

Relational Self-Affirmation

Changing the Stories We Tell Ourselves

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Joining a new team can be stressful



Problem with “belonging uncertainty”

- Need for social belonging as a fundamental human motivation (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995)
- Concerns about social belonging can be problematic for cognitive and academic performance (Baumeister et al., 2002; Walton & Cohen, 2007)
- Suppress unique perspectives and conform to a team's shared knowledge (Gruenfeld et al., 1996; Littlepage, Perdue, & Fuller, 2012; Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000)



My approach: **Relational** self-affirmation

In my eyes, you were at your best when you did X, Y and Z...

Definition: The process by which individuals internalize socially-reflected self-narratives about their valued strength and distinct contribution



Operationalizing relational self-affirmation

STEP 1



Write three stories of your distinct strengths and contribution

STEP 2



Solicit your best-self stories from personal network

STEP 3



Analyze the stories to find recurring themes

STEP 4



Compose your self-portrait

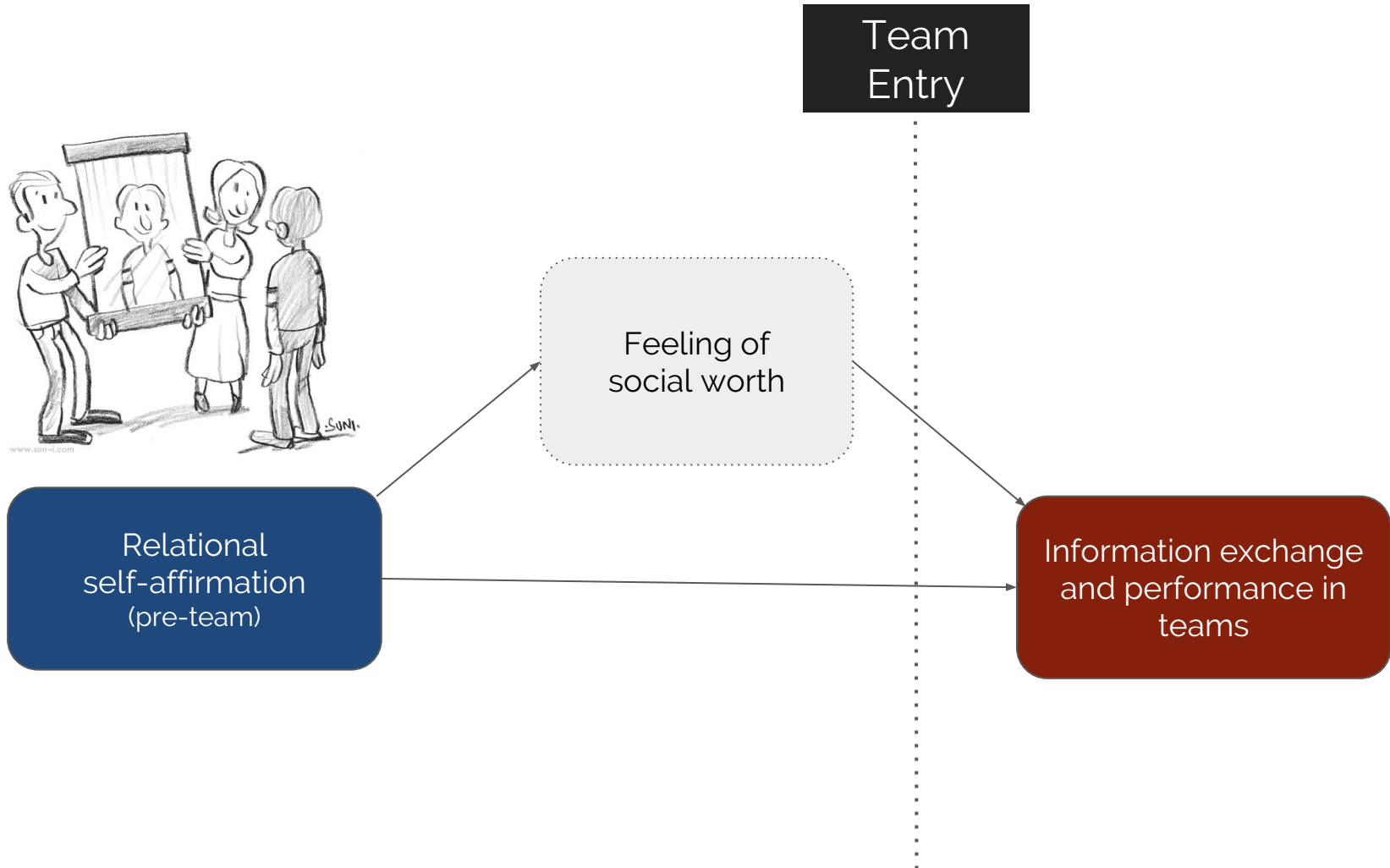
My hypothesis:



Relational
self-affirmation
(pre-team)

Feeling of
social worth

My hypothesis:



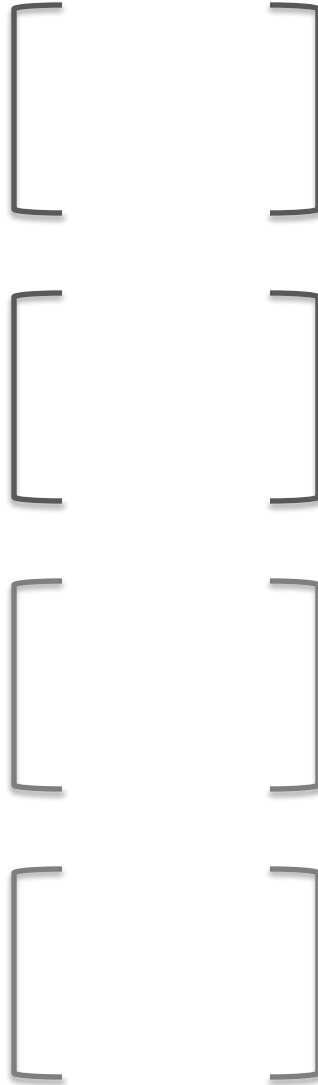
Study 1 Method

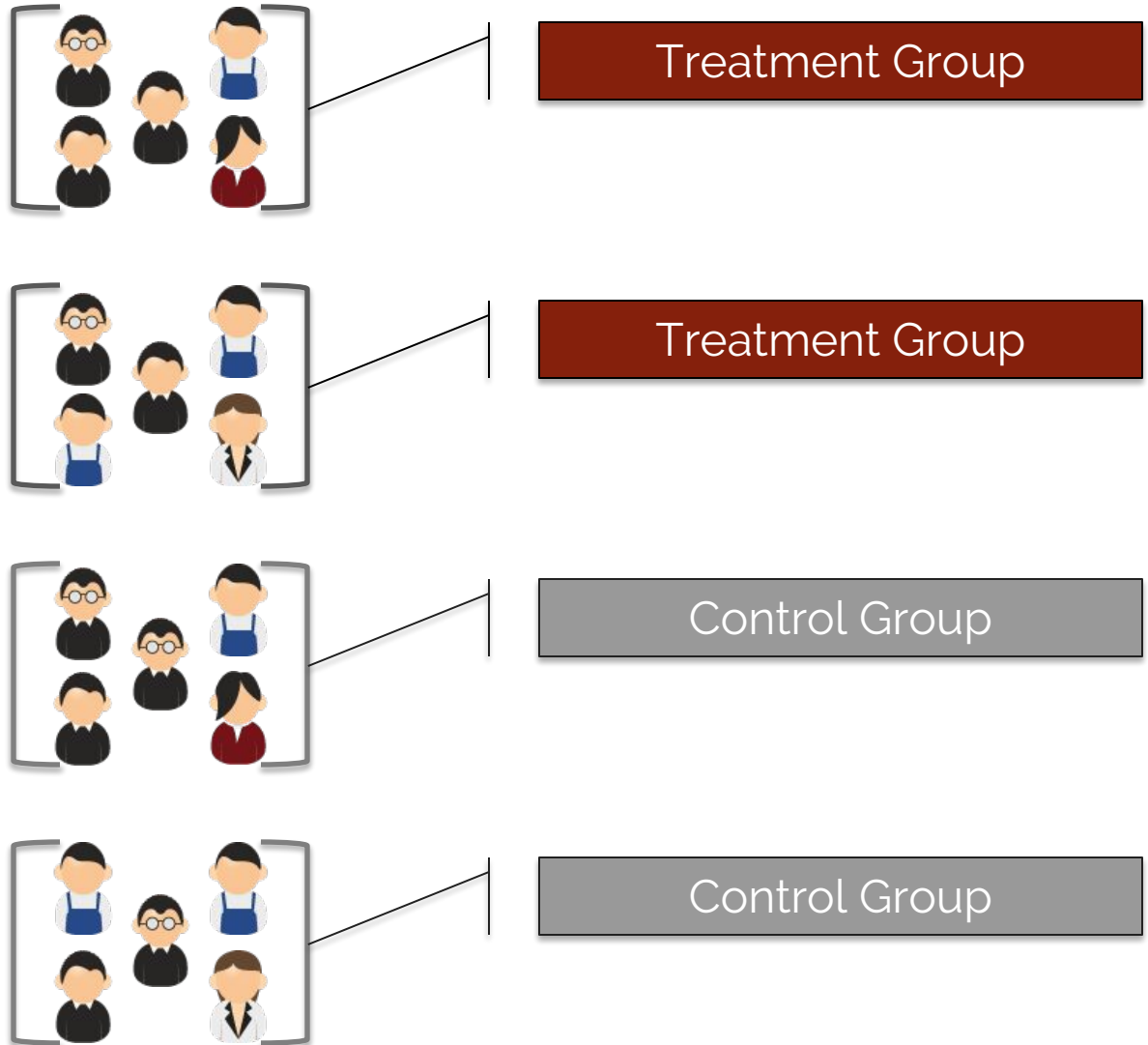
Context: Harvard Kennedy School's 4-week long Senior Executive Fellows (SEF) Program

Sample:

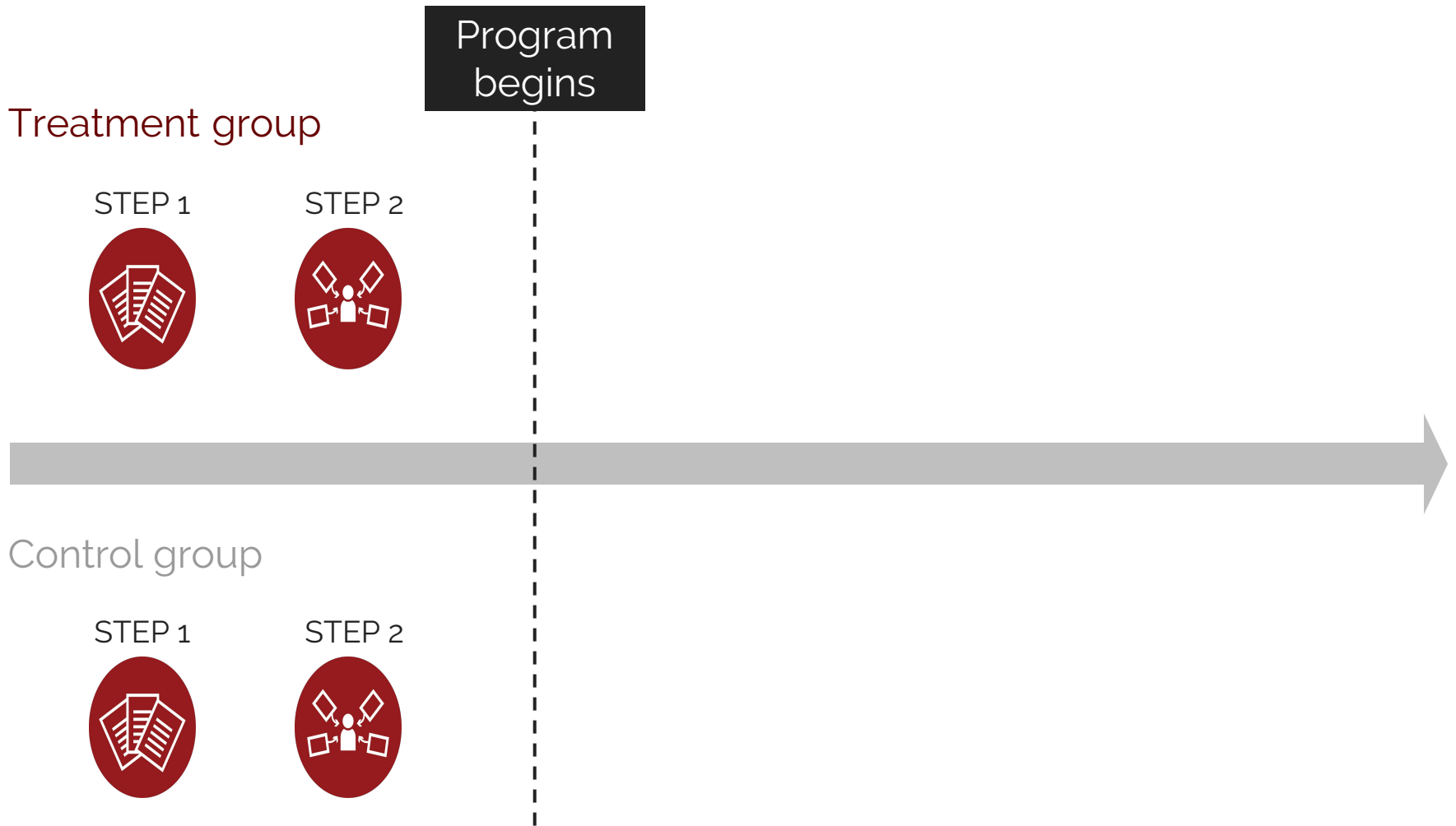
- 246 executives ($M_{age}=48$, $SD=7.13$; 27% female) participated in the SEF program (across 4 programs over 2 years)
- Civil and military officers (85% work for the US federal government)
- Assigned to one of 42 work groups consisted of 5-6 members for the crisis simulation



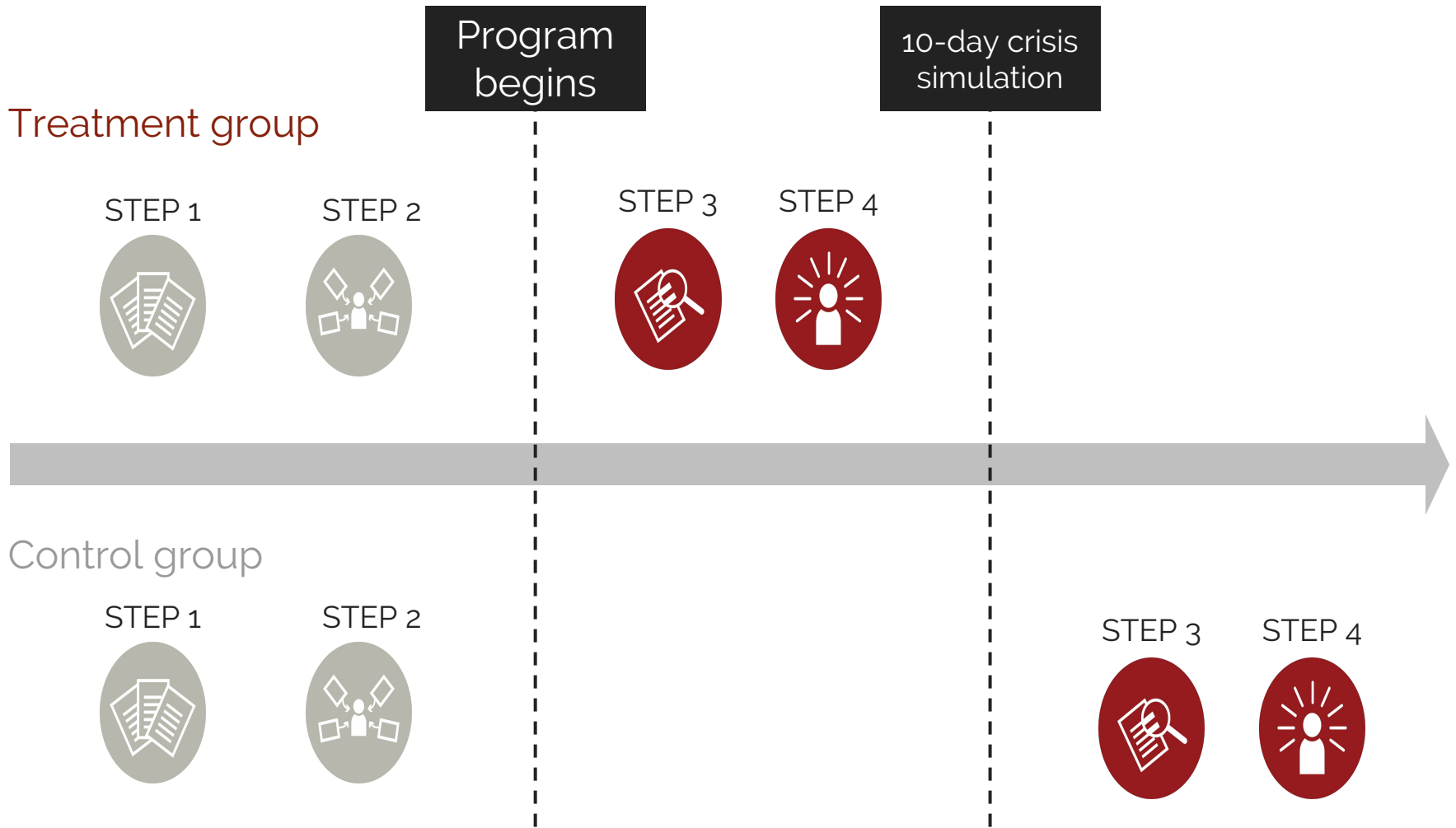




Experimental design



Experimental design



Crisis builds up in Boston for 10 days



HKS SEF Game
@GameSEFHKS

TWEETS 20 FOLLOWERS 134

Tweet to HKS SEF Game

Tweets Tweets & replies

HKS SEF Game @GameSEFHKS · Oct 23
ABC. President Obama to appoint MERS czar in speech to nation tomorrow morning.

HKS SEF Game @GameSEFHKS · Oct 23
CBS. MERS's latest victims. Family in New Mexico found dead, apparent suicide. Note cites the "MERS-plague" as sign of apocalypse.

HKS SEF Game @GameSEFHKS · Oct 23
Blog: Recent news in Saudi Arabia has military worried that MERS may have indeed been created as biological weapon.

HKS SEF Game @GameSEFHKS · Oct 23
Globe. Boston schools experiencing an uptick in absences as parents keeping children home. MERS-scare?





Teams who received narratives first performed better

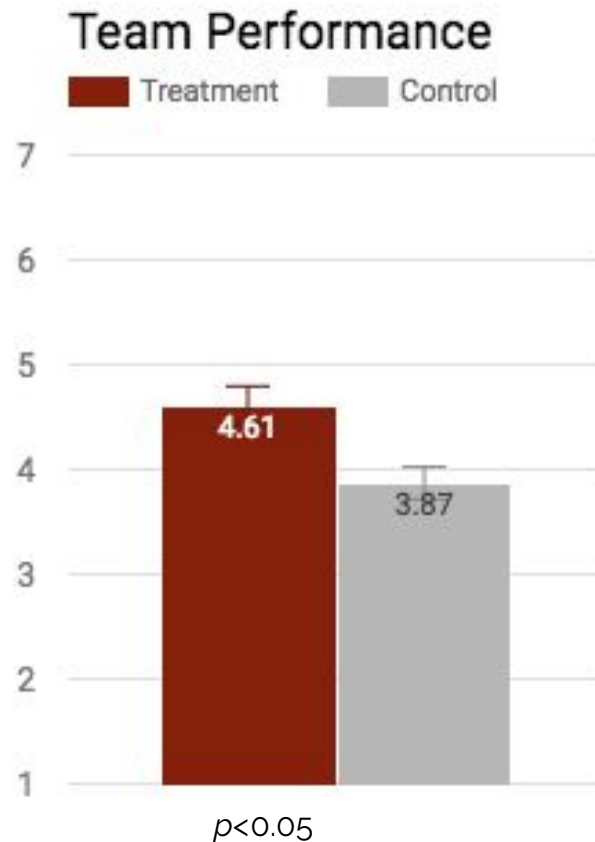
Team Performance

■ Treatment ■ Control

$p < 0.05$

Measure: effective communication, creativity, clarity, feasibility, team cohesiveness, overall value to the decision-maker

Teams who received narratives first performed better



Controlling for team size, age, gender composition, and cohorts...

Predictor Variables	Team Performance	
	B	SE
Treatment (vs. Control)	0.74*	0.32
Team Size	-0.04	0.26
Mean Age	0.01	0.05
Gender Composition	1.89	1.75
Cohort #1	-0.02	0.52
Cohort #2	1.31*	0.55
Cohort #3	1.26*	0.52
N	42	
Overall F	3.67	
R-squared	0.43	
Adj R-squared	0.31	
Root MSE	0.99	

Note. B refers to an unstandardized regression coefficient.

Summary of Study 1 Results



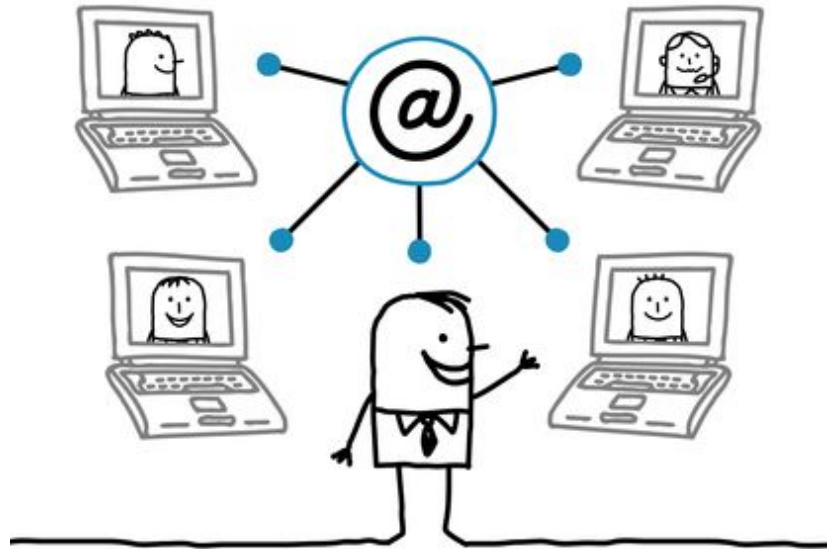
Relational
self-affirmation
(pre-team)

Expert-rated
team performance

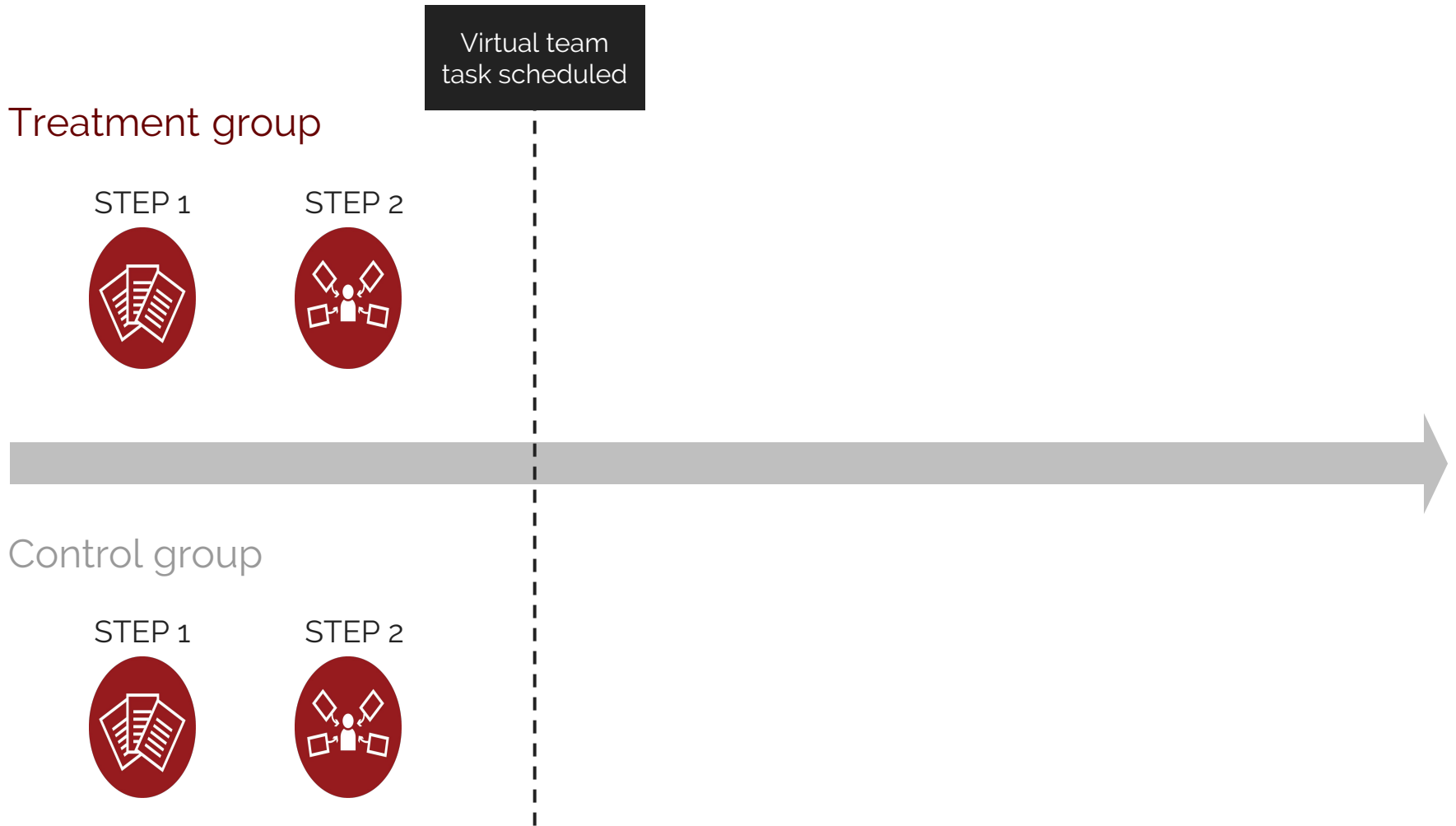
Study 2 Method

Sample: 123 virtual workers recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk

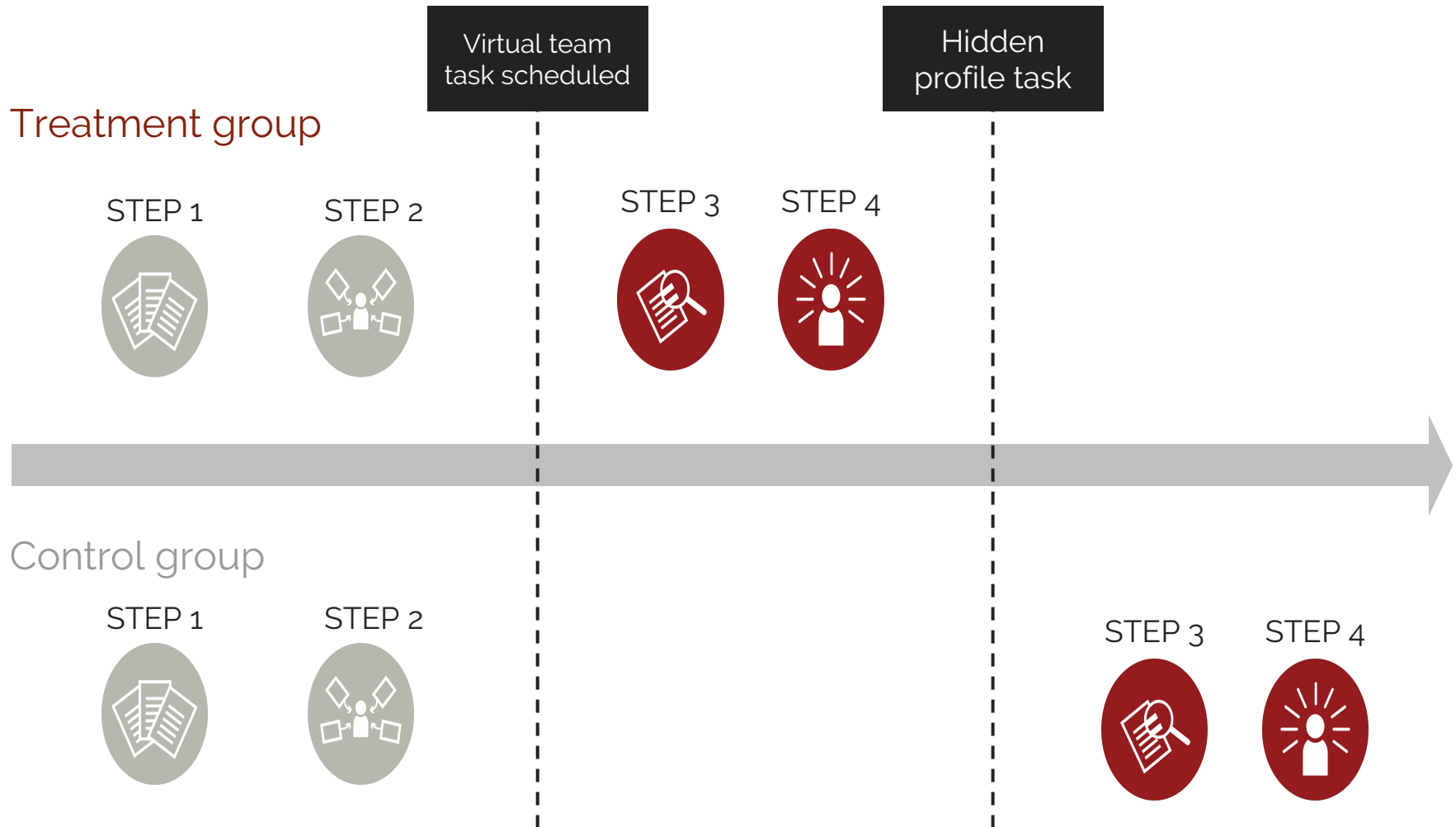
- Randomly assigned to 3-person teams and scheduled session times
- Have participants do the team problem-solving task (15 minutes) in a virtual chat room



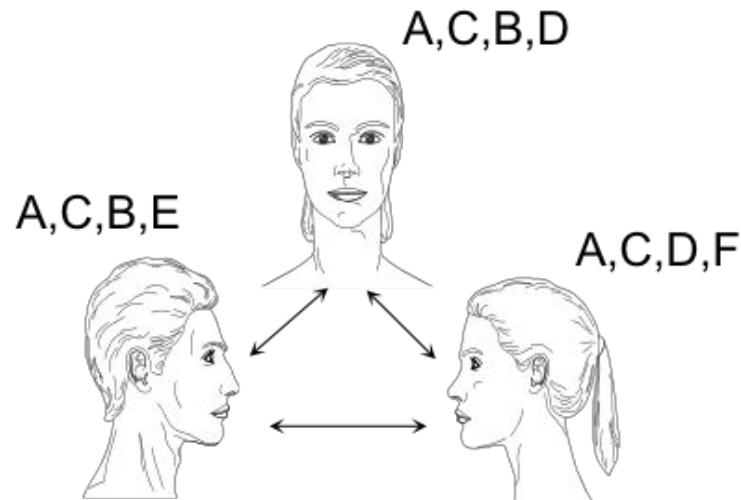
Experimental design



Experimental design



Hidden Profile Task



A,C: Common to all three people

B,D: Shared by two people

E,F: Unique to one person

Common information effect: Groups tend to spend too little time discussing unshared (unique, uncommon) information.

Each member gets a checklist

Criterion	Sample checklist		
	East Point Mall	Starlight Valley	Cape James Beach
At least 50 parking spaces	Y	Y	N
Larger than 2000 sq feet	N		
Cost of less than \$1M			
No more than 2 direct competitors			Y
Substantial foot traffic	Y		
Low maintenance costs		Y	
Large tourist population	N		Y
Large student population	Y	N	N
Quick access to waste disposal	Y	Y	N
Employable individuals	Y	N	Y

Each member gets a checklist

Preferred location based on private information

Criterion	Sample checklist		
	East Point Mall	Starlight Valley	Cape James Beach
At least 50 parking spaces	Y	Y	N
Larger than 2000 sq feet	N		
Cost of less than \$1M			
No more than 2 direct competitors			Y
Substantial foot traffic	Y		
Low maintenance costs		Y	
Large tourist population	N		Y
Large student population	Y	N	N
Quick access to waste disposal	Y	Y	N
Employable individuals	Y	N	Y

Information distribution

Difficult to identify the best option unless unshared information is discussed!

	East Point Mall			Starlight Valley			Cape James Beach		
Criterion	P1	P2	P3	P1	P2	P3	P1	P2	P3
At least 50 parking spaces	Y	Y	Y	Y			N	N	
Larger than 2000 sq feet	N				Y				N
Cost of less than \$1M		N				Y		Y	
No more than 2 direct competitors			N			Y	Y	Y	
Substantial foot traffic	Y	Y	Y		Y			Y	Y
Low maintenance costs			N	Y					Y
Large tourist population	N	N	N		Y		Y	Y	Y
Large student population	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N		
Quick access to waste disposal	Y	Y	Y	Y			N		N
Employable individuals	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y		Y
Total # of criteria met	+5-5 = 0			+8-2 = 6			+6-4 = 2		

Measures

Coding the chat dialogue to find proxies for information exchange

- Number of unshared cues ($ICC_1=.75$, $ICC_2=.83$, $R_{wg}=.99$)

Generalized feelings of social worth (Grant & Gino, 2010; $\alpha=0.90$)

- “I feel valued as a person”
- “I feel appreciated as an individual”
- “I feel I made a positive difference in others’ lives”

Chatzy Anonymous User Log In / Sign Up

Start A Free Private Chat
Fill out this form to create a chat room immediately – only for you and people you invite. (For more options, try our Virtual Rooms.)

Your name: John Black

Title/subject: I want to talk about...

Invite email: somebody@somewhere.com

Message: Hi there!

Please join me for a chat. All you have to do is follow this link.

[Create my chat room.](#)

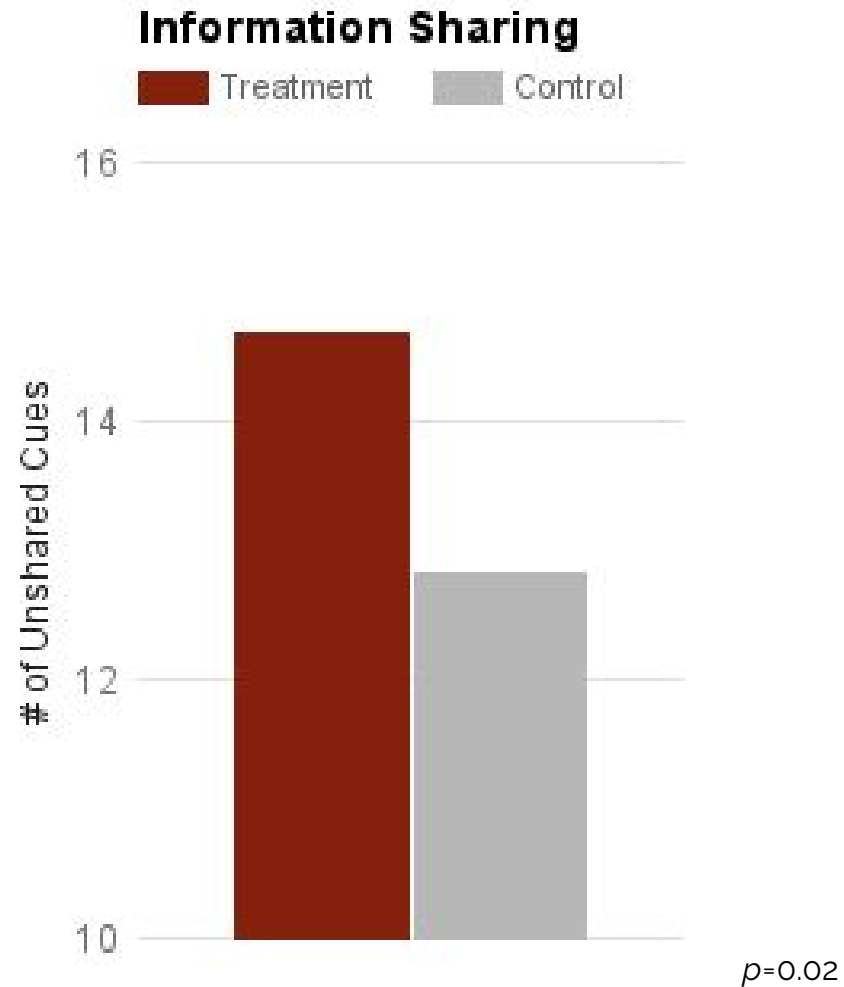
Chatzy respects your privacy to the fullest as outlined in our Privacy Policy. All services are provided "as is" with no warranties whatsoever, as described in our Terms of Use. © 2010-2013 Chatzy. All rights reserved.

Chatzy is a good alternative to Facebook, Skype, Windows Live, and other messengers because:

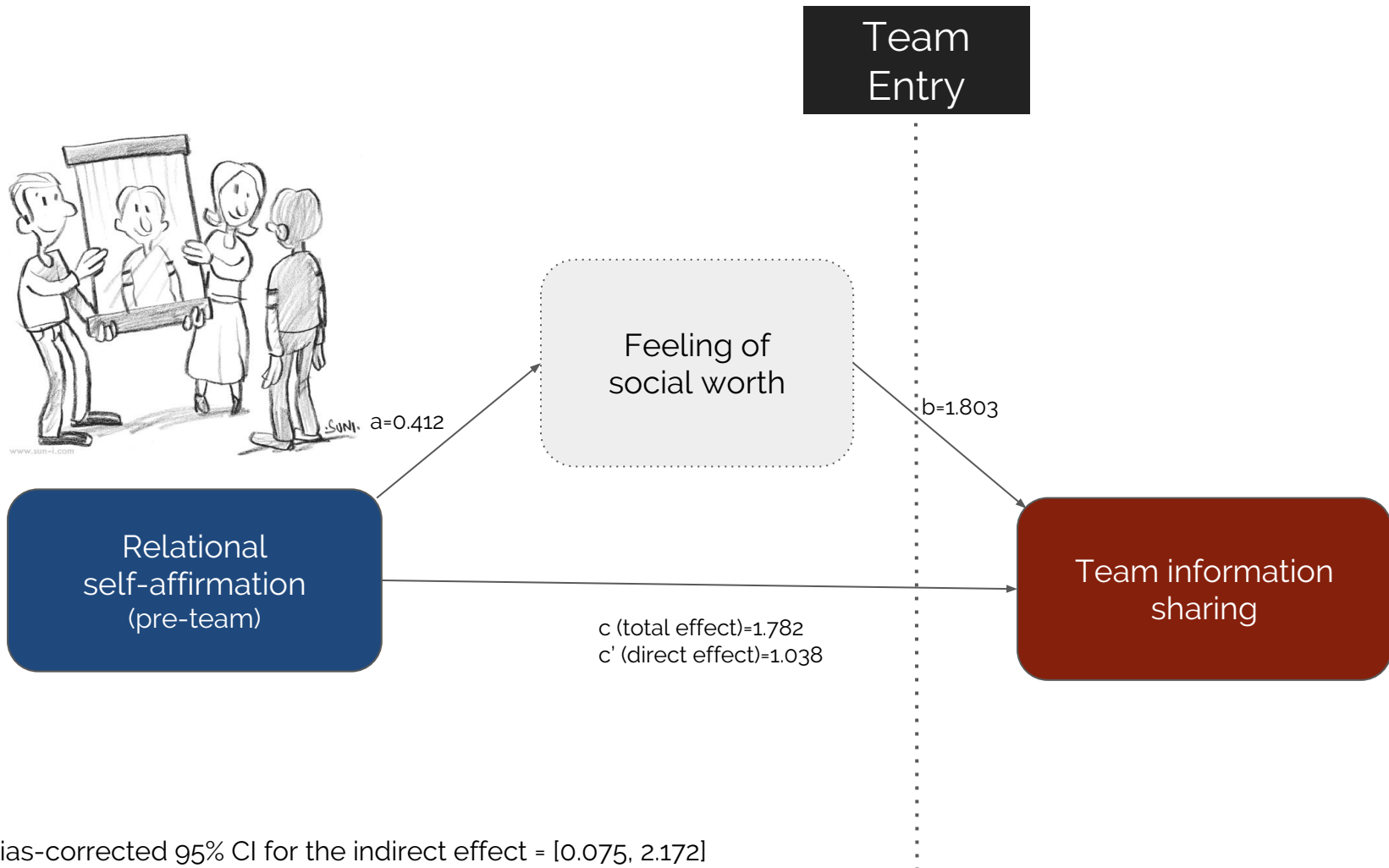
- ✓ Chatzy has no registration steps - your friends can join instantly
- ✓ Chatzy is free and has no popup ads
- ✓ Chatzy does not require Flash or any installation on your computer (= no spyware)
- ✓ Chatzy works on all major browsers, with any language and through corporate firewalls
- ✓ Chatzy is simple and easy to use

Freebie LIST FREE SITE

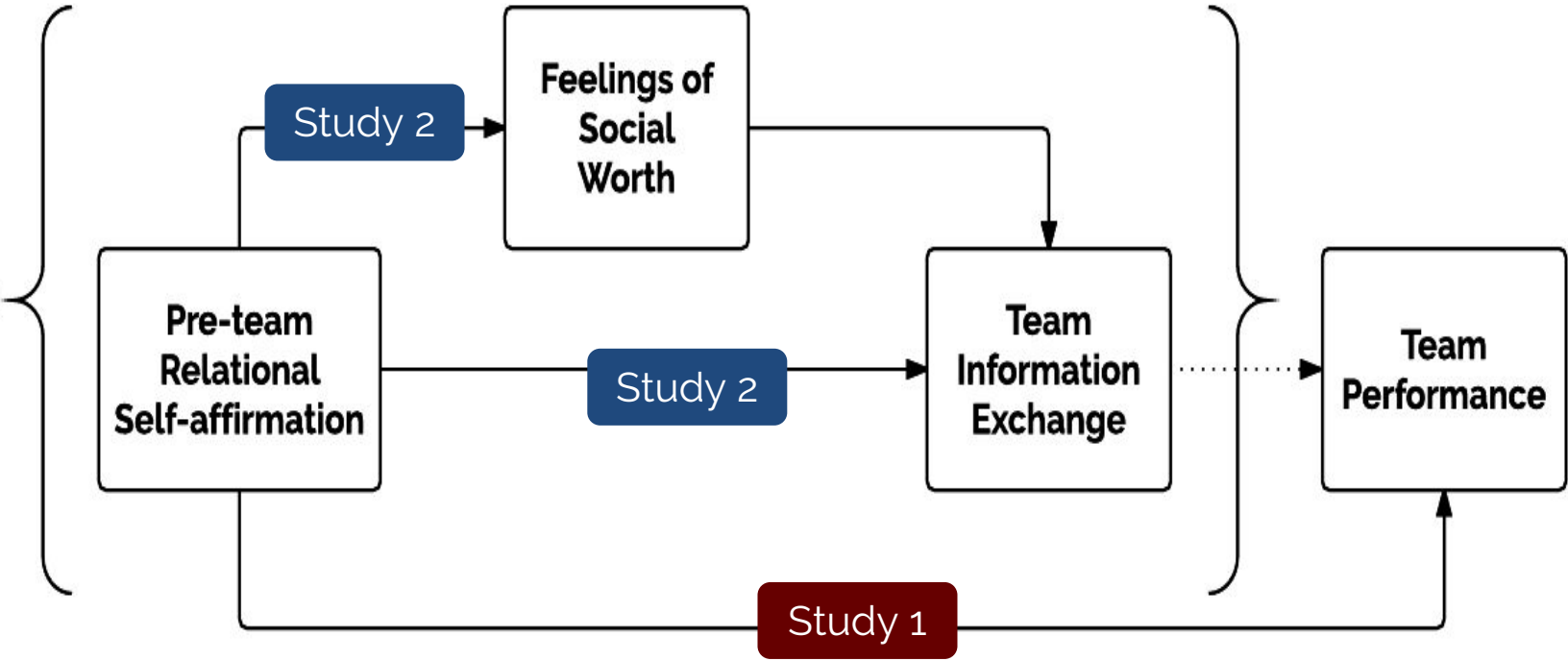
Results



Mediation by feelings of social worth



Summary



Theoretical contributions

Beyond self-affirmation

- Moved beyond the self-focused process of affirmation
- Fostered use of personal network of relationships for constructing contribution-based self-narratives



Theoretical contributions

Importance of socially-embedded view of self

- Highlighted how team members' self-narratives before they join the team matter and facilitate team performance
- Provided a theoretical framework by which addressing social belonging concerns helps role entry



Managerial implications

- Enabled organizations to leverage the employees' self-narratives to enhance team performance
- Power of **creating opportunities for social reflection** to remind individuals who they are when they make distinct contributions to others



Thank You!

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