

## Research Statement

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One-on-one interactions are a fundamental building block of organizational life. When managers interview applicants for jobs, negotiate contracts, lead subordinates, or turn to their colleagues for information or advice, their one-on-one interactions are shaped by a set of common psychological mechanisms such as perceptual biases, relationship effects, and perceived reciprocity. My research program focuses on domain-specific dyad-level organizational phenomena like these and the domain-bridging psychological mechanisms that influence them.

### Domain-Bridging Research

#### *Job talk research: Trait affective presence*

In my job talk research, I introduce a new perspective on individual differences and affect, a term psychologists use to describe the moods and emotions people experience. The existing literature at the intersection of these two topics shows that *trait affect* creates stability in people's affective states: some people consistently feel positively across a wide range of situations, whereas other people consistently feel negatively. Taking a new approach to this topic, my collaborator Hillary Anger Elfenbein and I argue that there is also stability in the affective states that individuals bring out in their interaction partners. That is, *trait affective presence* leads people to consistently feel positively when they are interacting with some individuals and consistently feel negatively when they are interacting with others. Testing this hypothesis, we asked MBA students how they felt during their interactions with each of the other members of their assigned workgroups. Our data suggest that a substantial proportion of the variation in the participants' affective states was explained both by their trait affect (31% of the variation in positive affect, 19% of the variation in negative affect)—replicating previous research—and by their interaction partners' trait affective presence (positive affect, 10%; negative affect, 23%). Our study, now in press in the top-tier psychology journal *Psychological Science* (Eisenkraft & Elfenbein, *in press*), provides the first strong evidence that different individuals consistently bring out different emotional states in other people.

Given the extensive evidence connecting people's trait affect to their performance within organizations, our findings suggest that additional research on the complementary construct of trait affective presence is warranted. To learn more about how trait affective presence influences performance, we are currently collecting or planning to collect data about how individuals' trait affective presence influences (a) the performance of their teams; (b) their performance as middle managers; and (c) their performance and the performance of their counterparts during two-party negotiations. We are also investigating whether people can accurately describe their own trait affective presence—i.e., do we know how we make other people feel?—because this ability may play a role in the development and maintenance of healthy social networks inside and outside the workplace.

#### *Dissertation research: The accuracy of first impressions*

In my dissertation, I bridge two literatures on dyadic interpersonal perceptions by reconciling the findings from the *thin slices* research literature—which suggest that individuals' snap judgments of others' skills and character are remarkably accurate—with the findings from interview validity

research—which suggest that individuals’ judgments of others’ skills and character are anything but. I studied the psychological mechanisms that influence the accuracy of interpersonal perception in order to identify four differences between these research domains that may explain why thin slice judgments are a better predictor of performance than an interviewer’s evaluations: (1) interviewers often receive information about a candidate that may bias their subsequent observations; (2) interviewers create high-pressure environments that may encourage deceptive impression management strategies; (3) interviewers predict future performance directly instead of evaluating an applicant’s personality; and (4) interviewers do not create more reliable evaluations by combining the ratings from multiple observers. I am currently conducting a series of laboratory studies that explore whether manipulating these four differences will both decrease the accuracy of thin slice judgments and increase the accuracy of one-on-one interviews. I will defend my dissertation in the spring of 2010.

## **Domain-Specific Research**

### *Accuracy in social network perceptions*

In collaboration with Hillary Anger Elfenbein and Waverly Ding, I have been working on a series of research projects on accuracy in social network perceptions. In the management literature, perceptions of social networks have been linked to the acquisition of political power and the development of people’s reputations within organizations. Our research extends this literature by exploring where and how accuracy in social network perception originates.

In our first project, now published in the top-tier journal *Psychological Science* (Elfenbein, Eisenkraft, & Ding, 2009), we investigated whether people can accurately describe how others view them, a perspective-taking exercise that social psychologists call dyadic meta-perception. The literature on this topic suggests that people know how, on average, the rest of the world tends to see them—a phenomenon called *generalized meta-accuracy*—but can typically only describe how different people view them differently—*dyadic meta-accuracy*—when they are evaluating relational constructs such as liking, humor, and friendship. An influential article once argued that people do not consistently exhibit dyadic meta-accuracy because they incorrectly assume that their own feelings about a person will always be reciprocated. In our study, we asked MBA students to (1) rate how much they valued fourteen of their colleagues as future professional contacts and (2) to predict how much they were valued by each of these colleagues. Interestingly, presumed reciprocity did not account for all of the dyadic meta-accuracy in people’s perceptions of their professional relationships. Further, respondents did not blindly assume their perceptions would be reciprocated; the participants used the reciprocity heuristic more when their perceptions were, in fact, reciprocated. We argue that, although assumptions of reciprocity play an important role in dyadic meta-accuracy, people also read cues in the social environment when they are describing what different people think about them.

In our second research project on accuracy in social network perceptions, we focus on how accurately individuals can describe *other* people’s relationships. Although researchers have analyzed whether people can describe the ties in their social network accurately, our ongoing research on this topic extends this literature in two ways. First, we plan to investigate accuracy in people’s network perceptions by examining *where* accuracy comes from, using a paradigm developed by psychologists studying social perception. Are some people’s relationships more legible than others? Are some people more accurate perceivers? If so, what personality traits and characteristics predict the legibility of a person’s relationships or the accuracy of their perceptions? Second, instead of studying one small network with one or two-dozen nodes, we spent two years collecting social network and network perception data from

479 people in 30 networks. We plan to use this rich data set to write a series of papers examining personality traits, demographic diversity, and structural positions.

### *Individual differences in negotiation performance*

I have conducted a series of studies on individual differences in negotiation performance with Hillary Anger Elfenbein, Jared Curhan, Lucio Baccaro, and graduate students at Berkeley and MIT-Sloan. We find that, although personality measures do not reliably predict negotiation performance, great negotiators do exist and they behave differently from other negotiators. This research stream provides guidance to individuals interested in becoming better negotiators, to organizations structuring job roles that may include negotiation activities, and to professors and others who teach negotiation skills.

Large-scale reviews on individual differences in negotiations previously concluded that bargaining outcomes are minimally influenced by people's self-reported personality traits. In our first research on this topic, we moved beyond specific personality traits by directly testing whether some individuals are better negotiators than others (Elfenbein, Curhan, Eisenkraft, Shirako, & Baccaro, 2008, *Journal of Research in Personality*). My co-authors and I randomly assigned MBA students to five-person groups and asked the participants to interact, one-on-one, with each of the other members of their group as they completed a series of four different, but similarly structured, distributive negotiation exercises—“fixed sum” exercises where one party's gain is the other party's loss. We then conducted a second study where MBA students engaged in four different, but similarly structured, integrative negotiation exercises—potential “win-win” exercises where the two parties can create joint value by identifying mutually beneficial trade-offs and compatible issues—with the other members of their randomly assigned five-person group. We found that individual differences explained a substantial 25% and 46% of objective performance in the distributive and integrative bargaining tasks, respectively, and 19% of subjective performance. We also found that most of the participants' personality traits, demographics, and cognitive abilities did not reliably predict how well the participants performed across different negotiation exercises. Although, consistent with prior research on this topic, self-report personality questionnaires did not reliably distinguish the great negotiators, our research confirmed the common sense belief that some negotiators are better than others.

After finding such promising results about individual differences in negotiation performance, we conducted two follow up studies. First, we investigated whether great negotiators behave differently while they are negotiating (Elfenbein, Curhan, Eisenkraft, Shirako, & Brown, *in progress*). We assigned MBA students to four-person groups, video-taped the participants as they completed a different integrative negotiation exercise with each of the other members of their group, and then coded these tapes to identify how frequently the negotiators engaged in behaviors such as lying, mentioning alternatives to a negotiated agreement, and expressing sympathy. Our analysis of these data suggests that great negotiators have different behavioral profiles than consistently poor negotiators, but changing one's behaviors based on these results may not lead to better performance. Although consistently engaging in particular behaviors is associated with improved negotiation performance, the behaviors themselves do not appear to help performance if they are not exhibited consistently.

In our second follow-up study, my coauthors and I are investigating whether negotiation ability is a heritable trait (Curhan, Eisenkraft, Elfenbein, Baccaro, & Perlis, *in progress*). As in our previous studies, we randomly assigned MBA students to groups and asked them to complete integrative negotiation exercises with each of their respective teammates. However, this time, we also collected saliva samples that Roy Perlis, a professor at Harvard Medical School, used to identify the presence/absence of 108 genotypes in each our participants. We are currently analyzing whether individual differences in

bargaining outcomes are significantly associated with a person's genetic constitution; analyses that are complicated by the hundreds of possible genotype-phenotype associations, interdependence in the data, and the relatively small number of participants ( $N \approx 200$ ) in our sample.

### *Emotional Intelligence*

In my first research projects as a graduate student, I collaborated on a series of studies about emotional intelligence, the umbrella construct researchers use to describe skills related to the perception, expression, and regulation of emotions. Since its development in the early 1990s, management scholars have shown that emotional intelligence is associated with decision-making skill, objective success in negotiations, job effectiveness, transformational leadership, and organizational citizenship behavior; all important outcome variables in the management literature. Our research contributes to the literature on emotional intelligence (1) by resolving a long-standing mystery about the association between the emotional intelligence branches of emotion perception and emotion expression skill, and (2) by providing a new perspective on emotional intelligence that may be particularly useful for field researchers interested in collecting valid and reliable emotional intelligence data.

In our research on the emotion expression-perception link, Hillary Anger Elfenbein and I solved a decades-old mystery surrounding the relationship between accuracy in recognizing other people's emotions and accuracy in expressing one's emotions so that other people can understand them. Although accurate expression and accurate perception are both branches of emotional intelligence, sixty years of research on the expression-perception link has produced conflicting empirical findings about their association ranging from  $r = -.80$  to  $r = +.64$ . Inspired by a similar discrepancy that we observed while analyzing the empirical data from two different projects, we investigated whether the researchers who contributed to the emotion expression-perception literature used different instructions to elicit emotional expressions from their participants. We found that some researchers asked their participants to express emotions by posing—an instruction that provides participants with a clear performance goal—while other researchers elicited spontaneous emotions by showing participants emotionally-charged materials such as disgusting imagery. A meta-analysis of 40 studies revealed that these different emotion expression conditions explained why different researchers reached different conclusions about the relationship between the legible expression and the accurate identification of emotional expressions. Researchers reported positive associations between expression and perception skill ( $\bar{r} = .19$ ) when they asked their participants to express emotions by posing, but reported no positive relationship when they studied spontaneous emotions ( $\bar{r} = -.08$ ). We argue that participants' expression abilities are revealed when they are given a clear performance goal of intentionally expressing their emotions, but eliciting spontaneous emotions primarily taps into how naturally expressive people are. Our meta-analysis is now in press in the top-tier *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Elfenbein & Eisenkraft, *in press*).

Hillary Anger Elfenbein, Sigal Barsade, and I have also been studying observer ratings of emotional intelligence. Some researchers believe emotional intelligence is an ability that should be measured with objective tests, while other researchers believe emotional intelligence is a personality trait that should be measured with self-report questionnaires. Our paper on this topic (Elfenbein, Barsade, & Eisenkraft, *revise and resubmit, Journal of Applied Psychology*) argues that observer-ratings of emotional intelligence provide a common ground between these two perspectives: if meaningful differences in emotional intelligence are visible to others, people should be able to differentiate the emotionally inept from the emotionally skilled, regardless of whether emotional intelligence is best conceptualized as an ability or as a personality trait. Data from thousands of participants suggest that observer-ratings are a reliable and valid indicator of emotional intelligence. We also found that observer-ratings of emotional

intelligence predict performance ratings from participants' real-world supervisors better than the self-report personality questionnaires.

### **Future Directions**

In the future, I hope to extend my current research program in three ways. First, I want to continue many of the research streams described above. Our early efforts have taught my coauthors and me much about trait affective presence, individual differences in negotiations, accuracy in social network perception, and emotional intelligence, but each investigation has also raised new questions about how these constructs influence organizational life. I want to answer those questions. Second, I am interested in starting new research streams on reputations, the structure and evolution of social networks, and racial diversity. I believe that a dyad-oriented perspective that draws from research in social psychology may provide new insights into our understanding of these and other topics relevant to organizational behavior. Third, I plan to conduct more research in the field. Although we have learned a great deal by surveying MBA students and conducting laboratory research, I believe that some of our upcoming research questions are best addressed by studying the perceptions, interactions, and performance of people in organizations.

More generally, I look forward to building additional new collaborative relationships with faculty and graduate students. I love analyzing data, designing studies, and exchanging ideas with my colleagues and am always happy to help my colleagues with their research. For example, when I wrote software programs that made collecting and analyzing my own data more convenient, I was delighted that my colleagues saved time and money by using the programs to collect and analyze data for their own research projects and dissertations (even though this often meant hours on the phone doing tech support). And, whenever I had a question or thought about pursuing a new research project, I always benefited greatly from the advice of my colleagues and collaborators. I do my best research when I am working with other people and I hope to continue and expand my collaborations in the future.