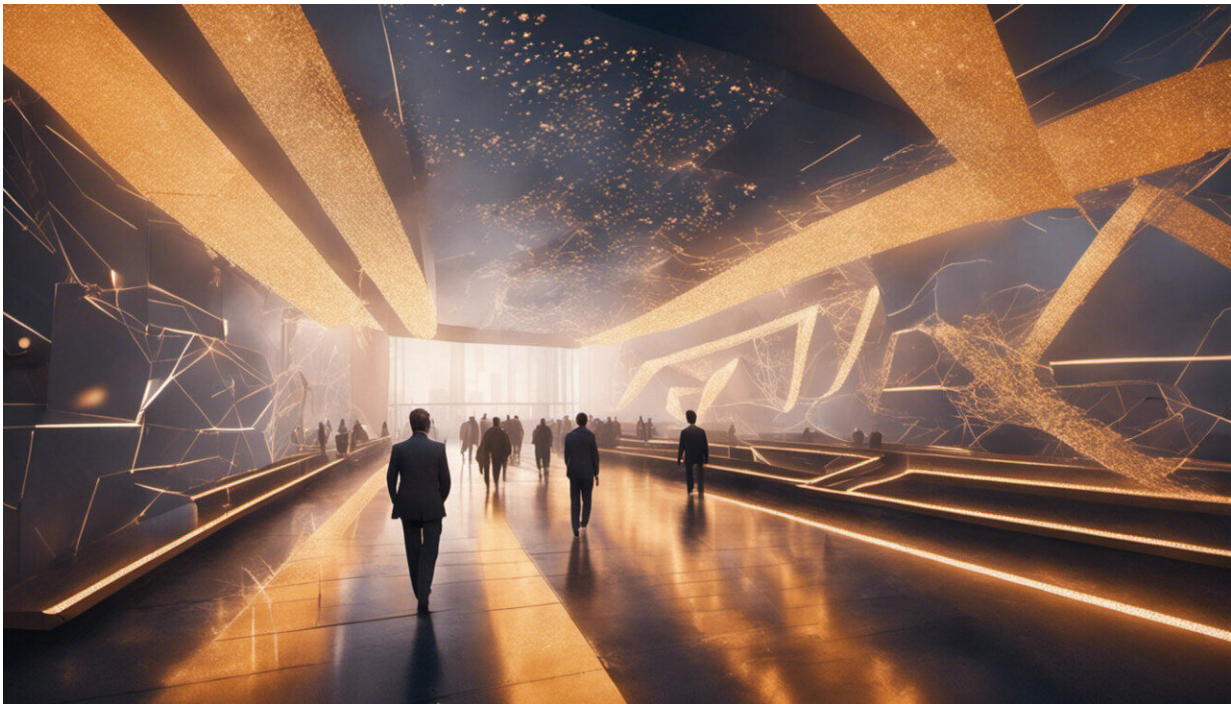


# Study reveals how to be socially successful

July 25 2014, by Helen Burdon

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Romantic, personal and professional relationships are fraught with danger, but a University of Queensland researcher has found the secret to interacting successfully with others in such settings.

A study co-authored by Professor Bill von Hippel from UQ's School of Psychology has found it is crucial to recognise when the rules of social engagement shift in order to get along well with others.

"Social situations are dynamic, and the ability to modify [social behaviour](#) in response to shifting dynamics is a hallmark of successful social functioning," Professor von Hippel said.

"Our findings suggest that simply having an understanding of appropriate behaviour is not enough to ensure social success.

"It is also necessary to be skillful at detecting social changes in the first place."

Professor von Hippel and recent UQ graduate Dr Richard Ronay, now Assistant Professor of Psychology at VU University, Amsterdam, developed a short computer game to measure a participant's ability to track when the rules of social engagement change.

In a series of experiments involving cooperative relationships between romantic partners and competitive interactions among MBA students, participants played a computer game in which they learned that some types of objects were typically more valuable than others.

Once participants learned that rule, the computer reversed it and then tested how quickly they noticed that the rule had changed.

Dr Ronay said the results showed that participants who noticed the rule change more quickly were also more socially successful.

"In the case of romantic relationships, this meant people had happier partners and were able to handle conflict with their partner more constructively; while competitive business students were more effective negotiators," he said.

Dr Ronay said performance on the game was unrelated to participant's IQ or their knowledge about how to manage emotions.

"The results suggest that the ability to recognise shifting rules reflects a component of social intelligence that can be used to pursue a variety of social goals, from [romantic relationships](#) to competitive negotiations, to the building of trust," he said.

This study is published online in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

**More information:** Richard Ronay and William von Hippel. "Sensitivity to Changing Contingencies Predicts Social Success." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 1948550614542348, first published on July 11, 2014 [DOI: 10.1177/1948550614542348](https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550614542348)

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