# SOLVING INTERPERSONAL SITUATIONS AS THE INDICATOR OF SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

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*Abstract:* There are many different views of social intelligence and that is one reason for the difficulty of its explanation and research. We have selected several interpersonal situations divided into two types: "A" respondents were active, and "B" respondents were responding to the situation. We have designed the pen-and-pencil method to measure cognitive, emotional, and conative aspects of respondents' behavior. The research sample consisted of 103 university students. Comparing social intelligence measured through solving interpersonal situations with some of interpersonal traits, self-image, and social intelligence measured by other methods confirmed some of our hypotheses.

*Key words:* social intelligence, interpersonal situations, interpersonal traits

## INTRODUCTION

Almost a century has passed since the first explicit use of the term "social intelligence". The delimitations of social intelligence differ in several aspects; sometimes they even contradict one another. That is the reason why it is so difficult to study and understand the issue. Vernon (in Kihlstrom, Cantor, 2000) provided the definition of social intelligence as the person's "ability to get along with people in general, social technique of ease in society, knowledge of social matters, susceptibility to stimuli from other members of a group, as well as insight into the temporary moods or underlying personality traits of strangers".

A common attribute is the perception of social intelligence as the *ability to behave in a certain way* in social interactions based on the *awareness* and the *evaluation* of certain aspects of the situation. When we take into account intelligence, this behavior should be effective; and when we talk about social intelligence this behavior should be effective in solving situations of interaction between an individual and other people. The delimitation of social competence seems relevant, as well. R.J. Schneider, P.L. Ackerman and R. Kanfer (1996, pp. 471) define social competence as "socially effective behavior and its cognitive, affective and conative antecedents. Socially effective behavior is behavior that is instrumental in helping people achieve personal goals that are social in nature".

The primary goal of our research was to verify whether the selected situations and the observed aspects of behavior correspond with the methods already used for measuring social intelligence. We were also interested in the differences in the level of social intelligence according to various personality traits.

## METHOD

*Sample*

The research sample consisted of 103 university students (38 males and 65 females) aged from 19 to 36 years, mean age was 20.6 years.

*Measures*

1) *RIS* - Solving Interpersonal Situations (Výrost, Vasiľová, 2004).

The questionnaire is divided into two parts: "A" 10 situations in which respondent is "active", he/she initiates the action. "B" the same situations as in "A", but reversed, and the respondent is "passive", he/she responds to the action of another person.

Each situation has a 5-point Likert-type scale to evaluate whether the resolution of a situation is a) reasonable (cognitive aspect), b) agreeable (emotional aspect), and c) whether respondent would behave this way (conative aspect).

The situations were selected so that they represented particular antecedents of social intelligence, e.g. empathy, Machiavellian intelligence, flexibility, sense of humor, "dramatic art", ease in social situations, resolution, etc., and they provide an opportunity to behave in a socially intelligent way.

2) *SELF* (Výrost, 1999).

3) *IAS-R* Interpersonal Adjective Scale, short version (Wiggins, Trapnell, Phillips, 1988).

4) *TSIS* - Tromso Social Intelligence Scale (Silvera, Martinussen, Dahl, 2001).

5) *STAT* - Sternberg Triarchic Abilities Test, subtest No. 4 (Sternberg et al., 1993).

6) *SM* - Self Monitoring Scale, short version (Snyder, 1974).

## RESULTS

Table 1 gives the evidence that there is a relation between the mean score and the situations of part "A" and between the mean score and part "B" situations. Intercorrelations are statistically significant. Positive correlations between the situations "A" where the respondent is active and situations "B" where he/she is passive indicate that individuals have the tendency to behave similarly in both types of situations. The highest consistency was

Table 1. Correlations among individual aspects of measure RIS - Solving Interpersonal Situations

| | KB | EB | BB | B | RIS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| KA | 0.45** | | | | |
| EA | | 0.20* | | | |
| BA | | | 0.69** | | |
| A | | | | 0.77** | 0.93** |
| B | | | | | 0.95** |

N = 102; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

K A/B - cognitive aspect in situations A/B; E A/B - emotional aspect in situations A/B; B A/B - conative aspect in situations A/B; A - overall score in situations A; B - overall score in situations B; RIS - overall score in Solving Interpersonal Situations

achieved in the behavioral aspect and the lowest in the emotional aspect of situations "A" and "B".

Subjects with higher level of self-monitoring (sensitive to situational stimuli which indicate appropriateness or inappropriateness of an expression) scored significantly lower in solving interpersonal situations "A". That is, they acted socially less intelligently in situations where they initiated the action than respondents with lower level of self-monitoring (self-expression controlled by affective states of an individual) (Figure 1).

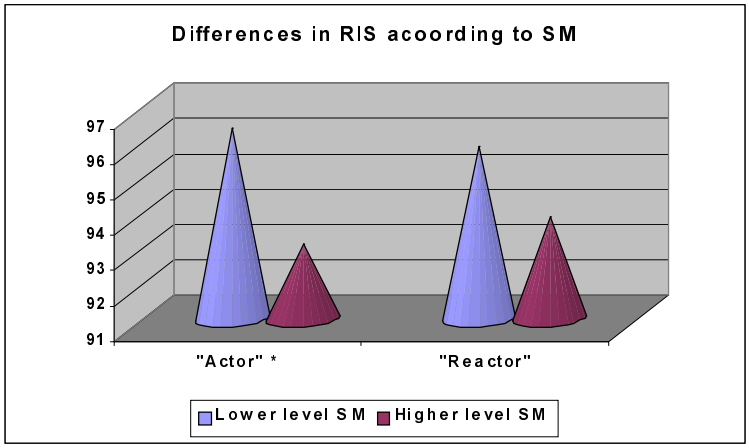


Figure 1. Differences in Solving Interpersonal Situations between respondents with lower and higher level of Self-monitoring

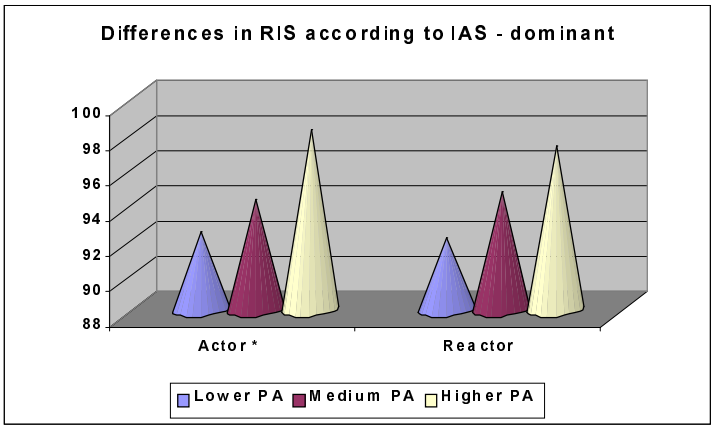


Figure 2. Differences in Solving Interpersonal Situations among groups with lower, medium, and higher level of dominant behavior

The results obtained from subjects divided into 3 groups according to interpersonal traits are presented in Figures 2, 3, and 4. The differences in social intelligence among the groups were significant in traits: dominant (PA), warm (LM), and extraverted (NO); the difference was significant in situations "A" in all cases. Subjects with higher level of dominant, warm, and extraverted behavior in social situations scored significantly higher in solving interpersonal situations. That is, they are, according to our hypothesis, socially more intelligent than those with an opposite tendency of behavior. The differences in octants calculating (BC), strict (DE), introverted (FG), submissive (HI) and modest (JK) were not significant.

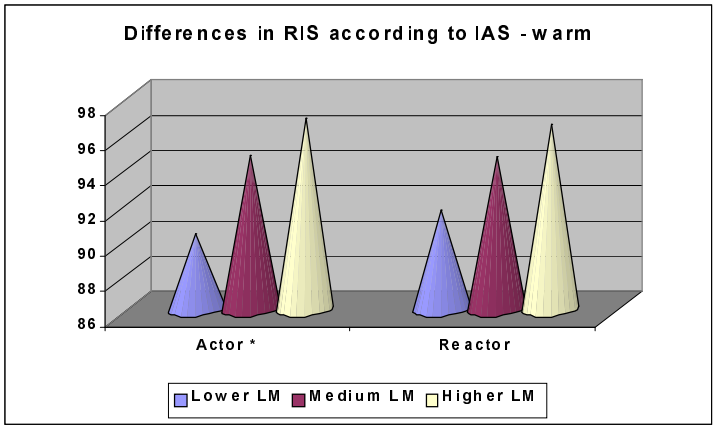


Figure 3. Differences in Solving Interpersonal Situations among groups with lower, medium, and higher level of warm behavior

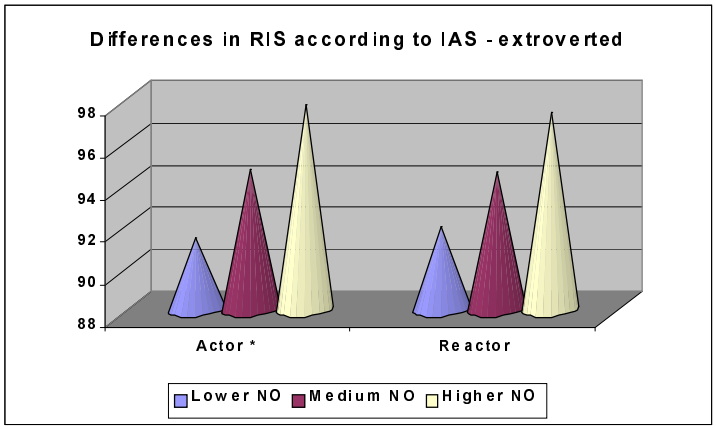


Figure 4. Differences in Solving Interpersonal Situations among groups with lower, medium, and higher level of extroverted behavior

We did not obtain any significant differences in social intelligence between men and women, either.

Table 2 shows the correlations between RIS and other measures of social intelligence used by other researchers. We have selected Sternberg Triarchic Abilities Test, and Tromso Social Intelligence Scale for the comparison. There is no relation between solving interpersonal situations and Sternberg's subtest on solving various situations. There is a negative significant correlation between emotional aspects of solving interpersonal situations in which the individual responds to other person's behavior and Social Information Processing. A positive significant correlation was found between Social Skills and cognitive, emotional, and conative aspects of RIS in situations "A" and logically, between Social Skills and overall score of situations "A".

The results shown in Table 3 indicate that the overall score of the measure SELF correlates positively with interpersonal traits: warm (LM) and extroverted (NO); and negatively with strict (DE) tendency to behave in social situations. The analysis did not confirm the hypothesis about the differences in social intelligence between individuals with more positive and more negative self-image.

## COMMENTS

According to the results of the study, individuals with lower level of self-monitoring, that is, whose expressive be-

Table 2. Correlations between RIS and the aspects of social intelligence measured by Sternberg Triarchic Abilities Test and Tromso Social Intelligence Scale

| | RS | SP | SS | SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| AK | -0.08 | 0.15 | 0.21* | -0.02 |
| EA | 0.02 | 0.06 | 0.19* | 0.05 |
| BA | -0.16 | -0.07 | 0.19* | -0.02 |
| KB | 0.01 | 0.06 | 0.07 | 0.05 |
| EB | -0.04 | -0.22* | -0.02 | 0.06 |
| BB | -0.03 | -0.15 | 0.03 | -0.09 |
| A | -0.06 | 0.02 | 0.20* | 0.03 |
| B | -0.02 | -0.13 | 0.03 | 0.00 |
| RIS | -0.04 | -0.06 | 0.12 | 0.01 |

N = 96; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$
RS - solving situations subtest; SP - Social Information Processing; SS - Social Skills; SA - Social Awareness

Table 3. Correlations between Self-image and Interpersonal traits

| | PA | BC | DE | FG | HI | JK | LM | NO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SELF | 0.11 | 0.04 | -0.26** | -0.22* | 0.07 | 0.10. | 0.35** | 0.24* |

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

havior is controlled by their inner affective states, solve interpersonal situations more effectively than those who are sensitive to stimuli from other people's behavior. Another finding concerning self-regulation is self-image. People with a more positive self-image seem to behave more warmly and more extravertedly, as well as less strictly and less introvertedly in social situations.

Better scores in our measure of social intelligence were obtained by people who seem to be more dominant, warmer, and more extroverted in social situations. These results correspond with the findings of other researchers, e.g. R.J. Schneider et al., who identified extraversion, warmth and social influence as the most reliable dimensions of social competence. We are aware of the fact that when speaking about social intelligence, we have to find the optimal degree of observed dimensions. We agree with Schneider's argument that more is not necessarily better. This statement is well demonstrated in an example that "extreme social influence may be domineering and extreme warmth may be overly-trusting and permissive" (pp. 479).

One of the pleasant outcomes of our study is that the measure RIS is not distorted by gender. This was also the aim during the process of designing and selecting the situations included in the method. Another of the positive outcomes is the relation between RIS, particularly situations in which the respondent was active, and Social Skills measured by the Tromso Social Intelligence Scale. The relations among individual aspects of the method RIS are significantly positive, which indicates that the measure has the capacity to be internally consistent. The study did not confirm all of our hypotheses but this might be caused by the different underlying concepts of social intelligence of the methods used which do not correspond with one another. Of course, further analysis need to be done to assess the reliability and validity of RIS but we believe that our approach may contribute to the research of social intelligence.

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# RIEŠENIE INTERPERSONÁLNYCH SITUÁCIÍ AKO INDIKÁTOR SOCIÁLNEJ INTELIGENCIE

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*Súhrn:* Sociálna inteligencia je dôležitým aspektom celkovej ľudskej inteligencie. Existuje mnoho pohľadov na danú tému, preto je veľmi zložité vysvetliť a skúmať ju. Pre potreby nášho výskumu sme vybrali niekoľko interpersonálnych situácií, rozdelených do dvoch skupín: v type "A" boli respondenti aktívni, iniciovali situáciu, kým v type "B" respondenti reagovali na situáciu, na správanie iných ľudí. Vytvorili sme tak metodiku typu ceruza-papier, ktorá postihuje kognitívny, emocionálny a konatívny aspekt správania respondentov. Vychádzali sme z predpokladu, že riešenie interpersonálnych situácií je jedným z najvhodnejších indikátorov sociálnej inteligencie. Výskumnú vzorku tvorilo 103 univerzitných študentov. Jednotlivé aspekty sociálnej inteligencie, merané pomocou riešenia interpersonálnych situácií, sme porovnávali s niektorými črtami interpersonálneho správania, seba-obrazom a sociálnou inteligenciou meranou inými metodikami.