  - \_\_\_\_\_c. [Target Name] would briskly assign responsibilities, coarsely telling the coworker exactly what to do.
  - \_\_\_\_\_d. [Target Name] would act withdrawn and fairly unresponsive, hoping the coworker will leave him/her alone so that he/she can work on other tasks.
- Which response would [Target Name] (the coworker you are thinking about) be **MOST** likely to do?  
(a,b,c,d): \_\_\_\_\_

- 5 **Imagine that Coworker W and [TARGET NAME] are creating a report together. During a meeting about the report, Coworker W affably lists what needs to be done and assigns tasks to [TARGET NAME] in a good-natured way.**

- \_\_\_\_\_a. [Target Name] would say that the plan for the report is a great start, and then enthusiastically assert a different way he/she thought they should split the tasks.
- \_\_\_\_\_b. [Target Name] would politely listen to the coworker and willingly go along with the tasks assignments.
- \_\_\_\_\_c. [Target Name] would disagree with the task assignments and assert that it should be done differently instead.
- \_\_\_\_\_d. [Target Name] would be taciturn, saying in a detached way that he/she would do the tasks the coworker assigned him/her.

Which response would [Target Name] (the coworker you are thinking about) be **MOST** likely to do? (a,b,c,d): \_\_\_\_\_

- 6 **Imagine that Coworker X and [TARGET NAME] are working together to plan a large social event for their department. At a planning meeting for the event, Coworker X mentions politely that he/she doesn't really know how to get started, and cordially asks [TARGET NAME] what he/she thinks they should do to plan the event.**

- \_\_\_\_\_a. [Target Name] would take charge of the task, enthusiastically outlining his/her ideas for the event and amiably pointing out what the coworker could do to contribute to the planning.
- \_\_\_\_\_b. [Target Name] would defer to the coworker, saying that he/she would be happy to go along with what the coworker decides.
- \_\_\_\_\_c. [Target Name] would briskly assign responsibilities, telling the coworker exactly what to do to start organizing the event.
- \_\_\_\_\_d. [Target Name] would be impassive, keeping opinions about the event to himself/herself to avoid having to make a decision.

Which response would [Target Name] (the coworker you are thinking about) be **MOST** likely to do? (a,b,c,d): \_\_\_\_\_

- 7 **Imagine that Coworker Y and [TARGET NAME] are working together to pick a new member for their workgroup. Coworker Y insists on one potential new member and points out negative attributes of all the other potential new members.**

- \_\_\_\_\_a. [Target Name] would cheerfully point out the good qualities in the potential new members and enthusiastically outline his/her opinions about what qualities of a potential new member would be most important to consider.
- \_\_\_\_\_b. [Target Name] would cordially listen to the coworker's points and respectfully agree that the coworker is probably right, deferring to his/her opinion.
- \_\_\_\_\_c. [Target Name] would brusquely dispute the coworker's points and argue that other potential new members would be just as good or better.
- \_\_\_\_\_d. [Target Name] would listen unresponsively and would begrudgingly go along with the coworker's choice.

Which response would [Target Name] (the coworker you are thinking about) be **MOST** likely to do? (a,b,c,d): \_\_\_\_\_

- 8 **Imagine that [TARGET NAME] and Coworker Z have been assigned to come up with potential solutions of a major problem at work. In a brainstorming meeting, Coworker Z acts indifferent and expresses indecisive viewpoints about what to do.**

- \_\_\_\_\_a. [Target Name] would congenially list out possible solutions and describe the reasoning behind them to the coworker in a friendly way.
- \_\_\_\_\_b. [Target Name] would defer, asking the coworker what he/she thinks about it, and would say that he/she would be happy to go along with whatever the coworker thinks.
- \_\_\_\_\_c. [Target Name] would briskly outline possible solutions and tell the coworker that he/she should work harder to come up with more solutions as well.
- \_\_\_\_\_d. [Target Name] would be withdrawn, coolly keeping opinions about solutions to himself/herself to avoid having to make a decision about the problem.

Which response would [Target Name] (the coworker you are thinking about) be **MOST** likely to do? (a,b,c,d): \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about [TARGET NAME].

<b>Liking</b> (Adapted from McCroskey, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2006)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
He/she is pleasant to work with.					
I enjoy working with him/her.					
It is difficult to collaborate with him/her.					
I would recommend him/her as a work partner.					

<b>Interpersonal Effectiveness</b> (Adapted from Sheldon & Kasser, 1998, and Ferris et al., 2005)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This person is effective at forming positive working relationships with fellow employees.					
This person is effective at creating strong connections with others in the workplace.					
This person is good at building rapport with others.					
This person is skilled at making conversations comfortable for others.					
This person often has awkward moments in interactions with others.					

**Would you want to work with [TARGET NAME] on a project that involves... (group that rated peers)**

OR

**Would you want to assign [TARGET NAME] to a project that involves... (group that rated direct reports)**

<b>Wanting to work with (peer) or assign (direct report) this person on/to INTERPERSONAL tasks</b> (Based on McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison's taxonomy, 1988)	<b>Definitely Would NOT Want to</b>	<b>Probably Would NOT Want to</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Probably WOULD Want to</b>	<b>Definitely WOULD Want to</b>
...Motivating people to implement solutions by working with them to come to consensus on how to implement the solution.					
...Working with executives.					
...Negotiating with others in order to develop a compromise between parties.					
...Working with people over whom he/she has no authority (e.g., peers).					
...Working with clients or stakeholders.					
...Leading and motivating a team.					
...Developing other people through one-on-one coaching.					

<b>Wanting to work with (peer) or assign (direct report) this person on/to INDEPENDENT tasks</b>	<b>Definitely Would NOT Want to</b>	<b>Probably Would NOT Want to</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Probably WOULD Want to</b>	<b>Definitely WOULD Want to</b>
...Generating ideas by oneself.					
...Independently using technical skills.					
...Creating initiatives on one's own.					
...Designing individual project components.					

[TARGET NAME]...

<b>Interpersonal Adaptability</b> (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Believes it is important to be flexible in dealing with others.					
Tends to be able to read others and understand how they are feeling at any particular moment.					
Has insight that helps him/her to work effectively with others.					
Is an open-minded person in dealing with others.					
Is perceptive of others and uses that knowledge in interactions.					
Tries to be flexible when dealing with others.					
Adapts his/her behavior to get along with others.					

<b>In Role Performance</b> (William & Anderson, 1991)	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Fulfills responsibilities specified in job description.					
Meets formal performance requirements of the job.					
Fails to perform essential duties.					



Please rate the extent to which these adjectives accurately describe how [TARGET NAME] is in general:

<b>Dominance</b> (Wiggins et al., 1988)	Not at All Accurate	Not Very Accurate	Somewhat Accurate	Quite Accurate	Extremely Accurate
Dominant					
Firm					
Assertive					

<b>Warmth</b> (Wiggins et al., 1988)					
Friendly					
Kind					
Warm					

<b>For how many years have you worked at [ORGANIZATION]?</b>	
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<b>Your current sector/function:</b>
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- ☐ Consumer
- ☐ MD&D
- ☐ Pharmaceuticals
- ☐ Supply Chain
- ☐ Corporate
- ☐ Other:

<b>Your current region:</b>
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- ☐ APAC
- ☐ EMEA
- ☐ North America
- ☐ Latin America

<b>Your current country:</b>	
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<b>Your gender (optional):</b>	
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<b>Your age (optional):</b>	
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<b>How many years have you worked with [TARGET NAME]?</b>	
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<b>How many hours per week (on average) do you work with [TARGET NAME]?</b>	
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<b>[TARGET NAME]'s gender (optional):</b>	
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<b>[TARGET NAME]'s approximate age (optional):</b>	
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## REFERENCES

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