

# Self-Monitoring at Work: A Motive-Based Perspective

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**ABSTRACT** It is argued that the recent study of personality in industrial and organizational (I-O) psychology is characterized by two limitations: (a) almost complete reliance on the Big Five to the exclusion of other personality variables (most notably, self-monitoring) and (b) insufficient theoretical attention paid to the criteria in work-related personality research. In an attempt to overcome both of these limitations, we review theoretical and empirical evidence for the relevance of self-monitoring in organizational life, with particular attention paid to the criteria grounded in socioanalytic theory of *getting along*, *getting ahead*, and *making sense*. Extant research indicates that high self-monitors are particularly good at getting along (e.g., meeting others' social expectations) and getting ahead (e.g., job performance and leadership emergence), but the evidence is more mixed with regard to making sense. We conclude with a discussion of practical concerns in considering the use of self-monitoring for managerial selection and a research agenda for the future to further elaborate a theory of self-monitoring at work.

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[S]elf presentation and impression management are not trivial party games. They are fundamental processes, rooted in our history as group-living animals. They are archaic, powerful, compulsive tendencies that are closely tied to our chances for survival and reproductive success.

(R. Hogan, Jones, & Cheek, 1985, p. 181)

Personality plays an important role at work. To best appreciate the many influences that personality—and particularly self-monitoring personality (Gangestad & Snyder, 1985; Snyder, 1974)—has in work contexts, it is important to understand how the role of personality has changed within the field of industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology. I-O can be described as a subdiscipline of general psychology that is devoted to the scientific study of work behavior. Over the past 15 years or so, there has been a renaissance in I-O regarding the relevance and importance of personality characteristics in predicting work-related behaviors and performance outcomes. Until the late 1980s (e.g., Day & Silverman, 1989), there was a prevalent belief that personality was of little consequence to individual work performance (e.g., Guion & Gottier, 1965). Fortunately, times have changed, and there is now abundant evidence for the robustness of many personality characteristics in understanding work-related attitudes, behavior, and outcomes.

In some respects it could be said that the pendulum might have swung too far to the other extreme with regard to personality, due largely to the emergence of the Big Five factors (Goldberg, 1990; John, 1990) and their subsequent widespread adoption in the I-O literature. Indeed, personality seems to be everywhere in I-O these days. Unfortunately, much of this work could be described as limited in two important ways. First, there has been nearly exclusive reliance on the Five-Factor Model of personality, which has served to largely exclude all of those “other” personality characteristics that do not fit neatly into any one Big Five factor. In fact, some have gone so far as to herald Conscientiousness as the “Big One” (e.g., Schmidt & Hunter, 1992), second only to cognitive ability in predicting work performance across all job types, at all levels, and in all kinds of organizations. This rise in prominence of Conscientiousness as a ubiquitous predictor of all things work-related has resulted in an overly narrow focus on personality as it applies to performance in work settings.

Nearly lost in all of this Big Five (and Big One) hoopla are other personality constructs that have a long history of both basic and applied research and demonstrated psychometric properties and hold much promise for improving the prediction and understanding of work behavior. At the top of such a list is self-monitoring. Given the nature of organizations and the social and interpersonal focus of self-monitoring (both of which are elaborated upon in a later section), this personality variable is especially relevant to understanding the attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes that constitute the primary criterion domains in organizational settings.

A second limitation of much of the contemporary personality research in I-O is that it has paid insufficient attention to *criteria*, something that has hindered progress in the development of theories of personality at work. In understanding how and why personality variables are relevant to (i.e., demonstrate predictive validity in) work settings, what is first needed is an articulation of the criterion space associated with individual work success. Traditionally, success has been defined in terms of task performance or contributing to the technical core of an organization, and more recently also in terms of contextual performance or contributing to the social context (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993; Conway, 1999). Contextual performance has also been construed in terms of organizational citizenship behaviors that are enacted by individuals (Organ & Paine, 1999). There has, in fact, been some research that has differentially linked personality to these two broad categories of criteria. In general, such research has demonstrated that personality may be more predictive of contextual performance than task aspects (e.g., Caligiuri & Day, 2000; Hatrup, O'Connell, & Wingate, 1998).

However, a potentially more interesting and theoretically rich perspective on individual career success is grounded in socioanalytic theory (R. Hogan, 1983, 1991; R. Hogan et al., 1985), which assumes that there are three broad motive patterns in life and work. These motives are presumed to be innate biological drives that have their origins in evolution and reproductive success (R. Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). At a very basic level, R. Hogan asserts that individuals have needs for (a) acceptance and approval; (b) status, power, and the control of resources; and (c) predictability and order. These general motive patterns translate into behaviors designed for *getting along* with other members of the group, *getting*

*ahead* in terms of achieving status, and *making sense* of the world. Taken together, the extent to which an individual has been able to get along, get ahead, and make sense can be used as markers of career success. Interestingly, although most people try to get along, get ahead, and make sense at work, it has been noted that “there are substantial individual differences in how their efforts are evaluated by others” (J. Hogan & Holland, 2003). Self-monitoring may, in part, account for these differences. Thus, the primary purpose of the present study is to review what theory and research suggest in terms of how high and low self-monitors, respectively, are able to get along, get ahead, and make sense of their organizational worlds.

An overarching goal of the present article is to contribute to advancing a theory of self-monitoring at work. In service of that goal, the remainder of the article is organized into four sections: (a) a juxtaposition with the nature of organizational work to better illustrate the theoretical relevance of self-monitoring; (b) a review of recent meta-analytic findings regarding the work-related attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes that have been reliably linked to self-monitoring; (c) an elaboration of these findings and corresponding directions for future research with regard to the criterion space of getting along, getting ahead, and making sense; and finally (d) the implications and potential concerns associated with the use of self-monitoring in organizational practice and research.

### **SELF-MONITORING AND THE NATURE OF ORGANIZATIONS**

Self-monitoring has been offered as a theory of expressive control, specifically, as a construct that is useful for understanding and measuring the extent to which individuals “strategically cultivate public appearances” (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000, p. 530). High self-monitors tend to be social pragmatists who are chameleon-like in adjusting the public expression of their attitudes and behavior to fit with the expectations of others. High self-monitors are also likely to construct and project images with the goal of impressing others—termed a *status enhancement motive* by Gangestad and Snyder. Conversely, low self-monitors are likely to attempt actively to convey to others that they present no false images. Low self-monitors appear to be both less willing and less able to project impressions that are

different from their privately experienced self. In this sense, Gangestad and Snyder suggested that low self-monitors also care about their impressions, but only to the extent that the impression is a genuine reflection of self. As such, the low self-monitor may be operating under a self-validation motive and may tend to use impression management as a principled strategy of representing their “true self” to others.

The very nature of organizations as the typical context for work is especially relevant for the study of self-monitoring and for developing a theory of self-monitoring at work. As noted by Snyder and Copeland (1989), “Organizational settings provide the backdrop for observing a myriad of strategic self-presentation activities” (p. 7). Organizational work is characterized by exercises of power and authority, enacted and perceived leadership, job performance and performance assessment, attitude formation and expression, and, most important, relationships. Indeed, there is a relationship imperative at the heart of most, if not all, organizational work (Gabarro, 1987). All of these phenomena—and especially work relationships—influence and are influenced by the expressive control of individuals engaged in social interaction.

Establishing and maintaining effective work relationships allows for task coordination, information flow, and other work processes that are necessary for accomplishing the goals and objectives of an organization. In addition, relationships are central to many leadership functions, such as setting direction, building commitment, and creating alignment (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004). Put simply, work would not be accomplished (at least not effectively) without a foundation of networked relationships in an organization. Self-monitoring personality is an important construct in understanding how such relationships are formed and maintained.

### **EMPIRICAL LINKS BETWEEN SELF-MONITORING AND WORK-RELATED OUTCOMES**

The relevance of self-monitoring personality to performance in organizational settings was examined recently using meta-analytic procedures (Day, Schleicher, Unckless, & Hiller, 2002). A total of 136 data samples ( $N = 23,191$ ) were used to estimate the relationships between self-monitoring and various work-related constructs:

job attitudes (including organizational commitment, job satisfaction, job involvement, and role stressors), individual ability, job performance and advancement, and leadership. Conceptualizing the criterion domain in broad terms as compared with a narrow focus solely on performance outcomes is more descriptive of how individual employees contribute to the broader organizational mission (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Also considered were the relationships between self-monitoring and the demographic characteristics of age and sex. The major findings are briefly summarized below and in Table 1, organized by construct and focusing on the average corrected effect

**Table 1**  
Summary of Sample and Effect Sizes

Variable	<i>k</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>d</i> <sub>+</sub>	95% CI for <i>d</i> <sub>+</sub>		<i>r</i>	Corrected <i>r</i>
				Lower	Upper		
<b>Work-Related Correlates</b>							
Job involvement	4	326	0.36	0.21	0.52	.18	.22
Role conflict	5	628	0.25	0.14	0.36	.12	.17
Role ambiguity	5	628	0.35	0.24	0.46	.17	.24
<b>Organizational</b>							
commitment	15	1,878	-0.23	-0.29	-0.16	-.11	-.13
Job satisfaction	6	631	-0.09	-0.20	0.02	-.04	-.07
Job performance/ advancement	28	3,069	0.18	0.13	0.23	.09	.10
Ability	10	1,244	0.11	0.03	0.19	.06	.07
Leadership	23	2,777	0.37	0.32	0.43	.18	.21
<b>Demographic Correlates</b>							
Age	13	2,240	-0.13	-0.19	-0.07	-.07	-.08
Sex	21	2,921	0.22	0.17	0.27	.11	.13

*Note:* *k* = number of samples; *N* = total number of individuals across *k*; *d*<sub>+</sub> = mean sample-weighted effect size; CI = confidence interval; *r* = mean sample weighted correlation; corrected *r* = mean correlation corrected for measurement unreliability (only correlations associated with role conflict and role ambiguity corrected for criterion unreliability). Significant effects are indicated by confidence intervals that exclude zero. From "Self-monitoring Personality at Work: A Meta-analytic Investigation of Construct Validity" by D. V. Day, D. J. Schleicher, A. L. Unckless, and N. J. Hiller, 2002, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, **87**, p. 393. Copyright 2002 by the American Psychological Association. Adapted with permission.

size ( $r$ ), which is weighted by sample size and corrected for measurement error (where appropriate).

### *Job Attitudes*

Several work-related attitudes have been studied with respect to self-monitoring. One of the largest overall effects found across the identified attitudinal studies concerned job involvement. High self-monitors were more likely to report higher levels of job involvement, which has been defined as a generalized cognitive style of psychological identification with the job (Kanungo, 1982). An interpretation issue regarding this effect concerns whether reporting higher job involvement is an impression-management tactic, or whether it is a function of high self-monitors being more attuned to others in the workplace (i.e., other directedness). Although an unequivocal interpretation is not possible, other meta-analytic results suggest that high self-monitors are not distorting their attitude ratings in order to “look good” to researchers. The data on which this conclusion is based are discussed next.

Results also indicated that self-monitoring was positively related to role conflict and role ambiguity, suggesting that high self-monitors were more likely to experience (or report) greater role stress than low self-monitors. These findings may help to rule out the possibility of an impression-management strategy at work in the responses, given that it would generally be more desirable to project an impression of low stress rather than high stress on the job. Being stressed does not project a positive image or enhance one's status.

A relatively large number of studies investigated a relationship between self-monitoring and organizational commitment. The finding that high self-monitors reported lower organizational commitment is consistent with the literature from basic social psychology showing that high self-monitors often report lower levels of interpersonal commitment and less stable social bonds (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000).

The results for job satisfaction indicated a weak, negative relationship with self-monitoring. Unlike the results for the other attitudinal variables, the 95% confidence interval for the estimated effect size included zero, suggesting that there is no reliable relationship between self-monitoring and job satisfaction. If questionnaire responses were distorted to project a favorable impression, it

would be expected that high self-monitors would report greater job satisfaction (in addition to stronger commitment and lower stress). Although high self-monitors appear to be more involved in their jobs than lows, they experience greater stress and lower organizational commitment, while showing no difference in terms of satisfaction. Taken together, these results suggest that high self-monitors do not intentionally try to present favorable impressions or project positive images when completing scale measures.

### *Job Performance and Advancement*

The criterion category of job performance and advancement probably provides the purest assessment of the relationship between self-monitoring and getting ahead at work. The overall effect indicated a positive and robust (i.e., non-zero) relationship. Supplemental moderator analyses indicated a significantly stronger effect for subjective ( $r = .15$ ) than for objective ( $r = .03$ ) measures of performance and advancement. Although an unequivocal interpretation of these results is again not possible, they are in line with a basic tenet of self-monitoring theory that high self-monitors are especially proficient at and inclined to use impression-management tactics (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Effective impression-management tactics may increase an evaluator's liking of the employee, resulting in inflated performance ratings (Villanova & Bernardin, 1989). Other meta-analytic research, however, has found a very low overall correlation ( $r = .04$ ) between impression management scale scores from personality inventories and overall managerial performance (Viswesvaran, Ones, & Hough, 2001). These findings suggest that it is possible that factors other than impression management may be responsible for the higher correlation between self-monitoring and subjective performance ratings, including the possibilities that (a) subjective measures take into account more interpersonal or contextual information, which is particularly well-suited for high self-monitors given their noted strengths, or (b) objective indices of performance have poorer reliability, greater contamination, or larger deficiencies than subjective ratings (e.g., Landy & Farr, 1980). However, an equally plausible explanation is that high self-monitors are better at managing impressions and projecting a favorable self-image than members of the general population.



*Individual Ability*

An issue that has received relatively little attention to date concerns the possibility that self-monitoring correlates with individual differences in cognitive ability. Are high self-monitors smarter than lows (or vice versa)? Examining this possibility helps to shed light on whether the noted relationship between self-monitoring and job performance is due to impression management or possibly also a function of ability differences. Ten studies were included in the meta-analysis that investigated the relationship between self-monitoring and ability measures such as grade point average, cognitive ability or intelligence test scores, and problem-solving performance. The results revealed a relatively small but robust effect, suggesting that high self-monitors have generally higher levels of intellectual ability than low self-monitors. Of course, it is impossible to infer causality from this correlational finding, and it is possible that some third variable (e.g., level of cognitive development) is driving this relationship. High self-monitors may have a more inclusive perspective on the world, which has been proposed by at least one developmental theorist (e.g., Kegan, 1994) as an indicator of more advanced cognitive development.

*Leadership*

Although leadership is one of the most extensively studied topics in I-O psychology, the construct can be conceptualized and measured in many different ways (R. Hogan, Curphy, & J. Hogan, 1994). One important distinction that is especially relevant for the present discussion is between leadership emergence and leadership effectiveness (Lord, De Vader, & Alliger, 1986). Leadership emergence is based on the extent to which an individual is viewed as a leader by others and is, therefore, inherently tied to others' perceptions. Leadership effectiveness, on the other hand, is typically conceptualized in terms of team, group, or organizational performance. The leadership outcomes included in the Day et al. (2002) meta-analysis were all based on self- or other ratings and thus could be most accurately described as studies of leader emergence. Although some researchers have suggested that job performance ratings constitute practical measures of leadership effectiveness (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002),

this potentially confounds the independent constructs of job performance and leadership.

Meta-analytic results revealed a positive relationship between self-monitoring and leadership emergence with the 95% confidence interval around this effect, excluding zero. From this finding it can be concluded that high self-monitors are seen as more leader-like in the eyes of others than are low self-monitors, possibly because they manage impressions so that their public images match with critical features of followers' leadership prototypes (Leary, 1989; Lord & Maher, 1991). Research is needed that directly examines the relationship between leader self-monitoring and team, group, or organizational performance (i.e., leadership effectiveness).

### *Demographic Characteristics*

The relationship between self-monitoring and the demographic characteristics of age and sex were also examined by Day et al. (2002) because of the implications such relationships may have for selection, promotion, and interactions in the workplace. Results suggested a robust, negative correlation with age. Although it may be tempting to conclude that as people age, they become more likely to manifest the motives of self-validation rather than status enhancement (i.e., act more like a low self-monitor), it must be remembered that these are cross-sectional results. True longitudinal studies are needed to draw the stronger inference that aging causes changes in self-monitoring.

A potentially more interesting and practically meaningful relationship was found between self-monitoring and respondent sex, indicating that men had higher average self-monitoring scores than women. Although care must be taken when interpreting this finding, given the relatively small (albeit robust) effect—and that there are likely to be larger within-sex than between-sex differences in self-monitoring—it does raise the specter of harmful effects on the career progress of women when considered across all organizational levels. Meta-analytic results point to advantages for high self-monitors in terms of better performance ratings and a greater likelihood to emerge as leaders and to findings that men tend to be higher in self-monitoring than women.

Taken together, these findings suggest that both men and high self-monitors are advantaged in organizations and thus would tend

to be overrepresented in senior management positions. It has been shown through computer models that relatively small effects associated with sex differences in promotion can have a demonstrable (and detrimental) influence on the career progress of women (Martell, Lane, & Emrich, 1996). If progression into middle management is mainly a function of likeability and a perceived ability to work with senior management (R. Hogan et al., 1994), high self-monitors (and men) appear to have a competitive advantage in the promotional tournaments of organizations. An issue that will be explored in more detail shortly concerns the implications of having an overrepresentation of high self-monitors in upper management.

Based on the results of the Day et al. (2002) meta-analysis, an empirically based picture emerges of the self-monitoring personality at work. In general, high self-monitors (in comparison to low self-monitors) tend to be more involved in their jobs, have higher levels of cognitive ability, perform at a higher level, are rated as better managers, and are more likely to emerge as leaders. Based on this positive picture of the high self-monitor, a question might be asked as to why any organization would ever want to hire a low self-monitor (given a choice). In terms of positive outcomes, low self-monitors were only found to have lower levels of reported role stress and stronger commitment to the organization.

If high self-monitors are generally preferred in organizations, should one of the self-monitoring scales (i.e., Gangestad & Snyder, 1985; Lennox & Wolfe, 1984; Snyder, 1974) be used as a tool for employment screening? The short answer is twofold: (a) Research indicates that high self-monitors are indeed more highly associated with effectual work-related outcomes than low self-monitors, but (b) that does not necessarily mean that organizations should use self-monitoring as part of their preemployment (or promotion-based) testing. Part of the latter issue has to do with the often contentious and litigious nature of employment testing, but perhaps more important, self-monitoring research has not adequately addressed all aspects of the criterion space that defines success. Specifically, the criterion aspect of "making sense" has been largely overlooked in the work-related research on self-monitoring. This aspect is reviewed in greater detail below, along with a more elaborated discussion of the criterion space for self-monitoring in general.

## ELABORATING THE CRITERION SPACE OF SUCCESS

### *Getting Along*

According to both theory and research, high self-monitors have an edge in terms of getting along at work because their interpersonal style is adaptive and flexible. High self-monitors are motivated to meet the expectations of others, which is also likely to enhance their likeability. It has been argued that likeability is a key variable that is associated with progression into middle management (R. Hogan et al., 1994); thus, there is an inherent link between getting along and getting ahead in organizations.

This does not mean that low self-monitors do not or cannot get along at work. Rather, it is more likely that they will be less motivated to project a likeable image of themselves at the expense of projecting a genuine self-image. This self-validation presentation strategy might be effective if the target is also a low self-monitor and if his or her values are aligned with those of the actor. However, because high self-monitors are more likely to get ahead in organizations (see below) it is more likely that those holding superior positions would tend to be high self-monitors. In such cases, there is a risk of a negative tie (in the terminology of social networks; Day & Kilduff, 2003) in which one person holds a negative affective judgment of another.

Negative ties are the source of dislike between parties. The low self-monitor's lack of flexibility may seem like an overly rigid or dogmatic interpersonal approach to the high self-monitor boss. Because the low self-monitor refuses to play the impression-management game, it could irritate those who value projecting a positive self-image to others as an end in itself. What this means is that the low self-monitor has a much narrower set of conditions under which he or she will come across as likeable. That is the risk associated with a more principled strategy of representing a genuine picture of the self to others, as compared with a more "universally" favorable one. Although this particular interpersonal style is unlikely to enhance likeability (i.e., getting along), it might facilitate others' efforts at making sense of the low self-monitor and the interpersonal world in general (a possibility explored in greater detail in a later section).

It is also worth noting that the interpersonal style of the high self-monitor involves a similar trade-off as with the low self-monitor but with different outcomes. As the high self-monitoring leader attempts

to make accommodations for multiple, and perhaps competing, demands of different constituencies, the flux of changing positions and perspectives might make it difficult for the subordinates of the high self-monitoring leader to anticipate his or her reactions and expectations. But to the extent that the interpersonal expectations of others are aligned rather than misaligned, the behavior of high self-monitors would also be generally predictable (Bedeian & Day, 2004). For example, most people want others to be friendly and supportive, open and engaging. High self-monitors are better at tailoring their self-presentations in ways that meet these expectations.

### *Getting Ahead*

At the core of getting ahead is status achievement—acquiring status, power, and control of resources. Meta-analytic results indicate that high self-monitors are more adept than low self-monitors at achieving status through better performance (especially better performance ratings) and through being perceived as leaders. Performing well and emerging as leaders, in addition to getting along with others, will likely contribute to faster rates of promotion, a prediction that is corroborated by the findings of previous research (Kilduff & Day, 1994). Meta-analytic findings related to organizational commitment also suggest that high self-monitors are better at getting ahead, in the sense that the results indicate that high self-monitors are relatively unconstrained in pursuing alternatives in the same or at other organizations. The willingness to relocate or change organizations is often necessary for continued progression up the corporate ladder. Because early success in promotional tournaments in organizations contributes to moving up the corporate hierarchy more quickly and is therefore related to the ultimate career trajectory of individuals, it is reasonable to predict that upper management would likely be overrepresented with high self-monitors despite their constituting only about 40% of the overall population (Gangestad & Snyder, 1985; Kilduff, 1992). What are the implications of such a trend?

The good news is that the high self-monitoring members of upper management should be relatively socially astute, and given the relationship imperative in organizations, this may facilitate the enactment of behaviors that develop the social capital in an organization. This is important because social capital has been shown to be a key driver of organizational performance (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998;

Sparrowe, Liden, Wayne, & Kraimer, 2001; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). But there is a potential downside to this: Where does the strategic direction (i.e., the mission) of the firm originate? How are ethical issues construed and negotiated? What provides for consistency in the thinking and behavior of senior management? Put more simply, who or what provides the rudder for a ship that is captained by those who look to others for cues on what to think and believe and how to present themselves? What are the implications of individual status enhancement on organizational identity, reputation, and image, which have been proposed as key attributes of organizational effectiveness (Day, 2001)? If those at the top are mainly concerned with promoting favorable individual impressions, then who is steering the ship?

A fundamental paradox in organizations may be that it takes the self-enhancement motive that guides high self-monitors to get ahead, whereas the self-validation motives of a low self-monitor are most needed to perform effectively once the top has been reached. Getting along may contribute to getting ahead into senior management. Indeed, research on leader derailment has indicated that the most prevalent reason why otherwise successful executives fail to reach senior management positions is interpersonal insensitivity (McCall & Lombardo, 1983). However, once an executive has “arrived” in senior management, it may be the ability to make sense of strategic (and ethical) issues that keeps a leader and that leader’s organization ahead.

### *Making Sense*

What it takes to make sense in work-related endeavors has not received the same level of attention in applied research as the other aspects (motives) associated with affiliation (getting along) and achievement (getting ahead). Karl Weick’s (1995) work on sense making in organizations helps to inform this domain but is not identical to it. R. Hogan and Warrenfeltz (2003) noted that the motivation to make sense is rooted in human needs for predictability and control. Conversely, Weick’s notion of sense making is based on several fundamental mental processing principles, including that sense making is retrospective, social, ongoing, and grounded in identity construction. Whereas R. Hogan and Warrenfeltz conceptualized making sense from a socioanalytic perspective based on

individual motives and needs, Weick approaches sense making as a relational process that is generated as a function of the interpersonal context.

From a socioanalytic perspective, a question might be raised regarding whether the high or low self-monitor is better at making sense. It may be that both orientations express motives dealing with predictability and control, but in very different ways. Because the making-sense motive has not received as much attention as the others, we intend to elaborate on its meaning and manifestations from both the perspective of the actor (e.g., leader) as well as the observer (e.g., followers).

Demonstrating consistent attitudes and behavior is one way to enhance predictability. The results reported by Gangestad and Snyder (2000) demonstrated that one of the categories of phenomena most strongly related to a central self-monitoring axis is behavioral variability. High self-monitors are more variable in their behavior across situations than are low self-monitors. On the positive side, this can contribute to behavioral flexibility and promote managerial adaptation. On the negative side, this same behavioral variability can be seen by others as unpredictability. Followers, in particular, look to their leaders to set direction and provide support. Perceived inconsistencies in how—or if—these leadership responsibilities are accomplished can undermine followers' confidence in a leader and reduce their trust and commitment. In order to be effective as a leader, someone must first be perceived as a leader (Lord & Maher, 1991). Behavioral inconsistency weakens leadership perceptions and presents additional obstacles to effective performance.

This enhanced behavioral variability on the part of high self-monitors contributes to their tendency to be socially pragmatic (Leone, this issue). That is, their social behavior is driven by the pragmatics of the interpersonal environment. High self-monitors will pretty much do whatever it takes to enhance their social appearance in a given situation. This raises the possibility that they may also be ethically pragmatic. High self-monitors tend to look to others to determine what to believe and how to act. As such, they are susceptible to unethical influences—although they would also be likely to conform to ethical behavior if that were the prevailing social norm in an organization. This also does not mean that low self-monitors will universally act in an ethical manner. If their guiding principle of self is to win at all costs (for example), it would likely lead to taking

advantage of others on a regular basis (Bedeian & Day, 2004). Nonetheless, the meta-analytic results reviewed previously indicate that the low self-monitor is more comfortable with ambiguity at work than is the high self-monitor (Day et al., 2002). Ethical dilemmas are inherently ambiguous. The research and theory on self-monitoring indicates that the high self-monitor will look to others for clues on how to think or behave when confronted with an ethical dilemma, whereas the low self-monitor will rely on his or her own set of internalized values and beliefs in similar situations.

A question to consider is which type of orientation would be preferred in top executive positions? Organization members would likely feel more comfortable with an executive who models his or her own values in setting the ethical climate—someone who makes sense of ethical issues by applying his or her own values set to the dilemma. A CEO or other top executive who must rely on others to determine which particular ethical values to portray puts the organization in a potentially vulnerable position. Yet there is reason to believe that high self-monitors are likely to be overrepresented in top management positions (Day & Kilduff, 2003; Kilduff & Day, 1994).

In terms of making sense of work-related issues, the quality and type of information that is available is of critical concern. Access to information is largely a function of one's position level in an organization, but also of one's position in the social networks that comprise an organization (Scott, 2000). Research has demonstrated that individuals who connect disconnected others in a network tend to gain both information and control benefits (Burt, 1992). Individuals who have network ties with others who are already connected will mostly have access to redundant information; thus, they will not be able to take advantage of entrepreneurial opportunities that become available in the social environment. Other research has shown that the more central one's position in an informal organizational communication network, the greater the social influence and the better the likelihood of being promoted (Brass, 1984). There are distinct structural advantages to occupying certain network positions that provide greater influence and more diverse information for making sense, which translates into more opportunities for getting ahead.

The notion that individuals actively construct their social networks has only recently begun receiving empirical attention. The role of self-monitoring orientation on network position and workplace performance was the focus of one such recent study (Mehra, Kilduff,



& Brass, 2001). Mehra et al. found in a sample of 116 employees of a high-technology company that high self-monitors were more likely than low self-monitors to occupy central positions in their social networks, which was shown to predict independently individuals' workplace performance (in addition to self-monitoring scores). As noted by the authors, the results "paint a picture of people shaping the networks that constrain and enable performance" (p. 121). High self-monitors appear to have access to the kinds of diverse information needed to make sense of various opportunities that contribute to better individual and group performance (Sparrowe et al., 2001) as well as long-term career success (Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001).

### *Summary*

In articulating the criterion space of managerial success based on the socioanalytic perspective (J. Hogan & Holland, 2003; R. Hogan, 1983; R. Hogan et al., 1985; R. Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003), research and theory suggest that high self-monitors outperform low self-monitors on the important factors of getting along and getting ahead. The evidence is relatively mixed, however, when it comes to the third criterion category of making sense. From the perspective of observers (e.g., followers), low self-monitors are likely to be much more predictable in their behavior than high self-monitors. The behavioral consistency and predictability of low self-monitors should help enhance their perceived trustworthiness, provided, of course, that the behavior is not destructive or dysfunctional. Others can make good sense of the behavior of a low self-monitor, whereas a high self-monitor may come across in situations in which interpersonal expectations are misaligned as inconsistent and possibly untrustworthy (which is ironic given their need for positive image projection).

It was also noted that being socially pragmatic, as in the case of high self-monitors, may contribute to the tendency to be ethically pragmatic. Given the recent failures of previously high-flying companies such as Enron, WorldCom, and others, which were directly attributable to ethical shortcomings among members of senior management in those firms, this is a potentially very important topic for research. As noted above, however, low self-monitors can act unethically if the behavior (e.g., stealing) is aligned with their values (e.g., greed). Likewise, high self-monitors can act ethically and

altruistically if that is the prevailing expectation in the corporate culture. Nonetheless, behaving according to pragmatically oriented values can leave an individual overly vulnerable to external influence when ethical dilemmas arise. Based on research and theory, it is critically important for a high self-monitor to be in an ethically oriented interpersonal environment in order for that individual to act ethically. The fear is that it is a relatively short leap from being ethically pragmatic to individual or even corporate malfeasance.

In terms of the ability of high and low self-monitors to make sense of their environments, it was noted that the highs tend to create structurally advantageous positions in their social networks. This position provides fresh (i.e., nonredundant) information that allows the high self-monitors to better make sense of prevailing opportunities for individual and perhaps organizational advantage. The networks of the low self-monitors have positive aspects as well, most notably in terms of the deeper emotional attachments that are made. These attachments can be a source of enhanced trust and support (especially in crisis situations); however, it has been noted that because these kinds of strong ties are more difficult to break, they may actually constrain the low self-monitor and prevent access to new opportunities (Brass, 2001; Day & Kilduff, 2003). Given the generally superior contributions of the high self-monitor to organizational success, a question to be addressed concerns the potential use of self-monitoring measures for preemployment selection. Might this be an idea whose time has come? We address this question directly in the next section.

### **VALIDITY OF SELF-MONITORING IN WORK CONTEXTS**

The topic of validity has a rich tradition in I-O psychology. Although validity has meant different things to different constituencies (Landy, 1986), it is commonly accepted today that validity is not a property of a test (or personality inventory or other measure). Rather, validity depends on the purpose for which test scores are used. A test could be said to be valid for predicting the job performance of nurses but not valid for predicting the turnover of salespeople. In this manner, validity has been argued to be an inference that is made from test scores (Binning & Barrett, 1989), and that inference is

likely to vary across contexts and across outcomes (cf. Schmidt & Hunter, 1977).

Another approach to thinking about validity—one more from a legal perspective—is in terms of job relevance (Guion, 1999). A particular measure demonstrates job relevance if it can be shown empirically that it (a) assesses key aspects of the content of a job (content validity), (b) is related to work outcomes (criterion-related validity), or (c) adequately measures a job-relevant characteristic such as reasoning ability (construct validity). For many years there was a de facto “trinitarian doctrine,” especially in legal contexts, in which the three “types” of validity were seen as distinct from one another and as providing information on distinct aspects of validity (Landy, 1986). The trinitarian approach gave way to a unitarian perspective in which all validation evidence was considered to be in support of an inference of construct validity. The meaning of construct validity was therefore clarified as a comprehensive approach that included all of the other traditional validation strategies (Anastasi, 1986; Binning & Barrett, 1989; Landy, 1986).

A pertinent question concerns the validity of self-monitoring in work contexts. Clearly, scales designed to assess self-monitoring (i.e., Gangestad & Snyder, 1985; Lennox & Wolfe, 1984; Snyder, 1974) do not directly measure any specific aspects of the job domain, nor does it make sense to think about the expressive control of behavior as a job-relevant characteristic (except in certain professions such as acting or modeling). However, the literature discussed previously suggests that self-monitoring theoretically should (and empirically does) demonstrate relationships in organizational settings with relevant outcomes such as turnover (Kilduff & Day, 1994), job performance (Day et al., 2002; Mehra et al., 2001), and leadership behaviors (Day et al., 2002).

As a good example of how validity depends on the particular inference being made, previous research suggests that low self-monitors are less likely to leave an organization (turnover), whereas high self-monitors are more likely to receive better job performance ratings (which is typically how the criterion construct of performance is measured). But what are the likely potential implications of using self-monitoring as one component of a preemployment selection battery? Four particular concerns are addressed that caution against the use of self-monitoring in preemployment selection processes (at least without additional research). Where appropriate, we also note

how these concerns may vary across the different self-monitoring scales available.

### *Applicant Reactions*

I-O psychologists have traditionally focused on understanding pre-employment selection processes mainly from the perspective of the organization. That is, the majority of research in this area has examined the validity of various selection techniques (e.g., specific tests, interviews, assessment centers) to better understand how an organization might benefit from using valid, job-relevant selection instruments. Only within the past decade have researchers broadened their scope to examine selection from the applicant's perspective as well (Gilliland, 1993, 1994), recognizing that not only do companies select employees but applicants also select the organizations to which they will apply and where they are willing to work. This interest in applicant reactions has developed largely because research has shown that such reactions can have important consequences, including the likelihood of accepting job offers (Macan, Avedon, Paese, & Smith, 1994), attitudes toward the company (Rynes, 1993), perceptions of the validity (Rynes & Connerley, 1993; Schmidt, Greenthal, Hunter, Berner, & Seaton, 1977) and fairness of selection assessments (Gilliland, 1994), and the likelihood of referring others to the organization (Bauer, Maertz, Dolen, & Campion, 1998). In addition, the costly consequences of negative perceptions of employment tests have also been noted in light of the proliferation of litigation concerning them (Arvey & Faley, 1992). Specifically, applicants who perceive a particular selection technique as invasive or inappropriate may be more likely to file a legal claim of unlawful discrimination than applicants who perceive the process as fair and face valid.

The relevance of applicant reactions to the potential use of self-monitoring for selection purposes is evident in recent meta-analytic results that compared the relative favorability of various selection instruments from applicants' perspectives. Personality testing was found to have relatively poor favorability ratings and to be significantly worse on this dimension than cognitive ability tests (Hauknecht, Day, & Thomas, 2004). The only technique with less favorable reactions was biodata. Applicants tend to find personality inventories to be invasive of their privacy and lacking in any

apparent job relevance (i.e., possessing poor face validity). Individual items on self-monitoring scales (Gangestad & Snyder, 1985; Snyder, 1987) would likely be problematic from both a privacy standpoint (“I can look anyone in the eye and tell a lie with a straight face (if for a right end)”; “I may deceive people by being friendly when I really dislike them”) as well as job relevance (“I have considered being an entertainer”; “At a party I let others keep the jokes and stories going”). Even though use of a self-monitoring scale would likely aid in identifying those prospective employees who would tend to be able to get along and get ahead at work, there are likely to be real costs in terms of unfavorable applicant reactions, which could very well outweigh any benefits in terms of predictive validity.

### *Legal Concerns*

According to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Civil Rights Act of 1991 that subsequently amended Title VII, it is unlawful to discriminate in any phase of employment based on sex (in addition to race, religion, color, and national origin). According to the *Federal Uniform Guidelines* (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Civil Service Commission, Department of Labor, & Department of Justice, 1978), a selection rate for a protected class (e.g., women) that is less than 80% of that for the majority (e.g., men) would constitute unlawful discrimination (i.e., adverse impact). Although meta-analytic results suggested that the mean effect between self-monitoring and sex was relatively small (Day et al., 2002), transforming this mean-weighted effect size into the metric of binomial effect-size display (Rosenthal & Rubin, 1982) suggests that there is approximately a 13% difference in success rates between men and women. That is, if selection were based solely on scores from one of the Snyder self-monitoring scales (e.g., Gangestad & Snyder, 1985; Snyder, 1974)—which is, admittedly, an unlikely scenario—men would be successful in terms of selection approximately 13% more often than women. It should be noted, however, that there was no aggregate difference between men and women on data collected with the Lennox and Wolfe (1984) self-monitoring scale (Day et al., 2002).

Although this differential selection rate falls within legal guidelines in terms of the 80% rule of thumb, this analysis does not take into account the likely aggregate effects of self-monitoring on subsequent promotion decisions. As shown through computer

simulations, relatively trivial effects associated with sex differences in promotion can have relatively large, aggregate effects on the career progress of women. Specifically, as little as 1% of the variance in performance appraisal ratings associated with bias against women was shown to result in 35% of the senior management positions being filled by women, as compared with 50% for a system in which there was no sex bias (Martell et al., 1996). Even a little bias can translate over numerous promotion decisions into detrimental effects for women in terms of getting ahead. Although using self-monitoring for employment selection may be unlikely to present serious legal issues with regard to adverse impact (as compared with cognitive ability tests), using a selection instrument that might contribute to the glass ceiling in organizations is something to be taken very seriously because of the potential ethical implications.

### *Faking*

The issue of faking on personality inventories has been the focus of scattered attention in the applied psychology literature (e.g., Daley, Stanton, & Roberts, 2001; Ones & Viswesvaran, 1998). The thinking is that if applicants knew what type of personality was favored by an organization, then they could distort their responses to better fit that desired type. This may or may not be a legitimate concern; however, it is unlikely to be an issue with self-monitoring. As noted, it has been proposed that low self-monitors have a motive need to present their true selves to others and to project no false images of themselves (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000), which would likely include responses to a personality scale that was part of a preemployment selection battery. Ironically, it is the high self-monitor who might be susceptible to response distortion if it were believed that a low self-monitoring profile was preferred by an organization. In essence, this would attenuate any validity that the scale might have in terms of predicting work-related outcomes.

### *Organizational Composition*

A final issue deserving careful consideration is whether or not increasing the number of high self-monitors in an organization is necessarily a good idea. Organizational behavior researchers have argued that, over time, organizations tend to become relatively homogenous in terms of

the personalities and values of its members. A fundamental principle of the attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model of organizational behavior is that people self-select into and out of organizations based largely on the fit between individual personality and the modal personality of the organization (Schneider, 1987; Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). Attraction and selection produce some degree of homogeneity in personality, and those that do not fit with the modal personality tend to leave, producing even greater homogeneity in those that remain. For these reasons, organizations should be differentiated in terms of modal personalities. This principle was tested with a sample of approximately 13,000 managers from 142 companies across a wide range of U.S. industries (Schneider, Smith, Taylor, & Fleenor, 1998). The results indicated support for the hypothesized ASA effect for organizational membership on the personality characteristics of managers (also see Jordan, Herriot, & Chalmers, 1991). It is important to note that the ASA trends toward homogeneity of personality occur even without explicit preemployment screening. Selection based on personality characteristics such as self-monitoring would increase homogeneity even further due to the imposed range restriction.

The potential benefits and costs associated with having an overrepresentation of high self-monitors in an organization were recently discussed in terms of the resulting social network configurations (Day & Kilduff, 2003). Given the general superiority of high self-monitors in terms of getting along and getting ahead, it would seem that having a concentration of network ties among high self-monitors would be organizationally advantageous. This would especially be the case for accessing novel, divergent, and nonredundant information given the tendency of high self-monitors to occupy central network positions (Brass & Krackhardt, 1999; Mehra et al., 2001). High self-monitors also tend to excel in boundary-spanning activities (Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1982), which would increase the overall number of connections with external networks. The downside of high self-monitors connecting with other high self-monitors is that such ties would tend to yield low-commitment relationships, given the overall lower commitment of high self-monitors to social and work relationships (Day et al., 2002; Kilduff & Day, 1994; Snyder & Simpson, 1984). This would likely impede the development of high levels of trust and support needed for effective leadership and that generate physical and mental well-being effects that are present in many social relationships (Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000).

Excluding low self-monitors from organizations would be short-sighted because they too add value to the workplace, especially in terms of loyalty, respect, and emotional commitment. In short, low self-monitors may provide the foundation of stability that buffers organizations in times of turbulence and crisis. A key with regard to low self-monitors is in making sure that their values are aligned with those of the organization. With values alignment, the low self-monitor can contribute not only in terms of stability but also in terms of self-motivation and autonomy. The latter effects could translate into requiring less supervision than the high self-monitor (Snyder & Copeland, 1989).

There may be unique resources that are generated for both high and low self-monitors who connect within an organizational network. In other words, they may be able to help each other because of their complementary strengths. Because high self-monitors tend to look to others for cues as to what attitudes and behaviors are appropriate in a situation and are more likely than low self-monitors to be influenced by others (Kilduff, 1992), high self-monitors may gain information from the lows on the range of opinions and behaviors that are appropriate in a given situation (Day & Kilduff, 2003). Low self-monitors could benefit from help in negotiating the boundaries spanning across individuals or groups holding divergent viewpoints, which is something that high self-monitors do well. In short, there may very well be incremental gains in the social capital of an organization that are created when high and low self-monitors affiliate. Their respective strengths theoretically complement each others' tendencies for making sense of their worlds and could contribute to better success in getting along and getting ahead for both personality types.

## CONCLUSIONS

Research has demonstrated that self-monitoring personality has relevance (i.e., validity) in predicting work-related outcomes (Day et al., 2002). It is also true that the research evidence favors the high self-monitor in terms of getting along and getting ahead at work. The results are more mixed in terms of the criterion category of making sense, the third basic human motive according to the socioanalytic theory of personality (R. Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). Despite the apparent attraction of seeing high self-monitors as the



preferred employee in work settings—and possibly conducting pre-employment screening using the construct—it is proposed that there may be unique value added to organizations that have both high and low self-monitors who connect in their social networks.

Striving for status, acceptance, and predictability is assumed to be a central genetic tendency of all human beings (McAdams, 1997). These needs are not just the provenance of high self-monitors. As the opening quotation to the present article attests, impression management is not a game or a ruse that is used to trick other people. Rather, it is closely tied to our success as individuals and as a species. As recently proposed by Gangestad and Snyder (2000), it is likely that both high and low self-monitors manage impressions but in very different ways. Whereas the high self-monitor has a fundamental need for self-enhancement, the low self-monitor wishes to present no false images. The present article suggests that there may be room for both types of self-presentation processes in organizations, with the most benefit potentially stemming from the ways in which high and low self-monitors complement each other's needs. However, this conclusion is tentative and must await further research scrutiny.

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