Chapter 7
Self-Monitoring Scale

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ABSTRACT

Self-monitoring represents a social psychological construct of expressive behavior and self-presentation. The original 25-item Self-Monitoring Scale was developed by Snyder (1974) to measure the extent to which individuals differ in their use of social cues to guide behavior. High self-monitors tailor their behavior to fit the social context and make a good impression (Snyder, 1979). Low self-monitors are less responsive to situational and interpersonal cues (Snyder & Cantor, 1980). Social psychologists were the earliest users of the Self-Monitoring Scale, but its use has expanded to include researchers studying organizational behavior, group and organizational management, consumer marketing, and human relations. Researchers report a relationship between self-monitoring and impression management, leader emergence, career success, and citizenship behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

Self-monitoring is a social psychological construct of expressive behavior and self-presentation (Snyder 1974, 1979). In organizational life, people portray images of themselves that they believe will make a good impression on others. High self-monitors are characterized as individuals who pay close attention to social cues and modify their behavior to fit the situation whereas low self-monitors do not vary their behavior much across different situations (Baumeister & Twenge, 2003). The original Self-Monitoring Scale is a set of 25 true-false statements that were developed by Snyder (1974) to measure the extent to which individuals differ in their use of social cues to monitor and regulate their expressive behavior and self-presentation (Snyder, 1979).

In this chapter, we highlight self-monitoring as an important individual difference character-
istic for researchers and consultants to consider when studying people in organizations. First, we examine the background of the self-monitoring construct and the development of the original 25-item Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder, 1974). We discuss some of the reasons why people engage in self-monitoring behaviors, how high and low self-monitors differ, the way researchers can measure self-monitoring, and how to use the scale. We also share what the critics have to say about the original Self-Monitoring Scale, and how self-monitoring behaviors influence factors associated with organizational settings. Next, we provide information on the reliability and validity of the Self-Monitoring Scale, results, commentary, costs, location, additional readings, and key terms.

We present self-monitoring as a relevant construct in organizational research because self-monitoring behaviors influence the way individuals differ when they are engaged in a variety of situations in organizational life. While there are a growing number of studies that have examined the influence of self-monitoring on organizational variables, we believe more empirical research on self-monitoring will help researchers and consultants gain a better understanding of how self-monitoring behaviors influence the way people interact and influence organizational outcomes.

BACKGROUND

Is Life a Theater, the Entire World a Stage, and People Merely Players?

James (1890) asserted that people show a different side of themselves to different groups of people, and Goffman (1955, 1959, 1963, 1967) compared social interactions to theatrical performances where people take the stage and act out their lives in the presence of others. When people interact, they attempt to present themselves in a manner that others expect and approve. The social life as a stage metaphor portrays life as a theater where there are differences between public appearance and private reality (Snyder, 1979).

The extent to which people monitor social context cues and tailor their behavior to fit the social environment explains self-monitoring behaviors (Jawahar, 2001; Snyder, 1979). When individuals self-monitor their behaviors, they attempt to control the impressions that they make on others through their social interactions (Snyder, 1979). Self-monitors use social cues to guide their selection of and judgment regarding the appropriateness of expressive behaviors. As social roles and expectations become salient, their self-presentations shift from situation to situation (Gordon & Gergen, 1968; Snyder, 1979). Self-monitored behaviors are intentionally selected to convey a favorable social identity in each social setting or interpersonal context (Alexander & Knight, 1971; Alexander & Lauderdale, 1977; Alexander & Sagatun, 1973; Snyder, 1979).

In order to create a desired image in the eyes of beholders during social interactions, self-monitors also attempt to manage or control their verbal and nonverbal self-presentations (Snyder, 1979). Effective social and interpersonal functioning requires that people possess some ability to manage and control their expressive behaviors (Snyder, 1974). Expressive behaviors include both verbal and nonlanguage behaviors and communication. Nonlanguage behaviors include voluntarily expressed behaviors as well as uncensored behaviors. Uncensored behaviors represent involuntary expressions whereas the behaviors that are purposefully selected and controlled represent deliberate and self-managed expressions. Ekman (2003) explained, “if we try to control what we do and say, it will be a struggle between our deliberate voluntary efforts and our involuntary emotional behavior” (p. 53).