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## **Political Skill**

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## Political Skill

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### Introduction

For more than a quarter-century, political perspectives of organizations have been prevalent and influential in organizational theory and research (e.g., Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981, 2010). Fundamental to this view about organizations is that reality often is enacted and socially constructed between individuals. As such, political activities of employees play an important role in shaping others' perceptions and assessments of their individual characteristics, performance, and potential. In turn, these perceptions influence the degree to which individuals are successful within the workplace, as indicated by their ability to obtain organizational resources and rewards, such as increased compensation, more frequent raises, and vertical promotions (Ferris & Hochwarter, 2011; Ferris & Treadway, 2012; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2006).

Concomitant with the realization that organizations are political arenas (Mintzberg, 1983), individuals' careers can be characterized as political campaigns, involving self-promotion, impression management, and the use of influence tactics as well as the development of influential relationships, valuable resource reservoirs, and positive reputational capital (Baruch & Bozionelos, 2011). Undoubtedly, the success of such campaigns and ultimately, effective career management, depends critically on individual competencies (beyond mere task performance) that enable individuals to effectively manage, package, and subsequently project positive images across different work environments, especially those that influence the assessment of performance and career potential (Greenhaus & Callanan, 2013). To this end, political skill has received much attention in the last decade largely as a function of its demonstrated positive influence not only on those in its possession but also to employing organizations and peripheral others with whom a politically skilled individual works.

### Political Skill – Overview of the Construct

Political skill is formally defined as, '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, Treadway, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, Kacmar, Douglas, & Frink, 2005, p. 127).

Comprised of four related, yet distinct, dimensions (i.e., social astuteness, interpersonal influence, apparent sincerity, networking ability) political skill is considered a comprehensive *set of social competencies* with affective (i.e., understanding; apparent sincerity), cognitive (i.e., knowledge; social astuteness), and behavioral (i.e., influence; interpersonal influence, networking ability) manifestations (Ferris, Treadway, Perrewé, Brouer, Douglas, & Lux, 2007). More specifically, politically skilled individuals are socially astute in that they are able to accurately perceive, comprehend, and interpret their behavior, social interactions, and the behavior of others. As such, *social astuteness* represents the more cognitive aspects of political skill which are necessary to achieve knowledge of others' motivations and desires, whereas *apparent sincerity* reflects a more affective component of political skill. Specifically, apparently sincere individuals conduct themselves in such a way that they are perceived by others as genuine, trustworthy, well-intentioned, and devoid of ulterior motives.

Further, *interpersonal influence* and *networking ability* reflect the behavioral components of

political skill required to influence others in attempts to ultimately enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives. Based on their ability to keenly perceive and understand the social environment, politically skilled individuals demonstrate their interpersonal influence by adapting their behavior to what is situationally appropriate and superiorly effective in eliciting desired attitudinal and behavioral responses from others. In addition, politically skilled individuals are imbued with an uncanny ability to establish and maintain meaningful relationships with influential others at work, bridge connections between individuals and groups, build powerful coalitions, and assuage conflict with ease.

Finally, although the name 'political skill' may seem to imply that this set of social competencies is specific or unique to governmental politics, political skill has been entirely explored in an organizational context. Political skill has been established as a comprehensive set of social competencies (Ferris et al., 2007). Therefore, it is likely that those politicians in possession of political skill would be undoubtedly advantaged; however, political skill has yet to be explored in this context. Thus, throughout this chapter, we discuss political skill entirely within the organizational context, as this is where the entire breadth of scientific inquiries concerning political skill has been conducted. Within the organizational context, politically skilled employees utilize their political savvy to obtain desirable workplace and career outcomes for themselves and others. In what follows, political skill is discussed in great detail with regard to its measurement, predictors, outcomes, mechanisms through which it operates, specific organizational contexts in which political skill has been examined (e.g., leadership, personal initiative), and directions for future research.

## Measurement

Since its introduction to the organizational sciences literature by Ferris and colleagues, political skill has been formally defined (Ferris et al., 2005), operationalized (Ferris et al., 2005), theoretically grounded (Ferris et al., 2007), conceptually delineated (Ferris et al., 2005, 2007), and empirically established (Semadar, Robins, & Ferris, 2006) as a unique social effectiveness construct. With regard to operationalization, there exist four measures of the political skill construct to date. Information regarding each of the measures (i.e., including the source of the measure, number and list of items, dimensionality, and citations providing evidence of construct validity) can be found in [Table 11.1](#).

### Table 11.1 Summary of measures used to operationalize political skill

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Citation	# of items	Dimensions	Dimension name	Items	Validation evidence
Ferris et al. (1999)	6	1	Understanding of Others <sup>1</sup>	– I find it easy to envision myself in the position of others. – I understand people well.	Ahearn et al. (2004) Perrewé et al. (2004) Perrewé et al. (2005)
			Interpersonal Influence	– I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me. – It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people. – I am good at getting others to respond positively to me. – I usually try to find common ground with others.	Harris et al. (2007) Shi et al. (2013)
Ferris et al. (2001)	7	1	n/a	– I find it easy to put myself in the position of others. – I am keenly aware of how I am perceived by others. – In social situations, it is always clear to me exactly what to say and do. – I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others. – I am good at making myself visible with influential people in my organization. – I am good at reading others' body language. – I am good to adjust my behavior and become the type of person dictated by any situation.	Witt & Ferris (2003) Hochwarter et al. (2006)
Ferris et al. (2005)	18	4	Networking Ability	– I spend a lot of time and effort at work networking with others. – I am good at building relationships with influential people at work.	Ferris et al. (2005) Treadway et al. (2005) Ferris, Blickle et al. (2008) Lvina et al. (2012)
			Apparent Sincerity	– I have developed a large network of colleagues and associates at work whom I can call on for support when I really need to get things done. – At work, I know a lot of important people and am well connected. – I spend a lot of time at work developing connections with others. – I am good at using my connections and network to make things happen at work.	
			Social Astuteness	– When communicating with others, I try to be genuine in what I say and do. – It is important that people believe I am sincere in what I say and do. – I try to show a genuine interest in other people.	
			Interpersonal Influence	– I understand people very well. – I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others. – I have good intuition or savvy about how to present myself to others. – I always seem to instinctively know the right things to say or do to influence others. – I pay close attention to people's facial expressions.	
Snell et al. (2014)	17	5	Networking Ability	– I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me. – I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others. – It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people. – I am good at getting people to like me.	Snell et al. (2014)
			Apparent Sincerity	– I spend a lot of time and effort at work networking with others. – At work, I know a lot of important people and am well connected. – I am good at using my connections and network to make things happen at work.	
			Image Management	– I have developed a large network of colleagues and associates at work whom I can call on for support when I really need to get things done. – I spend a lot of time at work developing connections with others. – I am good at building relationships with influential people at work.	
			Social Astuteness	– It is important that people believe I am sincere in what I say and do. – When communicating with others, I try to be genuine in what I say and do.	
			Interpersonal Influence	– I always seem to instinctively know the right things to say or do to influence others. – I have good intuition or savvy about how to present myself to others. – I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others. – I pay close attention to people's facial expressions. – I understand people very well.	
			Interpersonal Influence	– It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people. – I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me. – I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others. – I am good at getting people to like me.	

<sup>1</sup> While Ferris, Berkson, Kaplan, Gilmore, Buckley, Hochwarter, & Witt (1999) expected scale items to load onto two distinct factors (i.e., understanding of others, interpersonal influence), empirical evidence revealed that the items reflected a unidimensional scale.

Two of the original unidimensional measures reflect fledgling efforts to operationalize and subsequently further explicate political skill's construct domain. These efforts were widely successful as they sparked awareness and interest from the scientific community and inspired more in-depth construct delineation and measure development. Most notably, encouraged by early empirical evidence of the construct's predictive validity, Ferris and colleagues (2005) developed the four-dimensional, 18-item *Political Skill Inventory (PSI)*, which remains the most comprehensive and psychometrically sound measure of the construct to date. The *PSI* has undergone rigorous tests of construct validity (Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris, Blickle et al., 2008), with empirical evidence indicating that political skill is related to, but unique from, personality and social effectiveness constructs such as conscientiousness, political savvy, self-monitoring, and emotional intelligence (Ferris et al., 2005). Recent meta-analytic evidence confirms these findings (Munyon, Summers, Thompson, & Ferris, 2015). Further, researchers (Ferris et al., 2008) have established political skill as a higher-order factor (i.e., through second-order factor analysis) comprised of its four dimensions (i.e., social astuteness, interpersonal influence, apparent sincerity, networking ability), which allows researchers the freedom to operate at either the dimensional level or at the aggregate composite level.

Finally, the *PSI* has demonstrated cross-cultural equivalence across five different cultures (Lvina et al., 2012). More specifically, Lvina and colleagues (2012) found political skill (i.e., as operationalized by the 18-item *PSI*) to be stable across American, Chinese, German, Russian, and Turkish respondents. Further, the item loadings and intercepts were for the most part invariant across the samples. However, when loadings or intercepts did not demonstrate invariance, they tended to vary as a function of known cultural differences, namely, uncertainty avoidance and low- versus high-context communication. Specifically, whereas political skill levels were slightly constrained in cultures characterized by high uncertainty avoidance (e.g., Germany), respondents from cultures characterized by an indirect communication style (e.g., China, Turkey) demonstrated higher levels of social astuteness and networking ability (Lvina et al., 2012).

### Antecedents of Political Skill

In comparison to the numerous studies examining the effects of political skill on oneself and others, relatively few studies have examined the development of political skill and its dimensions. Nonetheless, political skill is believed to have both dispositional and developmental antecedents (Ferris et al., 2007). In regard to the former, as can be seen in [Table 11.2](#), a handful of studies have examined the four themes identified by Ferris and colleagues (2007) as antecedents of political skill. Specifically, Ferris et al. (2007) examined control, perceptiveness, affability, and active influence as categories of dispositional antecedents that best captured elements of individuals' personalities that positioned or predisposed them to demonstrate situationally appropriate behavior and personal influence.

**Table 11.2 Summary of research examining the personality and ability antecedents of political skill**

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<i>Personality antecedent category</i>	<i>Personality and ability correlate</i>	<i>Correlated with:</i>	<i>Citation</i>
Control	Self-efficacy	Composite Political Skill	Ferris et al. (2008)
		Interpersonal Influence	Ferris et al. (2008)
Perceptiveness	Self-monitoring	Social Astuteness	Ferris et al. (2005)
	Conscientiousness	Social Astuteness	Ferris et al. (2005)
	Emotion Recognition Ability	Composite Political Skill	Momm et al. (2015)
Affability	Positive Affectivity	Composite Political Skill	Kolodinsky et al. (2004)
		Extraversion	Composite Political Skill
	Humility	Interpersonal Influence	Ferris et al. (2008); Liu et al. (2007)
		Social Astuteness	Ferris et al. (2008); Liu et al. (2007)
		Networking Ability	Ferris et al. (2008); Liu et al. (2007)
	Affability	Composite Political Skill	Smith et al. (2009)
	Active Influence	Proactive Personality	Composite Political Skill
Networking Ability			Thompson (2005)
Self-motivation		Composite Political Skill	Smith et al. (2009)

The control dispositional theme suggests that political skill and its dimensions develop partly as a function of the extent to which individuals perceive personal and/or environmental control (Ferris et al., 2007). Individuals who are internally focused and self-efficacious, for example, are argued to demonstrate greater interpersonal influence and networking abilities largely as a function of their self-confidence, mastery of the environment, and their positive beliefs in self. In support, Ferris et al. (2008) found self-efficacy to be positively related to both

composite political skill and interpersonal influence (but not networking ability).

The perceptiveness theme encompasses dispositional constructs (e.g., self-monitoring, conscientiousness) that reflect a superior ability to observe and regulate one's behavior. Given the inherent observational and behavioral adaptability components, perceptiveness has been argued to influence the development of social astuteness (Ferris et al., 2007). In support, research has found that both self-monitoring and conscientiousness were positively related to social astuteness (Ferris et al., 2005).

Captured by personality traits like agreeableness, extraversion, and positive affectivity, the affability dispositional theme refers to a likeable, pleasant, and outgoing orientation (Ferris et al., 2007). As initially hypothesized (Ferris et al., 2007), research has found positive affectivity and extraversion to be positively related to composite political skill (Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2004), and extraversion to be positively related to the interpersonal influence, social astuteness, and networking ability dimensions of political skill (Ferris et al., 2008; Liu, Ferris, Zinko, Perrewé, Weitz, & Xu, 2007). In support, recent qualitative research identified two traits encompassed under the affability dispositional theme; that is, humility (i.e., 'being one with others') and affability (i.e., ease in interacting with others, friendly, outgoing), as dispositional antecedents of political skill (Smith, Plowman, Duchon, & Quinn, 2009).

The perceptiveness dispositional theme of political skill has been most recently examined through the lens of emotional intelligence. Meisler (2014) argued that as a form of intelligence (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999), emotional intelligence, or 'the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotions; the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth' (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10), would be positively related to individuals' political skill. In this manner, Meisler (2014) argued that emotional intelligence would provide the essential emotional understanding that politically skilled individuals needed to effectively influence others. Results provided support for this hypothesis; moreover, political skill was found to mediate the emotional intelligence–job satisfaction relationship.

Similarly, given the increasingly interconnected nature of today's work (Ferris, Liden, Munyon, Summers, Basik, & Buckley, 2009), Momm and colleagues (Momm, Blickle, Liu, Wihler, Kholin, & Menges, 2015) examined an element of emotional intelligence, emotion recognition ability (ERA), as a predictor of political skill, and ultimately, individuals' annual income. Results indicated that the positive effects of emotion recognition ability (i.e., the ability to 'recognize the meanings of emotions and their relationships, and to reason and problem-solve on the basis of them'; Mayer et al., 1999: p. 267) on annual income were mediated by political skill. Thus, support was found for Momm et al.'s (2015) assertion that the emotional perceptivity afforded by ERA assists in individuals' careful development and successful deployment of political skill. Taken together, these most recent studies seem to suggest that emotional abilities (i.e., those reflecting the perceptive dispositional theme) exert their influence on job outcomes through their more proximal effect on political skill.

Next, the active influence theme captures dispositional constructs that are comprised of a strong action-orientation (e.g., proactive personality). Individuals with an active influence orientation are action-oriented and goal-directed, and take proactive actions to influence their environments. As such, active influence dispositional themes have been hypothesized to engender heightened interpersonal influence and networking ability. In support, research has found a positive association between proactive personality and composite political skill (Liu et al., 2007), as well as between proactive personality and network building (Thompson, 2005).

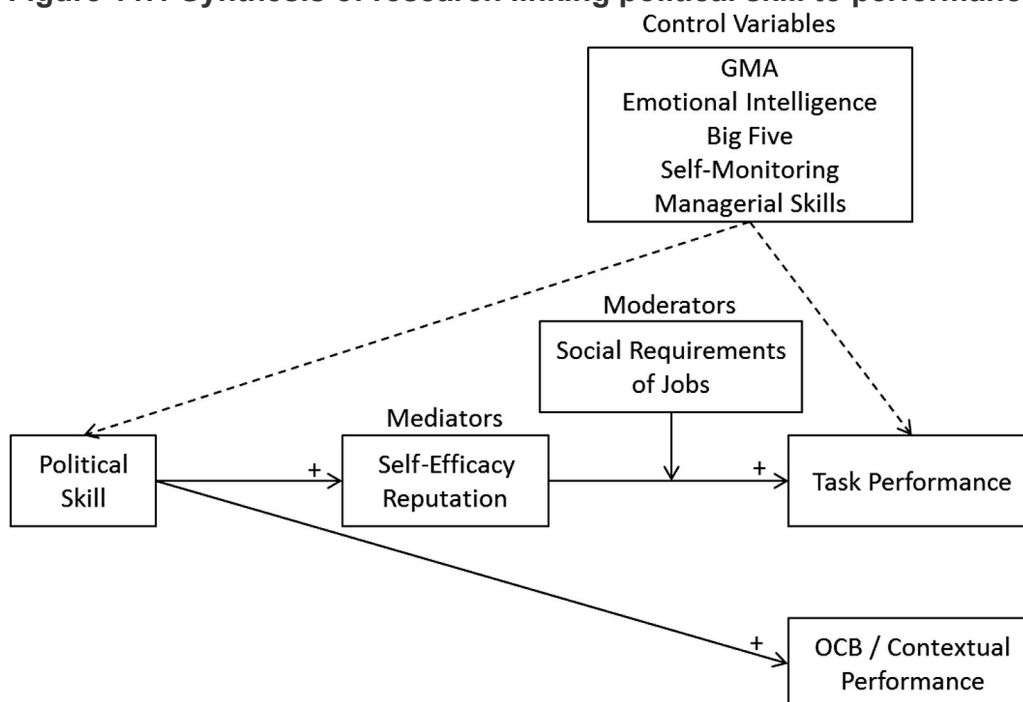
In further support of the association between active influence and political skill, Smith et al. (2009) identified self-motivation (i.e., internal motivation, desire to succeed, personal drive) as a dispositional antecedent of plant managers' political skill.

Finally, although political skill is considered to be partially innate and partially learnable, even fewer studies to date have examined the developmental antecedents of political skill. Conceptually, researchers (Ferris et al., 2007) have argued that individuals can develop political skill through their interactions with skilled mentors as well as through behavioral role modeling. In support, Blass et al. (Blass, Brouer, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2007) found that mentoring behaviors positively affected individuals' networking abilities, and this relationship was mediated by individuals' understanding of politics. Nonetheless, there exist numerous opportunities to explore the developmental antecedents of political skill in greater detail.

### Political Skill as a Predictor of Performance

To date, political skill enthusiasts arguably have been most interested in whether and how individuals in possession of political skill are advantaged from a performance standpoint (Munyon et al., 2015). This is not surprising given that job performance is undoubtedly the *raison d'etre* and the ultimate criterion of interest for organizational scientists (Organ & Paine, 1999) and politically skilled individuals alike. A growing body of literature has established political skill's demonstrated impact on multiple types of performance through various mediating mechanisms and as constrained by various boundary conditions; [Figure 11.1](#) is used to organize the following discussion.

**Figure 11.1 Synthesis of research linking political skill to performance**



Research suggests that politically skilled individuals demonstrate heightened performance in comparison to their non-politically skilled peers, even after controlling for numerous relevant personality and social effectiveness constructs. Specifically, in establishing the predictive validity of the 18-item *PSI*, Ferris and colleagues (2005) found that political skill was positively related to annual internal performance ratings. Further, research has found political skill to be

the strongest predictor of individuals' performance among emotional intelligence, self-efficacy, and self-monitoring; moreover, political skill explained significant incremental variance in performance ratings above and beyond the aforementioned social effectiveness constructs (Semadar et al., 2006).

Similarly, evidence from both cross-sectional and longitudinal research suggests that political skill explained significant variance in job performance above and beyond both general mental ability (GMA) and the 'Big Five' personality variables (i.e., conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, openness, and agreeableness (Blickle, Kramer et al., 2011). Recent meta-analytic research confirmed these findings, as meta-regression analyses indicated that political skill predicted task performance above and beyond GMA and personality (Bing, Davison, Minor, Novicevic, & Frink, 2011; Munyon et al., 2015).

Taken together, both single-study and meta-analytic results provide strong support for the importance of political skill in the prediction of task performance. Moreover, political skill also has been shown to predict contextual performance. Specifically, research has found that political skill was a stronger predictor of organization- and individual-directed organizational citizenship behaviors than was self-efficacy (Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris, & Hochwarter, 2008). Further, Blickle, Kramer, and colleagues (2011) found that political skill significantly predicted interpersonal facilitation (i.e., the extent to which employees are perceived as considerate, cooperative, and helpful; Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996) even after controlling for GMA and the Big Five personality constructs. Moreover, meta-analytic research confirms this positive association between political skill and various types of contextual performance (Bing et al., 2011; Munyon et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, results of Munyon and colleagues' (2015) meta-analysis revealed that the bivariate association of political skill with task performance ( $\rho = .26$ ,  $CI_{95\%} = .18 < .22 < .26$ ) and contextual performance ( $\rho = .38$ ,  $CI_{95\%} = .24 < .33 < .42$ ) while significant, varied widely as a function of intervening variables (task performance:  $CV_{95\%} = [-.07, .52]$ ;  $Q = 204.33$ ,  $p < .01$ ; contextual performance:  $CV_{95\%} = [-.05, .71]$ ;  $Q = 169.72$ ,  $p < .01$ ). To this end, a handful of studies have examined a number of job characteristics capable of strengthening the positive association between political skill and performance. For instance, research has found political skill to be increasingly related to both task and contextual performance the more that a job required social and interpersonal interaction (Bing et al., 2011; Blickle, John et al., 2012; Blickle, Kramer et al., 2009).

In addition to examinations of the main effects and boundary conditions of political skill on task and contextual performance domains, researchers have begun to examine the mechanisms through which individuals' political skill influences performance criteria. In this regard, Liu and colleagues (2007) argued and found support for the mediating role of reputation on the political skill–job performance relationship. Specifically, it was argued that politically skilled individuals would elicit favorable reputations as they conduct themselves in ways that inspire others' trust and confidence and engage in behaviors that are influential, situationally appropriate and apparently sincere. In turn, reputation was argued to influence performance evaluations as reputation both provides the backdrop against which behaviors are perceived and interpreted and also serves to influence others' evaluations (Liu et al., 2007). Results provided full support for these assertions. Moreover, meta-regression analyses found that both self-efficacy and reputation served to mediate the relationship between political skill and performance (Munyon et al., 2015), suggesting that the effects of political skill on performance can be explained in part through others' assessments of one's social



capital (i.e., reputation), as well as one's own assessments of social capital (i.e., self-efficacy).

Finally, recent research suggests that personal initiative may also serve as a mechanism through which political skill operates. Specifically, personal initiative is an active work concept grounded in human agency (Bandura, 2006) that describes a collection of proactive, action-oriented, and goal-directed behaviors (Frese, Kring, Soose, & Zempel, 1996). Wihler and colleagues (Wihler, Blickle, Ellen III, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2017) suggested that when the work climate is conducive to doing so, individuals will demonstrate proactive, achievement-oriented behaviors, and ultimately, heightened performance. In this manner, the work climate provides individuals with expectancy information regarding the extent to which proactive behaviors will be instrumental in achieving desirable performance outcomes. Moreover, Wihler et al. argued that as a function of their social astuteness, politically skilled individuals would be more likely to appropriately determine if the work context supported proactive, personal initiative efforts; additionally, as a function of their interpersonal influence, politically skilled individuals were argued to be superiorly effective at leveraging their proactive initiatives to achieve desirable goals (e.g., performance). Results across three studies provided overwhelming support for these arguments; specifically, individuals demonstrated heightened performance as the combinative effects of social astuteness and interpersonal influence ostensibly allowed them to appropriately read situations and properly mobilize personal initiative efforts (Wihler et al., 2017).

### **Political Skill as Moderator of the Employee Characteristics–Job Performance Relationship**

Researchers have also engaged in research efforts to examine how political skill serves to strengthen the positive relationships between many established employee trait/characteristic–performance relationships. For instance, meta-analytic research has demonstrated that conscientiousness is a consistently strong predictor of performance across all occupations (e.g., Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001). Nonetheless, Witt and Ferris (2003) argued that conscientious individuals (i.e., those who are disciplined, determined, and accomplishment-driven, Costa & McCrae, 1992), would be seen as overly demanding or inflexible, and as a result, receive sub-par performance evaluations when they lacked the perceptivity of, and ability to influence, social situations.

Results provided support for this hypothesis; specifically, individuals demonstrated the most auspicious levels of performance when they were both high in conscientiousness and (social) political skill (Witt & Ferris, 2003). Contrarily, in three of the four studies, individuals demonstrated the most inauspicious levels of performance when they were highly conscientious but lacking (social) political skill. Moreover, early research (i.e., pre-dating the establishment of the 18-item *PSI* measure) found that individuals with both high levels of (social) political skill and GMA demonstrated the best performance and received the highest salaries in comparison to their peers who were either low in (social) political skill and/or GMA (Ferris, Witt, & Hochwarter, 2001).

Further, a number of studies also have examined political skill in the context of socioanalytic theory. Socioanalytic theory suggests that underpinning all social interactions are individuals' two basic desires to get along (i.e., to feel supported, accepted, and not isolated) and get ahead (i.e., to gain power, status, and the control of resources) (Hogan, 1983, 1991, 1996). Nonetheless, individual differences (e.g., social skill) affect the extent to which individuals actually accomplish these desired motives. Across numerous studies, political skill was found to 'ignite' (Hogan & Shelton, 1998) or properly translate individuals' motives to get ahead

and/or get along into heightened performance.

For example, Blickle and colleagues (Blickle, Meurs, Zettler, Solga, Noethen, Kramer, & Ferris, 2008) examined the moderating role of political skill on the conscientiousness–performance and agreeableness–performance relationships. The authors argued that only those individuals with the proper social competencies (i.e., political skill) would be able to translate their motive to get ahead (i.e., conscientiousness<sup>1</sup>) and motive to get along (i.e., agreeableness) into heightened performance. Their results provided some support for the interactive effect of conscientiousness and political skill (after correcting for range restriction in conscientiousness) and found full support for the interactive effect of agreeableness and political skill on job performance.

Similarly, Blickle et al. (Blickle, Fröhlich, Ehlert, Pirner, Dietl, Hanes, & Ferris, 2011) found that the motive to get along × political skill interaction and the motive to get ahead × political skill interaction predicted the most auspicious levels of supervisor-rated cooperation and supervisor-rated promotability assessments than any other combinations of motive and social competence. Additionally, research has found that car salespersons demonstrating high levels of extraversion (i.e., motive to get ahead) and political skill sold more cars than salespersons with any other combination of extraversion and political skill (Blickle, Wendel, & Ferris, 2010). Finally, employing a narrow trait perspective, Meurs and colleagues (Meurs, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2011) examined a dimension of political skill, networking ability, as a social competence capable of translating individuals' trait sincerity into task performance. The results indicated that high trait sincerity (i.e., motive to get along) interacted with networking ability (i.e., social competence) to predict the most auspicious levels of task performance.

### **Political Skill as Moderator of the Impression Management–Job Performance Relationship**

Not surprisingly, individuals who are able to inspire trust in others, appear devoid of ulterior motives, and engage in influential situationally appropriate behaviors are better able to engage in effective impression management behavior. To this end, empirical evidence suggests that the impression management behaviors of politically skilled individuals are more successful than those of their non-politically skilled peers. For instance, Treadway and colleagues (Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007) found that supervisors were less likely to perceive their subordinates' ingratiation tactics as manipulative influence behavior when the perpetrating subordinates were high in political skill. In turn, the less supervisors perceived their subordinates to be engaged in ingratiation tactics, the higher they rated their subordinates on interpersonal facilitation (i.e., cooperative, considerate, helpful).

In other words, politically skilled individuals were better able to disguise their supervisor-directed ingratiation which resulted in supervisors rating them as more interpersonally effective (Treadway et al., 2007). Similarly, politically skilled individuals who utilized self-promotion, supplication, ingratiation, exemplification, or intimidation tactics received the most auspicious performance ratings from their supervisors as compared to non-politically skilled individuals who engaged in these impression management tactics (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007).

Further, Kolodinsky and colleagues (Kolodinsky, Treadway, & Ferris, 2007) argued that politically skilled individuals would both be more likely to engage in, and effective at, rational persuasion. In turn, the authors argued that the effective use of rationality would positively influence supervisors' perceptions of similarity with and liking for their subordinate, and

ultimately positively influence the supervisors' ratings of subordinates' task and contextual performance. Results provided strong support for these hypotheses. Moreover, as a function of their subtle, yet convincing interpersonal style, politically skilled individuals have been argued to appropriately represent their past achievements to others in ways that are non-threatening (Ferris et al., 2007). In support, recent empirical research found that politically skilled individuals were more effective at leveraging their past performance into further acquisitions of interpersonal power; in contrast, non-politically skilled individuals did not achieve additional interpersonal power as a function of past performance exploits (Treadway, Breland, Williams, Cho, Yang, & Ferris, 2013).

Finally, research has found that the effects of politically skilled individuals' impression management techniques pay dividends for years to come. Specifically, Blickle et al. (Blickle, Diekmann, Schneider, Kalthöfer, & Summers, 2012) found that politically skilled individuals who utilized modesty (i.e., humility) as a form of impression management (e.g., refraining from self-praise, refusing to toot their own horn) reported the highest levels of career satisfaction and hierarchical rank after three years. Contrarily, non-politically skilled individuals who engaged in modesty as a means of impression management reported reductions in career satisfaction and lower hierarchical ranks three years later. Taken together, this collection of studies illustrates the importance of political skill as a convincing interpersonal style construct that enables individuals to comprehend situational cues, select situation-specific and situation-appropriate behaviors, and execute influence attempts in a superiorly effective and genuine manner.

### Political Skill and Career Success

Given that meta-analytic research has linked general political knowledge and skills to career success (Ng, Eby, Sorenson, & Feldman, 2005), it is not surprising that the benefits of individuals' political skill extend far beyond mere task or contextual performance to include long-term objective and subjective career success. In this regard, evidence suggests that political skill is positively related to perceived external mobility, career and life satisfaction, and total number of promotions received (Todd, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2009). Moreover, Todd and colleagues (2009) found that the networking ability dimension of political skill was the strongest and most consistent predictor of total compensation as well as the aforementioned career success outcomes.

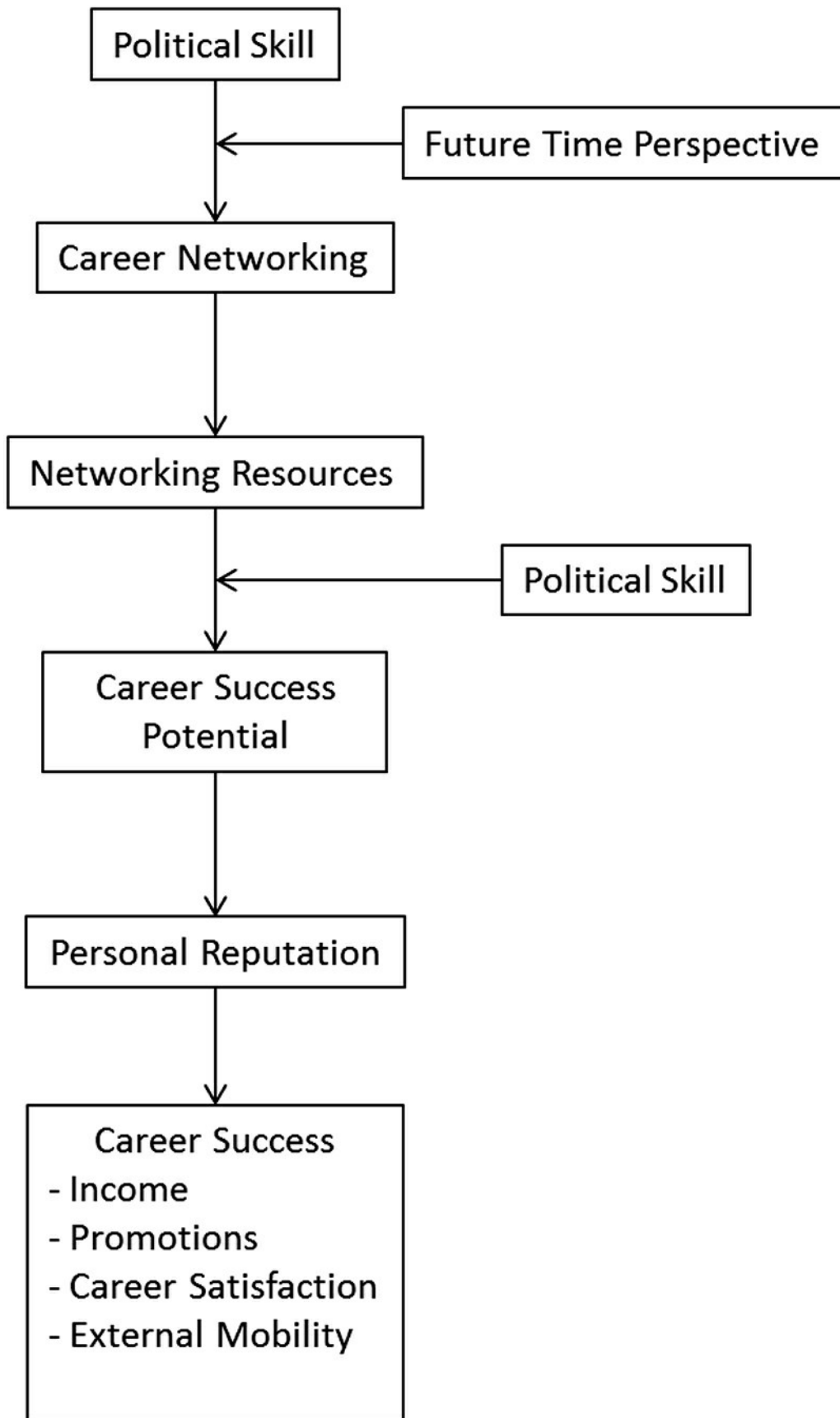
Similarly, research has indicated that political skill is positively related to supervisors', peers', and direct-reports' assessments of an individual's promotability (Gentry, Gilmore, Shuffler, & Leslie, 2012). Consistent with these single-study findings, recent meta-analytic research found political skill to be positively associated with overall career success, objective career success (i.e., hierarchical position), and subjective career success (i.e., career satisfaction) (Munyon et al., 2015).

Finally, in attempts to identify the manner through which political skill positively influences career success indicators over time, Blickle et al. (Blickle, Schneider, Liu, & Ferris, 2011) examined reputation as a mediating mechanism. Results indicated that political skill in Time 1 predicted income, hierarchical position, and career satisfaction one year later, with reputation mediating the relationship between political skill, career satisfaction, and position. Further, research has indicated that politically skilled subordinates obtain career development opportunities by employing their interpersonal acumen to generate *guanxi* (i.e., strong informal connections between supervisors and subordinates which represent the most critical of relationships for individuals in Chinese organizations) with their supervisors (Wei, Liu,

Chen, & Wu, 2010).

Building on these findings and integrating past research linking political skill to career success outcomes, we propose a multi-mediational moderated model of political skill's effects on long-term career success (see [Figure 11.2](#)). We suggest that individuals who are politically skilled will engage in career-oriented networking behaviors as they recognize that opportunities to engage in interpersonal interactions are both advantageous (as opposed to threatening) (Perrewé, Ferris, Frink, & Anthony, 2000) as well as effective at promoting one's own self-interests (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997). Moreover, politically skilled individuals acknowledge the individual and contextual considerations in the work environment, and engage in networking behaviors as a way to capitalize on these informalities.

**Figure 11.2 Proposed model of the long-term influence of political skill on career success**



Further, to the extent that politically skilled individuals have a long-term future time perspective, they are more likely to invest their resources in career-related networking

behaviors. In support, Treadway and colleagues (Treadway, Breland, Adams, Duke, & Williams, 2010) found that individuals withdrew or refrained from career-oriented networking behaviors as they perceived their time in the organization to be drawing to a close (e.g., retirement approached, impending career change).

In turn, given their effective interpersonal style and perceived sincerity, politically skilled individuals are thought to recognize, develop, and maintain stockpiles of networking resources (i.e., those resources that are derived from, included within, accessible through individuals' relational connections; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Developed through skilled interpersonal interactions, such networking resources contribute to increased interpersonal trust, reputation, and social capital (Gulati, 1999), as well as broader (sometimes privileged) informational access, personal influence, power, and status (Lin, 1999; Wei, Chiang, & Wu, 2012).

In other words, as [Figure 11.2](#) suggests, the networking resources developed through politically skilled individuals' career-oriented networking behaviors engender heightened career success potential (as rated by supervisors, peers, and subordinates; Gentry et al., 2012). Further, in keeping with Wei and colleagues (2012), we posit that individuals should be better able to leverage networking resources into career success potential commensurate with their political skill. In turn, career success potential is hypothesized to positively relate to individuals' personal reputation.

Reputation forms over time and represents others' judgments and perceptions of the extent to which a focal individual performs adequately, and is interpersonally cooperative/pleasant (Zinko, Ferris, Humphrey, Meyer, & Aime, 2012). Grounded in evidence that has found reputations to form over time as a function of human capital and social effectiveness (Zinko et al., 2012), we posit that career success potentially positively influences others' judgments of a focal individual's personal reputation over time. Finally, in keeping with prior research (Blickle et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2007), we posit that personal reputation contributes to individuals' objective and subjective career success.

Specifically, personal reputation signals or conveys information about a focal individual's capabilities (Spence, 1974) thereby reducing uncertainty surrounding an individual's potential motives (Johnson, Erez, Kiker, & Motowidlo, 2002) and the likelihood (and quality) of their future performance. Taken together, positive reputation should reduce uncertainty and signal that individuals are worthy of increased compensation, and capable of handling new and challenging opportunities such as vertical promotions.

### **Political Skill as Neutralizer of Perceived Organizational and Social Stressors**

In addition to the performance- and career-enhancement benefits of political skill, individuals in possession of this comprehensive set of social competencies are better equipped to manage the organizational and social stressors with which they are faced on a daily basis. Specifically, researchers have argued that politically skilled individuals experience less strain when faced with various stressors as a function of their increased confidence and self-control as well as their possession of and abilities to acquire additional coping resources. In support, Perrewé and colleagues (Perrewé, Zellars, Ferris, Rossi, Kacmar, & Ralston, 2004) found that the possession of political skill neutralized the negative effects of perceived role conflict on three types of strain; namely, somatic complaints, physiological strain (i.e., systolic and diastolic blood pressure), and psychological anxiety.

Similarly, Perrewé and colleagues (Perrewé, Zellars et al., 2005) argued that politically skilled individuals would experience less strain (i.e., anxiety, job tension, job dissatisfaction) when faced with role overload as a function of their heightened sense of personal security and ability to exert control over processes and social interactions within their work environments; results provided overwhelming support for their study hypotheses.

Moreover, Rosen and Levy (2013) examined the strain-buffering effects of political skill when individuals were faced with environments that they perceived to be political. Political environments are considered stressful given that they infuse ambiguity and uncertainty into the work environment (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009; Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ammeter, 2002); nonetheless, because politically skilled individuals are able to influence others and extract desirable outcomes from their work environments, Rosen and Levy (2013) argued that politically skilled individuals would experience less strain when faced with political environments than their less politically skilled peers. Results provided support for the strain-attenuating role of political skill on the politics perceptions (POPs)–strain relationship.

Finally, characterizing felt accountability as a stressor due to the concomitant anxiety associated with the increased levels of scrutiny (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999), Hochwarter et al. (Hochwarter, Ferris, Gavin, Perrewé, Hall, & Frink, 2007) argued that politically skilled individuals experience less job tension when faced with heightened levels of felt accountability and in turn receive higher job performance ratings; results provided support for the authors' moderated mediation hypothesis.

In addition to the aforementioned organizational stressors, researchers have also examined the strain-buffering effects of political skill on a number of perceived social stressor–strain relationships. To this end, Harvey and colleagues (Harvey, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2007) examined the moderating effects of political skill on the relationship of perceived social stressors (e.g., conflicts with supervisors, coworkers; negative feedback: Dormann & Zapf, 2004) and two strain reactions; namely, job and career dissatisfaction. Grounded in Conservation of Resources theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989), Harvey et al. (2007) argued that political skill represented a coping resource that protected individuals from actual, or threats of, resource losses. As such, politically skilled individuals were hypothesized to interpret social stressors as less threatening to their resources, and therefore were thought to experience less job and career dissatisfaction when faced with such stressors than their less politically skilled peers. Once again, results provided support for the role of political skill as a buffer of the stressor–strain relationship.

Similarly, political skill was examined as a factor capable of attenuating the positive relationship between perceptions of others' entitlement behaviors and job tension (Hochwarter, Summers, Thompson, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2010). Entitled individuals are motivated to seek out, consume, and monopolize more than their fair share of resources (Samuelson & Allison, 1994). Observing others engaged in entitlement behaviors is thought to result in strain, as such behaviors require attentional focus (Fiske & Taylor, 1984), and should such behaviors be successful, pose a threat to individuals' resources. Nonetheless, as a function of their increased personal security and additional resources that they have available to them, politically skilled individuals experienced less job tension when perceiving high amounts of others' entitlement behaviors than their less politically skilled peers. These results were consistent across three diverse samples.

Finally, in attempts to identify ways in which individuals could effectively cope with workplace ostracism, researchers examined the interactive effects of political skill and ingratiation on

various forms of psychological distress (i.e., emotional exhaustion, job tension, depressed mood at work) stemming from workplace ostracism (Wu, Yim, Kwan, & Zhang, 2012). The authors found that politically skilled individuals who engaged in ingratiation in response to being isolated at work experienced no increases in psychological distress when faced with heightened ostracism. However, non-politically skilled individuals who used ingratiation tactics to get in the good graces of their ostracizers actually experienced more psychological distress than had they not engaged in ingratiation tactics. Taken together, these findings suggest that politically skilled ingratiation attempts neutralized the negative effects of workplace ostracism whereas non-politically skilled ingratiation attempts worsened the negative effects of workplace ostracism.

### Political Skill and Leadership

The effects of political skill extend far beyond those simply realized by those in its possession. In addition to the profound effect of political skill on one's own stress and impression management, job performance, and career success, political skill has a demonstrated effect on leadership processes, follower reactions to leader influence, and ultimately, leader effectiveness (*cf.* Ferris, Treadway, Brouer, & Munyon, 2012). With regard to the latter, research has found that followers' perceptions of their leaders' political skill significantly predicted leadership effectiveness (i.e., work-unit performance, leader performance), even after controlling for relevant demographics (i.e., gender, education) and social skills (i.e., leader's self-efficacy, self-monitoring) (Douglas & Ammeter, 2004).

Similarly, hypothesizing that politically skilled leaders had the requisite social astuteness and interpersonal perspicacity to stimulate team success, Ahearn et al. (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004) found that child welfare casework teams led by politically skilled leaders performed better (as measured by permanency rate, or successful placement of children into permanent living situations) than those teams led by non-politically skilled leaders.

In further support of the influential role of leaders' political skill on leadership effectiveness, researchers (Snell, Tonidandel, Braddy, & Fleenor, 2014) have found that leaders' political skill demonstrated incremental predictive validity in predicting managerial effectiveness above and beyond traditional managerial skills (i.e., administrative skills, technical skills, human skills, citizenship behavior; Scullen, Mount, & Judge, 2003). Further, quantitative research concluded that plant managers' effectiveness resulted from the combination of relationship development, their effective (i.e., unobtrusive) use of power, and political skill (Smith et al., 2009), the latter of which is likely a driver of both relationship development and leaders' effective use of power (e.g., Ferris et al., 2012; Martinez, Kane, Ferris, & Brooks, 2012).

Further, research has been undertaken to examine the manner in which leaders in possession of political skill engender effectiveness outcomes. As such, it has been hypothesized that leaders in possession of political skill induce followers' perceptions of organizational support by way of their apparent sincerity, access to additional resources, and ability to present their behaviors as fair and in the best interest of others (e.g., followers). In turn, these perceptions were hypothesized to result in auspicious workplace attitudes (i.e., trust, job satisfaction, (lack of) organizational cynicism) and subjective indicators of leader effectiveness (i.e., organizational commitment) (Treadway, Hochwarter, Ferris, Kacmar, Douglas, Ammeter, & Buckley, 2004). Empirical evidence indicated that leader political skill was positively related to followers' perceptions of organizational support, which in turn, resulted in reduced organizational cynicism and increased job satisfaction, and ultimately, heightened levels of



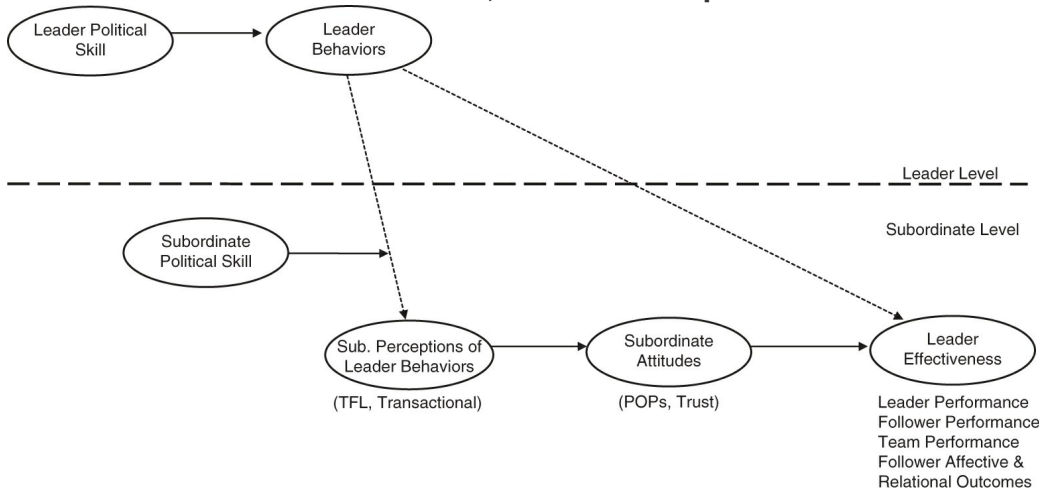
organizational commitment.

More recently, Ewen and colleagues (Ewen, Wihler, Blicke, Oerder, Ellen, Douglas, & Ferris, 2013) examined (followers' perceptions of) leader behavior as the mechanism through which leader political skill impacted leader effectiveness outcomes. Results indicated that leaders' political skill was positively related to leader effectiveness and follower satisfaction (i.e., a more subjective, affective conceptualization of leader effectiveness; DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011) through followers' perceptions of the extent to which leaders engaged in transactional and transformational leadership behaviors. Additionally, Blicke, Meurs, Wihler, Ewen, and Peiseler (2014) found that leaders with political skill are more effective at fostering follower attributions of leaders' charisma and effectiveness.

Similarly, consistent with both Smith et al. (2009) and Ewen et al. (2013), research has found that leaders with political skill are more effective at mobilizing their positional (i.e., legitimate) power in a manner that is perceived by followers as considerate and respectful (i.e., consideration; Bass, 1990) and goal-oriented and structured (i.e., initiating structure; Bass, 1990). In turn, followers who perceived their politically skilled leaders to have mobilized their positional power in efforts to initiate structure and provide consideration for them reported heightened levels of job satisfaction (i.e., a subjective measure of leader effectiveness) (Blicke, Kane-Frieder et al., 2013). Moreover, underpinned by socioanalytic theory (Hogan & Shelton, 1998), Ewen and colleagues (Ewen, Wihler, Kane-Frieder, Blicke, Hogan, & Ferris, 2014) found that politically skilled leaders engender followers' ratings of institutional effectiveness and follower job satisfaction through their use of initiating structure behaviors.

Finally, in an effort to synthesize the small body of research examining the mechanisms through which leader political skill engenders various leader effectiveness outcomes, we posit a multilevel model (Figure 11.3) in which politically skilled leaders are thought to engage in effective leadership behaviors, which in turn result in ratings of objective and subjective leader effectiveness. The model also suggests that objective leader behaviors are perceived differently by individual followers, and these perceptions of leaders' behavior result in followers' workplace attitudes (e.g., perceived organizational support), which in turn are thought to influence objective and subjective indicators of leader effectiveness. Finally, followers who are politically skilled are hypothesized to perceive leaders' behaviors as more instrumental in their future successes and therefore experience heightened positive attitudes toward their leaders and organizations, and ultimately perform more effectively.

**Figure 11.3 Multilevel theoretical model of leader political skill, transactional and transformational leader behavior, and leadership effectiveness**



More specifically, as a function of their interpersonal influence and social astuteness, politically skilled leaders are hypothesized to engage in effective leadership behaviors (e.g., transformational leadership, initiating structure, consideration; Piccolo, Bono, Heinitz, Rowold, Duehr, & Judge, 2012), as they are attuned to what behaviors would be most effective at eliciting desired outcomes from their followers. Additionally, the behaviors of politically skilled leaders should be appropriate and well-perceived by followers given that politically skilled leaders are able to present their behaviors and influence attempts in an apparently sincere, genuine, and trustworthy manner (Ferris et al., 2005).

However, the behaviors of politically skilled leaders should be more accurately perceived and interpreted by followers who also possess high levels of political skill. In turn, followers who perceive their leaders to be engaged in well-intentioned and situationally appropriate behaviors should experience positive attitudes toward both their leader (e.g., trust) and their organization for which their leader acts as an agent (e.g., perceived organizational support; Treadway et al., 2004).

Further, followers with positive attitudes toward their leader and concomitantly, their organizations, should perceive their leader as more effective especially as politically skilled leaders are instrumental to followers' organizational successes via access to additional resources, growth opportunities, and so forth. Here, in keeping with comprehensive reviews and syntheses of leadership literature (DeRue et al., 2011), we define leadership effectiveness broadly as affective sentiments (e.g., job satisfaction; career satisfaction), relational assessments (e.g., leader–member exchange), objective and/or subjective assessments of leader, follower, and/or team performance (e.g., individual task and contextual performance; team sales performance), or some overall assessment of a leader's effectiveness (e.g., overall leader effectiveness).

For example, in keeping with this broad definition of leader effectiveness and the relationships specified in [Figure 11.3](#), followers experiencing positive attitudes as a result of politically skilled leaders' behaviors should demonstrate heightened performance and experience heightened levels of job satisfaction and work relationship quality with their leaders. Taken together, leader political skill is hypothesized to influence leader effectiveness through leaders' selection and execution of appropriate leadership behaviors as well as through followers' perceptions of and resultant attitudes they form regarding leaders' use of certain behaviors.

## **Future Perspectives**

### **Antecedents**

Although research proliferated over the last two decades has made strides in defining, delineating, and documenting the effects of political skill for both those in its possession as well as on others, there exist numerous opportunities for continued research. First, research should continue to examine the antecedents of political skill especially with regard to the individual dimensions of political skill and whether and how they develop over time. For example, both need for achievement and need for dominance seem like natural drivers of the networking ability dimension of political skill whereas need for affiliation may precede individuals' development of apparent sincerity.

Thus, future research should continue to identify additional categories of antecedents in

addition to the control, perceptiveness, affability, and active influence categories of dispositional antecedents identified by Ferris et al. (2007). Moreover, research should examine whether and how individuals develop political skill over time. Case studies of individuals considered to be quintessentially politically skilled may be influential in this regard and may serve to expose key dispositional and developmental antecedents that have been otherwise overlooked and/or undetected.

### **Dimensions of Political Skill**

Notable opportunities exist to examine the differential predictive validity of the political skill dimensions. It is likely that researchers may find that one or two dimensions of political skill dominate the relations with examined outcomes should they examine specific dimensions of political skill that explicitly match the domain of the outcome of interest. For example, while political skill in the aggregate has demonstrated auspicious relationships with career success (Todd et al., 2009), strain reduction (Perrewé, Zellars et al., 2005), and leader effectiveness (Douglas & Ammeter, 2004), it is likely that certain dimensions of political skill are primarily responsible for the observed effects. Specifically, networking ability and interpersonal influence may be the dimensions most strongly related to politically skilled individuals' career success, social astuteness the dimension most strongly related to strain reduction, and apparent sincerity and interpersonal influence the dimensions most strongly related to leader effectiveness. Thus, given that certain dimensions of political skill are more logically related to certain criterion, future research should focus on developing theory to explicate the role of the political skill dimensions on established outcomes.

### **Mechanisms**

Additionally, there exist numerous opportunities to examine the mechanisms and intermediate linkages through which politically skilled individuals affect outcomes for themselves and others. Most notably, researchers should begin to examine the behaviors that politically skilled employees or leaders engage in that sets them apart from their less politically skilled peers (or leaders) and ultimately translate into organizational success (and leadership effectiveness). While efforts to link leader political skill to leader effectiveness through followers' perceptions of leaders' behavior have been successful (e.g., Blickle, Kane-Frieder et al., 2013), there is a surprising absence of research examining the mediating mechanisms through which politically skilled individuals achieve desirable outcomes for themselves in the workplace. Thus, researchers that undertake research concerned with what politically skilled individuals actually *do* or refrain from doing would make a substantive contribution in addressing one of the most notable gaps in the political skill literature.

Similarly, researchers have argued that politically skilled individuals are able to attract and influence others as a result of the calming self-confidence and personal security that they are hypothesized to exude (e.g., Liu et al., 2007); nonetheless, while theoretically grounded, these explanatory mechanisms have not been explicitly measured. Along these lines, while researchers have argued that individuals experience less strain as a result of the increased control and personal security afforded to them by their possession of political skill (e.g., Perrewé et al., 2005), researchers have failed to explicitly examine the mechanisms through which political skill operates on individuals' strain reduction. Specifically, it is not clear whether political skill aids in the primary, secondary, or coping processes. For instance, it has been argued that politically skilled individuals experience less strain because they have a keen understanding of the workplace environment (Ferris et al., 2005), which in essence seems to

suggest that upon primary appraisal (i.e., 'Is this stimulus stressful?'; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) politically skilled individuals may not perceive certain stimuli as stressful at all.

Nonetheless, other researchers have asserted that politically skilled individuals experience less strain as a function of their ability to determine how to 'get by' or 'solve the immediate problem' (Perrewé et al., 2005). In this regard, political skill is implicitly conceptualized as helpful during the secondary appraisal of a stressor (i.e., 'Do I have the resources needed to cope with this stressor?'; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Finally, others have argued that politically skilled individuals have additional access to resources be they tangible or intangible (e.g., control; personal security) (Harvey et al., 2007). Thus, according to this argumentation, political skill assists individuals in the coping process. Taken together, there exist numerous opportunities to more explicitly explicate the manner in which political skill operates on one's self and others. For example, future research could be designed to assess whether more politically skilled individuals perceive equally objective stimuli as more or less stressful as their less politically skilled counterparts.

### **Political Skill and Leadership**

Political skill is a predictor of leader effectiveness. Future research should continue to examine why such leaders are deemed more effective. One more recent notion is that they provide subordinates with political support and help them navigate the murky waters of the political arena. It could be hypothesized that subordinates of politically skilled leaders would have better understanding of the goings on around them, more access to resources, better opportunities to demonstrate their performance, better visibility with regard to career advancement opportunities, and sponsorship from a well-connected, well-respected supervisor. Nonetheless, future research should explicate these suppositions so as to determine how politically skilled leaders evoke high performance from their subordinates.

Additional directions for future research on political skill and leadership are outlined by Kimura (2015).

### **Political Skill and the Human Resources Management Function**

Switching gears, opportunities exist to examine the predictive validity of political skill with regard to the hiring process. To date, two field experiments have offered preliminary support for the use of the political skill inventory (*PSI*) in predicting job incumbents' performance (Blickle, Von Below, & Johannsen, 2011) as well as yearly income (Blickle & Schnitzler, 2010). Nonetheless, research should examine how politically skilled individuals perform within actual interview settings. For example, are politically skilled individuals better able to disguise disinterest, misfit, and/or lack of experience? Do politically skilled individuals make better interpersonal connections with their interviewer(s) and therefore perform better when interviews incorporate some types of unstructured or less-structured elements such as rapport building into their interviews?

Moreover, subsequent research could examine whether those individuals who were selected for the job based on their political skill subsequently performed well in the months and years following their initial hiring especially as compared to those who were selected on the basis of other established predictors of incumbents' performance. Nonetheless, it warrants mention that some of the aforementioned research questions would require non-survey-based and longitudinal research designs, both of which are for the most part uncharacteristic of the political skill literature (more on this below).

Along these lines, researchers should more closely examine how individuals develop political skill and concomitantly, ways in which organizations could tailor their formal management training and career acceleration programs to incorporate political skill training. To this end, researchers have found that developmental experiences (i.e., mentoring) positively relate to individuals' political skill (Ferris, Blickle et al., 2008). Thus, organizations who initiate formal mentoring programs may contribute in part to their employees' political skill development, but more research is needed to determine the manner in which organizations can more fully educate and train employees to exhibit political skill.

### Methodological Issues

Further, from a more methodological standpoint, future research should examine who is best suited to assess a focal individual's political skill: oneself or others. Arguably, if individuals are especially politically skilled, others should not perceive them to be *apparently* sincere, but rather simply sincere. Moreover, those who are artfully politically skilled might not be overtly obvious networkers, but instead, may be more well-connected and intertwined in powerful networks and coalitions than is readily apparent. Thus, one would argue that the outward manifestations of political skill might not be best captured by the current political skill inventory (*PSI*; Ferris et al., 2005). Thus, perhaps future research should explore whether the current measure of political skill is properly suited for assessing other individuals' (e.g., one's supervisor, coworkers) political skill.

Finally, the political skill literature would benefit from more rigorous, and perhaps less-mainstream, research designs. Given that much of the political skill construct operates at non-visible levels of abstraction (e.g., ability to understand people), more qualitative research designs (e.g., case studies, interviews) may be best suited for determining commonalities among politically skilled individuals and how exactly political skill manifests itself in the workplace. While behaviors deemed politically skilled may be more nuanced depending on the organization in which individuals work, qualitative research practices may be helpful in identifying key themes and characteristics that contribute to individuals' political skill and how it manifests across varied workspaces.

Further, longitudinal research designs may be helpful in explicating how politically skilled individuals exert influence over their subordinates and peers over time, ascend hierarchically, and ultimately achieve career success. All of these research questions require more elaborate and sophisticated research designs, but hold promise for unlocking some of the most intriguing ambiguities associated with the political skill construct.

### Implications for Practice

There is impressive empirical evidence that political skill is necessary in order to thrive in organizational life particularly in jobs which involve influencing and leading others (Kimura, 2015). Oerder, Blickle, and Summers (2014) found that individuals in the workplace develop political skill with particular focus on the networking dimension as a result of contextual factors which promote the personal learning and development of political skill. These contextual factors are new situations with unfamiliar responsibilities, tasks, or projects that require the individual to create change, manage across organizational boundaries, build relationships with diverse people, and high-level, high latitude responsibilities. Thus, it is not always necessary to have available relevant political skill for a new job, as these skills can be developed within the context of the new work context (Roberts, 2006). This is important

especially for those employees who are tossed into jobs with complex social demands without sufficient training and irrespective of the level of their political skill.

## Conclusion

In many respects, Mintzberg (1983) and Pfeffer (1981) were ahead of their times in developing political perspectives of organizations, which both argued that to be successful, and even survive in such workplace environments, individuals needed to possess political skill. Although Mintzberg and Pfeffer characterized the nature and importance of political skill, empirical research on the subject matter was absent for some time after their initial conceptualizations because no measure of the construct existed. Thus, although the political skill construct has been around for nearly 35 years, for the first 25 of those years, there was little to no empirical research investigating this important phenomenon.

This chapter is an attempt to trace the evolution of the empirical work on political skill that has been published to date, as well as characterize the theory and research issues that remain for the future. As such, we highlighted the importance of political skill in managing impressions in the workplace, coping with stress, and promoting individuals' job performance and career success, as well as political skill's role in influence processes and leadership effectiveness. We hope this review stimulates increased interest in this important area of scientific inquiry, as there are a number of fruitful avenues for continued research.

## Note

1. Conscientiousness was operationalized as 'motive to get ahead' largely as a function of the performance and achievement focus characterized by this personality trait (Blickle et al., 2008).

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- career success
- interpersonal influence
- contextual performance
- career satisfaction
- ingratiation
- influencing skills
- impression management

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