

time soon. To summarize our view in one statement, clearly defined constructs and specific situations are the currency of SJTs.

References

- Bledow, R., & Frese, M. (2009). A situational judgment test of personal initiative and its relationship to performance. *Personnel Psychology, 62*, 229–258.
- Chen, L. (2009). *Cheng xin de ben zhi, ping jia he ying xiang ji zhi: Yan jiu shi jiao xia de zhong xi fang cheng xin* [The nature, assessment, and mechanisms of integrity: A research perspective to integrity in Chinese and Western societies]. Beijing, P. R. China: Economic Science Press.
- Kaptein, M. (1999). Integrity management. *European Management Journal, 17*, 625–634.
- Lievens, F., & Motowidlo, S. J. (2016). Situational judgment tests: From measures of situational judgment to measures of general domain knowledge. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice, 9*, 3–22.
- McDaniel, M. A., Morgeson, F. P., Finnegan, E. B., Campion, M. A., & Braverman, E. P. (2001). Use of situational judgment tests to predict job performance: A clarification of literature. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*, 730–740.
- Meijer, L. A. L., Born, M., Zielst, J. V., & Molen, H. T. (2010). Construct-driven development of a video-based situational judgment test for integrity: A study in a multi-ethnic police setting. *European Psychologist, 15*, 229–236.
- Motowidlo, S. J., & Beier, M. E. (2010). Differentiating specific job knowledge from implicit trait policies in procedural knowledge measured by a situational judgment test. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 95*, 321–333.
- Mumford, T. V., Iddekinge, C. H. V., Morgeson, F. P., & Campion, M. A. (2008). The team role test: Development and validation of a team role knowledge situational judgment test. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93*, 250–267.
- Sharma, S., Gangopadhyay, M., Austin, E., & Mandal, M. K. (2013). Development and validation of a situational judgment test of emotional intelligence. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment, 21*, 57–83.
- Weekley, J. A., & Ployhart, R. E. (2005). Situational judgment: Antecedents and relationships with performance. *Human Performance, 18*, 81–104.

Reinvigorating the Concept of a Situation in Situational Judgment Tests

Nicolas A. Brown, Ashley Bell Jones, David G. Serfass, and Ryne A. Sherman
Florida Atlantic University

What is the role of the *situation* in situational judgment tests (SJTs)?
Lievens and Motowidlo (2016) assert that SJTs are somewhat of a misnomer

Nicolas A. Brown, Ashley Bell Jones, David G. Serfass, and Ryne A. Sherman, Department of Psychology, Florida Atlantic University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Nicolas A. Brown, Department of Psychology, Florida Atlantic University, 777 Glades Road, Boca Raton, FL 33433. E-mail: nbrown60@fau.edu

because they do not actually measure how individuals would behave in a given situation per se. According to these researchers, SJTs assess general domain knowledge—whether potential employees recognize the “utility of expressing certain traits” (p. 4). As a result, SJTs map onto personality measures, which are a summary of behavior across time and situations. SJTs provide predictive validity in part because they tap into personality. However, rather than renaming SJTs, it is possible to reintroduce the concept of a situation to provide even greater predictive power. Thus, the goals of this commentary are to (a) clarify what constitutes a situation, (b) describe what SJTs might actually measure, and (c) set forth a path for a taxonomy of workplace situations.

What Are Situations?

For decades, and without much evidence, psychologists claimed that “situations” were the primary determinant of human behavior. Because aspects of the individual, such as personality, only weakly predicted behavior in any given situation, it was assumed that the situation itself was the source of behavioral variability. This “person–situation” debate was resolved in part by demonstrating that both persons and situations are necessary to understand behavior (Funder, 2006). However, the question remains: *How* do situations affect behavior? Rauthmann, Sherman, and Funder (2015b) proposed that situations consist of three types of information: cues, characteristics, and classes.

Cues refer to raw physical stimuli in the environment. As such, they are objective and easily quantified (e.g., the number of people present; temperature of the room). By definition, cues have no intrinsic meaning and must be perceived to have meaning.

Characteristics refer to psychologically meaningful interpretations of cues that have been processed (either implicitly or explicitly). As such, characteristics are used to describe situations much in the same way that personality dimensions are used to describe persons (e.g., is potentially anxiety inducing). In social-psychological parlance, characteristics fall under the categories of formal rules/laws (e.g., designated nonsmoking areas), norms (e.g., no cutting in line), expectations (e.g., talking is expected on an interview), or threats (e.g., a negative performance review from the manager). Recent empirical work on situation characteristics indicates that everyday human situations might be broadly described by eight dimensions (Rauthmann et al., 2014). The so-called DIAMONDS dimensions are Duty (Does a job need to be completed?), Intellect (Is there aesthetic stimuli?), Adversity (Is someone being criticized or blamed?), Mating (Are potential romantic partners present?), pOSitivity (Is the situation enjoyable?), Negativity (Is the

situation stressful?), Deception (Is someone being deceitful?), and Sociality (Is there an opportunity to form close relationships with others?).

Because characteristics require processing and psychological meaning making, they are less objective than are cues. Therefore, self-reports of situation characteristics contain both consensual (i.e., shared interpretations of rules, norms, expectations, and/or threats) and idiosyncratic (i.e., distinct interpretations of rules, norms, expectations, and/or threats) components. Empirically, the data indicate that people largely agree about what situations are like (i.e., consensus is quite high; Rauthmann, 2012; Serfass & Sherman, 2013) and that individual differences in situation perceptions are related to personality in theoretically predictable ways (Serfass & Sherman, 2013; Sherman, Nave, & Funder, 2013).

Classes refer to types of situations: constellations or patterns of cues and/or characteristics that frequently co-occur. As such, situation classes are quite useful for quickly conveying broad information about situations. For example, the situation “in a meeting with the manager” provides quick information about what that situation is probably like (i.e., high on Duty). However, classes often leave important characteristics unknown. Is the manager criticizing me (Adversity)? Can I trust what the manager is saying (Deception)? Thus, although situation cues and classes are important, characteristics are the psychologically meaningful interpretations of situations and are the most useful for predicting behavior (Rauthmann et al., 2015b).

Situations in Situational Judgment Tests

Items on SJTs contain situation cues (e.g., relevant stimuli present on the job) and classes (e.g., types of situations one experiences while working). For example, an SJT item that presents a problem that might be encountered at the workplace—you noticing a coworker stealing company resources—contains situation *cues* (e.g., a person; a laptop; a desk; the boss is not present) and situation *classes* (e.g., a workplace theft situation). Importantly, SJTs also contain situation *characteristics*, and an individual's perception and interpretation of an SJT item determines his or her response to the item. In the foregoing example, if a person perceives the situation as one in which something is being undermined or sabotaged and perceives that he or she is counted on to do something about it, the person will take action. However, if the person perceives the situation as one that arouses competing motivations and/or as including pressure to conform to the actions of others, then the response will be quite different. Such differential perceptions of situations are predicted by personality (Serfass & Sherman, 2013; Sherman et al., 2013). Moreover, the foregoing example is consistent with the fact that SJTs retain their predictive validity even when situations are “decapitated” from their respective items (Lievens & Motowidlo).

Personality is driving the behavioral response irrespective of the situation (cf. Sherman, Rauthmann, Brown, Serfass, & Jones, 2015).

What Are Workplace Situations?

What do we know about workplace situations? First, we know that workplace situations impact organizational behavior (Johns, 2006). However, such knowledge does not tell us much about *how* workplace situations impact behavior. What are the psychological characteristics on which workplaces differ? What are the important dimensions of workplace situations? To these questions we would make two points. First, it is essential to distinguish between workplace situations and workplace environments (Rauthmann, Sherman, & Funder, 2015a). *Workplace situations* are concrete, short in duration, and quite unstable and dynamic. A meeting with the manager, a Skype call with a client, and a coffee break with a coworker are all examples of workplace situations. In contrast, *workplace environments* are abstract, long in duration, and quite stable. An oil rig, a pharmacy, and a retail store are all examples of workplace environments.

Second, the DIAMONDS taxonomy offers a relatively comprehensive account of the most essential dimensions of workplace situations. Meetings with the manager that are characterized by Adversity are quite different from those that are characterized by Sociality. Thus, the DIAMONDS taxonomy may be quite useful for describing differences in workplace situations within a given workplace environment. The DIAMONDS taxonomy may be less useful for describing differences between different workplace environments. For example, nearly every workplace environment is characterized by Duty (i.e., a job needs to be done). Fortunately, the essential taxonomy for characterizing workplace environments—Holland's (1966) RIASEC model—is already well-known. However, because persistent and enduring workplace environments are directly related to workplace situations, there is some expectation that workplace environments as characterized by the RIASEC will inherently include more workplace situations characterized by specific DIAMONDS dimensions. For example, consider a job in the Investigative–Realistic–Enterprising cluster, such as a chemist. A typical workplace situation for a chemist may afford opportunities for working with intellectual stimuli (Intellect) and fewer opportunities for interpersonal interaction (Sociality). In contrast, a job in the Social–Artistic–Conventional cluster, such as childcare worker, affords many opportunities for social interaction (Sociality).

Conclusion

SJTs are useful for employee selection, but why they are effective is not entirely clear. The target article (Lievens & Motowidlo) argues that these

questionnaires actually assess beliefs about the appropriateness of expressing certain traits in certain situations, and we are inclined to agree. Research using “decapitated” SJTs suggests that personality is partially driving the responses. Nonetheless, SJTs also seem to comprise situation characteristics, and these, in combination or interaction with personality, may jointly determine responses.

References

- Funder, D. C. (2006). Towards a resolution of the personality triad: Persons, situations, and behavior. *Journal of Research in Personality, 40*, 21–34.
- Holland, J. L. (1966). *The psychology of vocational choice*. Waltham, MA: Ginn.
- Johns, G. (2006). The essential impact of context on organizational behavior. *Academy of Management Review, 31*, 386–408.
- Lievens, F., & Motowidlo, S. J. (2016). Situational judgment tests: From measures of situational judgment to measures of general domain knowledge. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice, 9*, 3–22.
- Rauthmann, J. F. (2012). You say the party is dull, I say it’s lively: A componential approach to how situations are perceived to disentangle perceiver, situation, and perceiver × situation variance. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 3*, 519–528.
- Rauthmann, J. F., Gallardo-Pujol, D., Guillaume, E. M., Todd, E., Nave, C. N., Sherman, R. A., . . . Funder, D. C. (2014). The Situational Big Eight: Taxonomizing major dimensions of situation characteristics. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 107*, 677–718.
- Rauthmann, J. F., Sherman, R. A., & Funder, D. C. (2015a). New horizons in research on psychological situations and environments. *European Journal of Personality, 29*, 363–381.
- Rauthmann, J. F., Sherman, R. A., & Funder, D. C. (2015b). Principles of situation research: Towards a better understanding of psychological situations. *European Journal of Personality, 29*, 363–381.
- Serfass, D. G., & Sherman, R. A. (2013). Personality and the perceptions of situations from the Thematic Apperception Test. *Journal of Research in Personality, 47*, 708–718.
- Sherman, R. A., Nave, C. S., & Funder, D. C. (2013). Situational construal is related to personality and gender. *Journal of Research in Personality, 47*, 1–14.
- Sherman, R. A., Rauthmann, J. F., Brown, N. A., Serfass, D. G., & Jones, A. B. (2015). The independent effects of personality and situations on real-time expressions of behavior and emotion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 109*(5), 872–888.