

CONCEPTUAL ARTICLE



Social intelligence at work: A conceptual analysis of the S.P.A.C.E. model and interpersonal effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

In the modern workplace, social intelligence (SI) has emerged as a critical determinant of professional success and organizational performance. This conceptual study explores the relationship between social intelligence operationalized through Karl Albrecht's S.P.A.C.E. model (Situational Awareness, Presence, Authenticity, Clarity, and Empathy) and job performance, with interpersonal effectiveness proposed as a mediating construct [1]. Drawing on multidisciplinary literature in psychology, management, and organizational behavior, the paper argues that the S.P.A.C.E. framework offers a comprehensive behavioral lens for understanding how individuals navigate complex interpersonal dynamics. Employees who demonstrate higher social intelligence exhibit greater adaptability, communication, and collaboration, leading to stronger workplace relationships and improved performance. The study also posits that interpersonal effectiveness translates social intelligence competencies into observable behaviors that foster trust, cohesion, and team productivity. By synthesizing theoretical insights, this research contributes to expanding the conceptual understanding of non-cognitive competencies and their impact on organizational effectiveness. It further provides a foundation for future empirical research and practical interventions to develop socially intelligent and interpersonally effective workforces in today's rapidly evolving global environment.

KEY WORDS

Social intelligence, S.P.A.C.E. model, Interpersonal effectiveness, Job performance, Emotional competence, Organizational behavior, Conceptual framework

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Introduction

In contemporary organizations, effectiveness at work is increasingly shaped by employees' ability to navigate complex interpersonal environments rather than by cognitive competence alone. The growing prevalence of teamwork, cross-functional collaboration, hybrid work structures, and culturally diverse workplaces has rendered traditional intelligence quotient (IQ)-based explanations of performance insufficient, as recent research emphasizes the growing importance of social and emotional competencies in predicting job performance and workplace effectiveness [1,2]. As a result, scholars and practitioners have turned their attention toward socially embedded competencies that enable individuals to function effectively within relational and organizational systems.

Among these competencies, SI has re-emerged as a critical determinant of workplace success. SI captures an individual's capacity to understand social contexts, interpret interpersonal cues, and enact behavior that facilitates cooperation and coordinated action [3]. Contemporary studies further emphasize that social intelligence plays a significant role in enhancing employee adaptability and performance in organizational settings [4]. Unlike purely cognitive or technical skills, SI directly influences how employees interact, collaborate, and contribute to collective goals.

The concept of social intelligence was first introduced by who defined it as the ability to "understand and manage men and women, boys and girls to act wisely in human relations" [5]. This foundational insight highlighted that effective performance depends not only on analytical reasoning but also on social judgment and behavioral appropriateness [6].

Subsequent research has expanded this view, positioning SI as a multidimensional construct integrating social cognition, behavioral adaptability, and interpersonal competence [7]. A significant advancement in the operationalization of SI was offered by Karl Albrecht, who conceptualized SI as the ability to "get along well with others and get them to cooperate with you" [1]. His S.P.A.C.E. model, comprising Situational Awareness, Presence, Authenticity, Clarity, and Empathy, provides a structured framework for understanding socially intelligent behavior in organizational contexts.

Despite the robustness of the S.P.A.C.E. model, existing literature largely treats the relationship between SI and job performance as either direct or implicitly mediated. The behavioral process through which SI is translated into measurable performance outcomes remains underspecified. Addressing this gap, the present paper advances a conceptual framework that positions interpersonal effectiveness as the central mediating mechanism linking SI to job performance. By doing so, the study extends Albrecht's model from a descriptive taxonomy of social capabilities to a process-oriented explanatory framework [1].

Literature Review

Evolution of SI as a construct

The development of SI reflects a gradual shift from narrow cognitive conceptions of intelligence toward more holistic, socially grounded perspectives. Thorndike's early articulation of SI emphasized practical wisdom in managing human relations, challenging the dominance of abstract intelligence measures [5].

Wechsler further broadened this perspective by defining intelligence as the global capacity to act purposefully and to adapt to one's environment, implicitly acknowledging social adaptation as central to intelligent behavior [8]. The researcher formalized SI as a distinct domain within his Structure of Intellect model, reinforcing its theoretical legitimacy [3]. Later developments in emotional intelligence (EI) contributed to renewed interest in non-cognitive competencies [9]. Recent meta-analytic evidence confirms that emotional and SI significantly predict job performance across diverse organizational contexts [4]. However, while EI focuses primarily on emotional perception and regulation, SI extends beyond emotions to include social cognition, contextual judgment, and behavioral enactment within social systems [10]. Thus, SI is particularly relevant for understanding performance in group-based and organizational settings, especially in modern workplaces that emphasize collaboration and interpersonal effectiveness [2].

The S.P.A.C.E. model of SI

Albrecht's S.P.A.C.E. model offers one of the most comprehensive operationalizations of SI in workplace contexts [1]. Rather than treating SI as a unitary trait, the model identifies five interrelated dimensions that collectively shape interpersonal functioning.

Situational awareness refers to the ability to accurately perceive social cues, power dynamics, and contextual constraints. It enables individuals to adapt their behavior strategically and align their actions with organizational expectations [11]. Presence reflects the capacity to project confidence, composure, and attentiveness. Presence enhances social influence and credibility, increasing receptivity to ideas and leadership efforts [1]. Authenticity involves behavioral congruence between internal values and external actions. Authenticity fosters trust, psychological safety, and ethical consistency in workplace relationships [12]. Clarity denotes the ability to communicate ideas, emotions, and expectations accurately and unambiguously. Culturally intelligent employees with high empathy and situational awareness demonstrate better adaptation, collaboration, and task performance in multicultural settings, and recent research further emphasizes the importance of these competencies in enhancing workplace performance and collaboration [2,13].

Recent empirical studies reinforce the idea that interpersonal effectiveness mediates the relationship between SI and job performance. Professionals who exhibit high levels of empathy, authenticity, and clarity can foster psychologically safe environments where collaboration thrives [14]. Empathy represents the capacity to understand and respond to others' perspectives and emotions. Empathy supports inclusion, conflict resolution, and relational cohesion across diverse teams [15]. While these dimensions are well theorized individually, existing research does not sufficiently explain how they collectively influence job performance.

Distinguishing SI, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal effectiveness

Although emotional intelligence, SI, and interpersonal effectiveness are conceptually related, they serve distinct theoretical functions. EI primarily concerns emotion

awareness and regulation at the intrapersonal level [9]. SI extends this focus by emphasizing contextual understanding and behavioral adaptation in interpersonal systems.

Interpersonal effectiveness, by contrast, represents the behavioral manifestation of these underlying intelligences. It encompasses observable outcomes such as trust-building, conflict management, relational coordination, and collaborative problem-solving [16]. As such, interpersonal effectiveness is well-positioned to mediate the relationship between SI and job performance.

SI, interpersonal effectiveness, and job performance

Empirical evidence consistently links SI to positive performance outcomes, particularly in roles requiring collaboration, leadership, and coordination [18]. Socially intelligent employees foster positive relational climates through effective interpersonal behavior, particularly in dynamic, uncertain work environments shaped by organizational change [14,18].

Importantly, these outcomes are realized primarily through relational processes. Studies suggest that performance gains associated with SI occur when socially intelligent capabilities are expressed through effective interpersonal behavior [14]. This insight underscores the need for a framework that explicitly theorizes interpersonal effectiveness as the transmission mechanism.

Research Objectives

- The objectives of this conceptual study are as follows:
- To revisit the relationship between SI and job performance in organizational contexts.
- To explore the individual contributions of the S.P.A.C.E. dimensions, Situational Awareness, Presence, Authenticity, Clarity, and Empathy toward enhancing job performance.
- To propose the mediating role of interpersonal effectiveness in the relationship between SI and job performance.
- To provide a conceptual framework that can guide future empirical research on SI and its impact on workplace outcomes.
- To offer practical implications for organizational management, leadership development, and HR interventions based on the S.P.A.C.E. model.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a conceptual research design to synthesize and integrate established theories and empirical insights and develop a coherent framework explaining how SI, operationalized through Karl Albrecht's S.P.A.C.E. model, influences job performance through interpersonal effectiveness [1]. Consistent with conceptual research traditions, the study does not involve primary data collection; instead, it relies on systematic literature synthesis and theory integration to generate explanatory propositions and advance conceptual understanding [19].

The literature review was conducted through a structured search of peer-reviewed academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and PsycINFO. These databases were selected for their extensive coverage of organizational behavior, psychology, and management research. Search strings combined key terms

such as SI, S.P.A.C.E. model, interpersonal effectiveness, job performance, and workplace relationships. Seminal works and frequently cited foundational studies were also identified through backward and forward citation tracking.

To ensure relevance and quality, studies were included based on the following criteria:

- The publication explicitly addressed SI, interpersonal functioning, or job performance in organizational or professional contexts.
- The source was published in a peer-reviewed journal, academic book, or authoritative scholarly outlet.
- The study contributed to theoretical insight, conceptual clarification, or empirical evidence relevant to at least one dimension of the S.P.A.C.E. model.

Studies were excluded if they focused exclusively on general cognitive intelligence (IQ), lacked relevance to workplace contexts, or addressed EI without explicit linkage to social or interactional competence. This selection process ensured conceptual coherence while maintaining analytical depth.

A thematic analysis approach was employed to systematically organize and interpret the selected literature [20]. The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, relevant concepts and findings were coded under the five dimensions of the S.P.A.C.E. model: Situational Awareness, Presence, Authenticity, Clarity, and Empathy. Second,

patterns across studies were examined to identify how dimensions contribute to interpersonal functioning in organizational settings. Third, these insights were synthesized to theorize interpersonal effectiveness as a mediating behavioral mechanism linking SI to job performance.

these Rather than aggregating findings descriptively, the analysis emphasized conceptual integration, identifying convergences, complementarities, and gaps across theoretical and empirical streams. This process enabled the development of a process-oriented framework that extends the model by explaining how SI capabilities are enacted behaviorally and translated into performance outcomes [1].

To enhance transparency and replicability, all stages of literature selection and analysis followed explicit criteria and structured analytical steps. Theoretical triangulation was achieved by integrating classical perspectives such as Thorndike's foundational conceptualization of SI with contemporary organizational research on interpersonal competence and performance [5]. This methodological rigor strengthens the credibility of the proposed framework and supports its applicability for future empirical testing.

Overall, this methodological approach provides a systematic and transparent foundation for conceptual model development, contributing to theoretical refinement and offering a replicable pathway for subsequent empirical research in dynamic organizational contexts.

Conceptual Framework

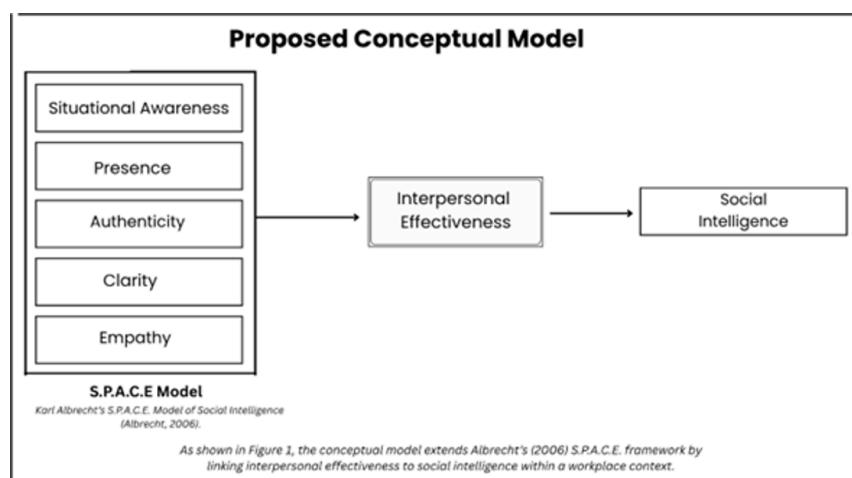


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model illustrating the S.P.A.C.E. framework linking interpersonal effectiveness with social intelligence in workplace contexts.

Figure 1 presents the proposed conceptual framework explaining how SI influences job performance through the mediating mechanism of interpersonal effectiveness. Drawing on Karl Albrecht's S.P.A.C.E. model, SI is operationalized through five core dimensions: Situational Awareness, Presence, Authenticity, Clarity, and Empathy [1]. These dimensions are depicted on the left side of the model as foundational social capabilities.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the five S.P.A.C.E. dimensions collectively contribute to interpersonal effectiveness, which is positioned as a central mediating construct. Interpersonal effectiveness represents the behavioral enactment of SI in workplace interactions, encompassing trust-building,

effective communication, conflict management, and collaborative engagement [16]. Rather than assuming a direct, automatic relationship between SI and job performance, the framework explicitly theorizes that SI exerts its influence through a proximal relational mechanism.

The directional arrows in Figure 1 indicate a sequential process: socially intelligent capabilities (S.P.A.C.E. dimensions) first shape interpersonal effectiveness, which, in turn, facilitates enhanced job performance outcomes [21]. This structure extends Albrecht's original S.P.A.C.E. model by moving beyond a descriptive categorization of social competencies to a process-oriented explanation of how

these competencies are translated into performance-relevant behaviors within organizational contexts [1].

By visually integrating interpersonal effectiveness as a mediator, the model clarifies the indirect pathway through which SI operates. This articulation highlights the central role of relational competence in contemporary workplaces characterized by interdependence, collaboration, and hybrid work arrangements. Furthermore, the framework provides a clear basis for future empirical testing, particularly mediation analyses examining how specific S.P.A.C.E. dimensions contribute to job performance through interpersonal effectiveness.

Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that Albrecht's S.P.A.C.E. dimensions function as complementary social capabilities that collectively underpin interpersonal effectiveness in organizational contexts [1]. Situational Awareness provides the contextual grounding necessary for adaptive behavior, while presence enhances credibility and interpersonal influence. Authenticity contributes to trust and psychological safety, clarity supports coordination and task execution, and empathy fosters relational cohesion and inclusion. Organizational contexts, with recent research reinforcing that such competencies are critical drivers of performance in evolving and hybrid work environments [2].

Rather than operating in isolation, these dimensions interact dynamically to shape interpersonal effectiveness, the behavioral expression of SI. Employees high in interpersonal effectiveness are better equipped to translate social understanding into productive collaboration, conflict resolution, and sustained relational engagement, thereby enhancing both task and contextual performance [16].

This mediating process is particularly salient in contemporary workplaces characterized by interdependence, cultural diversity, and hybrid work arrangements [13]. By explicitly theorizing this mechanism, the present framework strengthens the explanatory power of SI research and clarifies how SI contributes to performance in real organizational settings.

Implications

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to SI literature by advancing a process-oriented explanation of how SI influences job performance. By positioning interpersonal effectiveness as a mediating mechanism, the framework extends Albrecht's S.P.A.C.E. model beyond a descriptive taxonomy of social competencies to an explanatory model of performance outcomes [1]. The integration of classical conceptualizations of SI with contemporary organizational behavior research clarifies the distinct role of SI vis-à-vis emotional intelligence. The framework also strengthens conceptual boundaries by emphasizing behavioral enactment rather than intrapersonal affective regulation, thereby enriching theory development in non-cognitive intelligence research [5].

Managerial and practical implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that organizations should move beyond technical skill development and explicitly invest in building SI capabilities. The S.P.A.C.E. dimensions provide a practical diagnostic tool

for leadership development, talent assessment, and training interventions, aligning with recent findings that emphasize the role of emotional and social competencies in enhancing workforce effectiveness [4,22]. Developing situational awareness, presence, authenticity, clarity, and empathy can enhance interpersonal effectiveness, thereby improving collaboration, conflict management, and team performance. Human resource practices such as competency-based recruitment, performance appraisal, and leadership coaching can be aligned with the S.P.A.C.E. framework to foster socially intelligent and interpersonally effective workforces, particularly in hybrid and culturally diverse environments.

Implications for future research

The proposed conceptual framework offers a clear foundation for empirical validation. Future studies can test the mediating role of interpersonal effectiveness using quantitative methods such as structural equation modeling or longitudinal designs. Researchers may also examine the differential impact of individual S.P.A.C.E. dimensions across job roles, leadership levels, and cultural contexts. Additionally, exploring reciprocal relationships in which interpersonal experiences contribute to the development of SI over time can further refine the model and expand its explanatory scope.

Limitations

This study is conceptual in nature and relies on secondary literature, limiting causal inference [19]. Future research should empirically test the proposed mediation model using quantitative methods such as structural equation modeling.

Additionally, the framework assumes a unidirectional relationship, whereas interpersonal experiences may also contribute to the development of SI over time. Longitudinal designs would be valuable in capturing such reciprocal dynamics. Cultural generalizability remains another concern, as much of the supporting literature is Western-centric [23]. Finally, the multidimensional nature of both SI and interpersonal effectiveness presents measurement challenges. Reliable, validated instruments are needed to operationalize constructs such as Presence or Authenticity, as self-report measures are often susceptible to social desirability bias [16]. Addressing these limitations through mixed-method designs and longitudinal studies will strengthen the robustness of future empirical models [24].

Conclusion

This paper advances SI research by demonstrating that interpersonal effectiveness is the critical mechanism through which Albrecht's S.P.A.C.E. dimensions influence job performance. By explicitly articulating this mediating process, the study extends the S.P.A.C.E. model from a descriptive capability framework to an explanatory model of workplace performance. Each dimension of the S.P.A.C.E. framework contributes uniquely to relational and organizational outcomes: Situational Awareness supports adaptability, presence enhances influence, authenticity nurtures trust, clarity improves communication, and empathy strengthens emotional bonds. Together, they constitute a behavioral framework for sustainable interpersonal and organizational success. By positioning interpersonal effectiveness as the central conduct between SI and performance, this study provides a fresh perspective on how human competencies can be systematically developed to enhance professional outcomes. The model encourages organizations to incorporate SI training in leadership development and performance management programs. Moreover, it opens new

avenues for empirical research to test and refine the mediating role of interpersonal effectiveness across diverse work settings. Ultimately, fostering socially intelligent, interpersonally effective employees is essential to achieving long-term organizational excellence in an increasingly interconnected, dynamic work environment. The framework offers both theoretical clarity and practical relevance, providing organizations with a structured lens for diagnosing and developing SI capabilities. Future empirical research is encouraged to validate and refine the proposed relationships across diverse organizational contexts.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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