Political Skill as a Predictor of Performance and Work Relationship Quality

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between political skill and multi-faceted job performance as well as work relationship quality. Political skill is “the ability to effectively understand others at work and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and/or organizational objectives” (Ferris, 2005, p. 127). Ferris (2005) specifically provided four underlying dimensions of political skill: networking ability, apparent sincerity, social astuteness, and interpersonal influence. Prior meta-analytic evidence supports a significant positive correlation between political skill and task performance ($r = .26$; Munyon et al., 2015). While the relationship with job performance has received a good deal of research attention, less is known about how political skill may impact interpersonal relationships at work. Some evidence suggests that political skill can relate to interpersonal citizenship behavior (Andrews, Kacmar, & Harris, 2009), but specific relationship quality has not been sufficiently examined. The present study tested the relationship between political skill and performance in a diverse employee sample ($N = 752$) that was recruited via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. In addition, we examined political skill as a predictor of relationship quality with both coworkers and supervisors. We examined these relationships using a longitudinal design, with political skill measured at Time 1 and performance and relationship quality measured two months later at Time 2. Using a series of regression analyses, we found support that political skill was positively related to performance, assessed as task performance, co-worker support, and teamwork, and positively related to both supervisor and co-worker relationship quality. When examined at the subscale level, there were some nuances in which aspects of political skill related to performance domain and relationship quality. We expect that our results could have implications for Industrial-Organizational psychology, in clarifying the literature on the outcomes of political skill. In addition, our results
could have practical implications for the development of interpersonal skills training and leadership development.
Introduction

The workplace, like all social environments, can be susceptible to the effects of politics and political behaviors. Pfeffer (1981) suggested that in addition to job requirements (KSA), political skill is also a necessity to successfully navigate the workplace. As the nature of work continues to evolve and grow more interdependent, interpersonal competencies will only become more impactful and crucial to success (Garcia-Chas, Neira-Fontela, & Varela-Neira, 2015). Indeed, Ferris, Perrewe, & Davidson (2006) posit that political skill may be one of the most critical competencies for successful leadership (Douglas & Ammeter, 2004).

The current literature on political skill as a predictor of job performance has shown strong evidence of a positive relationship. Studies have found that political skill is associated with higher multi-faceted performance (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007; Garcia-Chas, et al., 2015) and greater success in developing network resources (Treadway et al., 2004; Wei, Chiang, & Wu, 2012;), likely as a result of enhanced adaptivity and flexibility (Ferris, Perrewe, Anthony, & Gilmore, 2000, p.34). A meta-analysis of 50 studies by Munyon et al. (2015) found that political skill was significantly related to task performance, personal reputation, and work productivity.

Research on political skill as a predictor of relationship quality is scarce. A study by Lvina, Johns, & Vandenberghhe (2018) found that political skill in a group context is related to greater social cohesion, greater task cohesion, and overall more effective collaboration and group performance. In addition, political skill has been found to be associated with less psychological strain and behavioral strain in the workplace (Perrewe et al., 2004). Other studies have generally found that political skill is intuitively associated with more successful social navigation, greater leadership effectiveness, greater interpersonal influence, and more citizenship behaviors at work (Andrews, Kacmar, & Harris, 2009; Ferris et al., 2007; Ferris et al., 2005). To build upon the
existing research, our study examined how political skill relates to quality of relationships with both co-workers and supervisors. In sum, tested the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Political Skill (measured by PSI) is positively correlated to job performance.

Hypothesis 2. Political Skill is significantly related to co-worker relationship quality.

Hypothesis 3. Political Skill is significantly related to supervisor relationship quality.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants were recruited using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Each participant was compensated $2.00 for completing a survey at Time 1 (N = 1,077). Participants were invited to participate in a second survey two months later (N = 752 matched sample) and compensated an additional $2.00 for the second survey. Demographic information was collected at Time 1 and Time 2. Political skill was also measured at Time 1 using the Political Skill Inventory (PSI; Ferris et al., 2005). Measures of self-reported job performance measures (Williams & Anderson, 1991) and adapted measure of relationship quality with one’s co-workers and supervisors (Modeled after Poerio, Totterdell, Emerson, & Miles, 2015) were assessed at Time 2.

Results

Overall the results support all three hypotheses; however, when considering the individual dimensions of political skill not all dimensions were consistently correlated with the criterion measures.

Apparent sincerity (B=.09, p<.01) and social astuteness (B=.12, p<.01) correlated with task performance. Social astuteness and interpersonal influence were not significantly correlated to task performance. The model explained 14.1 percent of the variance in task performance, with
social astuteness explaining the most unique variance \( (sr^2=.014) \), followed by apparent sincerity \( (sr^2=.01) \).

Networking ability \( (B=.06, p<.01) \), apparent sincerity \( (B=.10, p<.01) \), and interpersonal influence \( (B=.11, p<.01) \) correlated with co-worker support. Social astuteness was not significantly correlated with co-worker support. The model explained 20.5 percent of the variance in co-worker support, with apparent sincerity explaining the most unique variance \( (sr^2=.012) \), followed by networking ability \( (sr^2=.008) \).

Networking ability \( (B=.10, p<.01) \), apparent sincerity \( (B=.14, p<.01) \), and social astuteness \( (B=.08, p<.05) \) correlated with teamwork. Interpersonal influence was not significantly correlated with teamwork. The model explained 23.2 percent of the variance in teamwork, with apparent sincerity explaining the most unique variance \( (sr^2=.023) \), followed by networking ability \( (sr^2=.017) \).

Networking ability \( (B=.28, p<.01) \), apparent sincerity \( (B=.26, p<.01) \), social astuteness \( (B=-.21, p<.01) \), and interpersonal influence \( (B=.16, p<.01) \) correlated with co-worker relationship quality. The model explained 16.9 percent of the variance in co-worker relationship quality, with networking ability explaining the most unique variance \( (sr^2=.044) \), followed by apparent sincerity \( (sr^2=.023) \). We note that there was evidence of a suppression effect when considering social astuteness, as the univariate correlation with co-worker relationship quality was positive \( (r=.23, p<.01) \) whereas the relationship appeared as negative in the regression.

Networking ability \( (B=.29, p<.01) \), social astuteness \( (B=-.16, p<.05) \), and interpersonal influence \( (B=.27, p<.01) \) correlated with supervisor relationship quality. The model explained 13.3 percent of the variance in supervisor relationship quality, with networking ability explaining
the most unique variance ($sr^2=.032$), followed by interpersonal influence ($sr^2=.012$). Similar to co-worker relationship quality, social astuteness again appears to be affected by suppression.
References


