



Digging deeper or piling it higher? Implicit measurement in organizational behavior and human resource management



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ABSTRACT

Organizational researchers can dig deeper into peoples' thoughts, attitudes, and self-concepts to understand how automatic processes may impact judgment and social behavior in organizations. Measures of these automatic processes, including the Implicit Association Test (e.g., IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), Semantic Priming (e.g., SP; Wittenbrink, Judd, & Park, 1997), Affect Misattribution Procedure (e.g., AMP; Payne, Cheng, Govorun, & Stewart, 2005), Word Completion Tasks (e.g., WCT; Johnson & Saboe, 2011), among many others, deserve greater attention as alternatives or supplements to traditional self-report measures of variables important in organizations (e.g., job satisfaction, personality and trait measurement, diversity attitudes). In this paper, we first provide a primer on implicit social cognition and its relationship to automatic and controlled cognitive processes, discussing major types of implicit measures, how these might operate, criticisms of this approach, and how these implicit constructs may give rise to behavior in organizations. Second, we discuss models of automatic processes and explore their validity and how these may predict behavior. Third, we offer advice for selecting, constructing, and improving implicit measurements when used in organizational research to enhance human resources and organizational functioning.

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1. Introduction

Because organizations are social systems, processes in thinking, perceiving others, and understanding behavior are important in understanding organizational processes and effectiveness (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Many people take comfort that their conscious thoughts, declarative knowledge, and deliberate intentions guide their decision-making processes and social behavior. Advances in implicit measurement, however, indicate that some thought processes may be less accessible than one may assume (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977), and may operate automatically (e.g., Bargh, 1994). The space between conscious reflection and accurate assessment has motivated researchers to develop measures of these automatic processes for digging deeper into people's thoughts, goals, and self-knowledge (e.g., Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998; Payne, Cheng, Govorun, & Stewart, 2005). However, with these advances, the question remains how do we impact and improve organizations as we dig deeper into measuring these automatic processes that govern cognition, attitudes, and behaviors? Or does this line of research simply pile higher our knowledge of biases, limitations, and criticisms preventing us from further improving organizational behavior and effectiveness?

Implicit measurement poses both opportunities and challenges for organizational researchers. In terms of opportunities, digging deeper using implicit measures, such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald et al., 1998), Semantic Priming tasks (SP; e.g., Wittenbrink, Judd, & Park, 1997), the Affect Misattribution Procedure (AMP; Payne et al., 2005), Name Letter Effects procedure (NLE; Nuttin, 1985), and Word Completion Tasks (WCT; e.g., Johnson & Saboe, 2011; Johnson, Tolentino, Rodopman, & Cho, 2010), among

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others, may provide additional approaches for assessing thoughts and feelings when social desirability, lack of introspective access, and faking may distort declared or stated beliefs (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). Using these measures offers an alternative to understanding and improving organizations because we can now measure a person's attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudices from two perspectives, one explicit, and one implicit, and link these separately, jointly, and incrementally to each other and organizational phenomena to enhance theory and improve organizations.

In terms of challenges, the routine inclusion of implicit measures in research has not been without criticism, debate, and caution (e.g., Arkes & Tetlock, 2004; Blanton & Jaccard, 2006; Blanton et al., 2009; DeHouwer, Teige-Mocigemba, Spruyt, & Moors, 2009; Fazio, 2007; Fazio & Olson, 2003; Gawronski, LeBel, & Peters, 2007; Karpinski & Hilton, 2001; Landy, 2008; McConnell & Leibold, 2009; Ziegert & Hanges, 2009). Many of these arguments (e.g., use of real world criteria) regarding implicit measurement often also apply to the use of explicit or traditional forms of measurement. Further, there remains considerable debate regarding the meaning and usefulness of measures of automatic cognitive processes and the extent to which they provide distinct information about inner thoughts and states that truly relate to important, measurable behaviors in organizations or society at large. Instead of piling higher cautions and admonitions about the use of these measures in organizations, we look at these problems as challenges and as opportunities for future research to fully evaluate the efficacy of such measures to assist us in improving workplaces and organizations.

The purpose of this paper is to review the social cognitive perspective on the measurement of automatic cognitive processes and how these relate to organizational outcomes. We review the theoretical basis and the validity evidence for these measures, and suggest several research strategies for those interested in using, critiquing, and improving implicit measurement in organizational research. We discuss many judgment processes in organizations and how these may be impacted by implicit cognition as we take a deeper, process-oriented, and more critical view of implicit cognition in organizations (Haines & Sumner, 2006; Johnson & Steinman, 2009; Sumner & Haines, 2004). Finally we briefly provide practical advice to organizational researchers interested in exploring implicit measurement and automatic processes to both understand and improve organizational behavior.

2. The case for implicit measurement

Implicit social cognition refers to thoughts based on implicit associations that lack introspective awareness, impact on our current thinking and behavior, and arise from our previous experiences (Fazio & Olson, 2003; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Researchers often use different terms to describe implicit social cognition such as thought that is indirect, unconscious, subconscious, automatic, or unaware (Gawronski & Payne, 2010). For the purposes of this review, we use the term implicit measure to refer to the measuring of an automatic cognitive process, one that is typically defined as being unaware, uncontrollable, unconscious, and efficient (Bargh, 1994). Automaticity in cognition is contrasted with controlled cognition, characterized as thoughtful, aware, deliberate, logical, and planned. Explicit measures or assessments may include many questionnaires, interviews, surveys, standardized tests, or physical counts and measurements, whereas implicit measures of automatic cognitions include latency pairing tasks, subliminal priming tasks, and word completion tasks (e.g., Fazio, Sanbonmatsu, Powell, & Kardes, 1986; Gaertner & McLaughlin, 1983; Gilbert & Hixon, 1991; Greenwald et al., 1998; Payne et al., 2005; Wittenbrink et al., 1997). As in other issues of measurement, we do not intend to conflate a measurement with the construct it is intended to represent. Just as the results of an IQ test are not the same thing as one's intelligence, any implicit measure is just one way of assessing an implicit process.

Although more than twenty types of specific implicit measurement procedures have been used in social cognition research (Nosek, Hawkins, & Frazier, 2011; Uhlmann et al., 2012), two categories of latency measures dominate the measurement of implicit attitudes, stereotypes, and self concepts: 1) Implicit Association Test-inspired tasks (e.g., IAT, Single Category IAT, Go-No-Go Task), and 2) Priming-inspired Tasks (e.g., Affect Misattribution Procedure, Affective priming). Both types of these tasks rely on a Stroop like interference paradigm (i.e., classifying a stimulus on separate dimensions to gauge associations between related and unrelated concepts). Both of these also rely on computerized stimuli and recording of reaction processes. There are also paper and pencil measures of implicit associations that may be useful for researchers, including word completion tasks and the like (e.g., Johnson & Saboe, 2011; Johnson et al., 2010). These can be used without a technological platform, perhaps making them easier to use in some organizational applications and settings where the technology is neither reliable nor accessible.

2.1. Implicit Association Test

In IAT inspired tasks, participants complete several speeded categorization tasks on a computer and comparisons are made between congruent and incongruent categorization tasks. For example, in an implicit race attitude task to measure the strength of association between White and pleasant (and Black and Unpleasant), participants sort White faces, Black faces, pleasant words (e.g., diamond) and unpleasant words (e.g., filth) using just two response keys on a computer keyboard (usually the "E" and "I" keys as they are on the left and right hand sides of the keyboard). Thus, a right-handed correct response ("I") represents a White face or a pleasant word and a left-handed correct response ("E") represents a Black face or an unpleasant word. The implicit attitude is measured by the speed at which participants can sort words and pictures when White and pleasant share a response key as compared to when Black and pleasant share a response key. The strength of the implicit association is usually represented as a difference in average latencies when white and pleasant are paired vs. when black and pleasant are paired together on the same response key. Other variants of the IAT include: 1) the Go-No-Go Association Task (GNAT; Nosek & Banaji, 2001), which can use one or two categories, 2) a single category IAT (SC-IAT; Karpinski & Steinman, 2006), or Single Target IAT

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