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What is This?

Political Skill in Organizations[†]

Gerald R. Ferris*

Department of Management, College of Business,
Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-1110

Darren C. Treadway

Department of Organization and Human Resources, School of Management,
State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY 14260-4000

Pamela L. Perrewé
Robyn L. Brouer
Ceasar Douglas

Department of Management, College of Business,
Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-1110

Sean Lux

Center for Entrepreneurship, College of Business Administration, University of South Florida,
4202 E. Fowler Ave., BSN 3404, Tampa, FL 33620

Political skill is a construct that was introduced more than two decades ago as a necessary competency to possess to be effective in organizations. Unfortunately, despite appeals by organizational scientists to further develop this construct, it lay dormant until very recently. The present article defines and characterizes the construct domain of political skill and embeds it in a cognition–affect–behavior, multilevel, meta-theoretical framework that proposes how political skill operates to exercise effects on both self and others in organizations. Implications of this conceptualization are discussed, as are directions for future research and practical implications.

Keywords: *political skill; social competency; interpersonal style; influence; astuteness*

Organizational politics has drawn considerable interest from scholars for decades. However, much less is known about the requisite competencies to successfully practice politics in the workplace. In the early 1980s, both Pfeffer (1981) and Mintzberg (1983) advocated political perspectives on organizations, and both suggested that to be effective in political environments, individuals needed to possess political skill. Unfortunately, despite appeals by scholars for more work in this area, research on political skill lay dormant until recently, when Ferris and his colleagues (Ferris et al., 1999; Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005) developed a measure of the construct and a program of research.

The purpose of the present article is to propose a conceptualization of political skill in organizations that considers the effects on both self and others. Political skill is characterized as a comprehensive pattern of social competencies, with cognitive, affective, and behavioral manifestations, that have both direct effects on outcomes and moderating effects on predictor–outcome relationships.

Characterization of Political Skill

A perspective shared by many academicians is that organizations are inherently political arenas (Mintzberg, 1985). In this regard, it is assumed that although performance, effectiveness, and career success are determined in part by intelligence and hard work, other factors such as social astuteness, positioning, and savvy also play important roles (e.g., Luthans, Hodgetts, & Rosenkrantz, 1988; Mintzberg, 1983). In his articulation of the political perspective on organizations, Pfeffer (1981) was one of the first to use the term *political skill* in the scholarly literature. He suggested that political skill is needed to be successful in organizations, and he called for research that would develop a more informed understanding of the construct. Similarly, Mintzberg (1983) suggested that political skill referred to the exercise of influence through persuasion, manipulation, and negotiation.

Although considerable research has examined organizational politics, a serious omission has been the failure to evaluate the political skill of the influencer, leaving us ill informed about why influence efforts are (or are not) successful. Indeed, theory and research largely have assumed that the mere demonstration of an influence attempt is synonymous with its effectiveness. However, it is not enough to study the particular influence tactics or political behaviors that reflect the "what" of influence. We also need to critically examine the political skill of the influencer to understand the "how" of influence, which addresses the selection of the most situationally appropriate influence tactics and their successful execution (Ferris, Hochwarter, et al., 2002).

Definition and Construct Specification

In an effort to capture the essential nature of the construct as discussed by Ferris et al. (1999), Mintzberg (1983), and others, we define political skill 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, et al., 2005: 127). As such, politically skilled individuals combine social astuteness with the capacity to adjust

their behavior to different and changing situational demands in a manner that appears to be sincere, inspires support and trust, and effectively influences and controls the responses of others.

Political skill, then, is about competencies that are manifested in work-relevant situations that reflect both dispositional antecedents and situational variability. Although the variance because of dispositions is more stable, the variance attributable to situations can be affected through training, practice, and experience. As such, individuals benefit from experiences that cultivate the development of political skill, regardless of their inherent political capabilities.

Dimensionality of Political Skill

Careful examination of the organizational politics and political skill literature indicates several important aspects that should be included in any conceptualization of the political skill construct. This examination indicates four critical dimensions of political skill: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity. Subsequent conceptual and empirical development has lent support to the robustness of this formulation of political skill.

Social astuteness. Individuals possessing political skill are astute observers of others. They understand social interactions well and accurately interpret their behavior and the behavior of others. They are keenly attuned to diverse social settings and have high self-awareness. Pfeffer (1992) referred to this characteristic as being sensitive to others, and he argued that the ability to identify with others is critical to obtaining things for oneself. Socially astute individuals are often seen as ingenious, even clever, in dealing with others.

Interpersonal influence. Politically skilled individuals have an unassuming and convincing personal style that exerts a powerful influence on others around them. Interpersonal influence allows people to adapt and calibrate their behavior to different situations to elicit the desired responses from others. The interpersonal influence dimension captures what Pfeffer (1992) referred to as "flexibility," which involves adapting one's behavior to different targets of influence in different contextual settings to achieve one's goals.

Networking ability. Individuals with political skill are adept at identifying and developing diverse contacts and networks of people. People in these networks tend to hold assets seen as valuable and necessary for successful personal and organizational gains. Because of their typically subtle style, politically skilled individuals easily develop friendships and build strong, beneficial alliances and coalitions. Furthermore, individuals high in networking ability ensure they are well positioned to both create and take advantage of opportunities (Pfeffer, 1992). Finally, they are often highly skilled negotiators and deal makers and are adept at conflict management.

Apparent sincerity. Politically skilled individuals appear to others as having high levels of integrity and as being authentic, sincere, and genuine. They are, or appear to be, honest and forthright. This dimension of political skill is crucial if influence attempts are going to

be successful because it focuses on the perceived intentions of the behavior exhibited. Perceived intentions or motives are important and have been argued to modify the interpretation and labeling of behavior. As noted by Jones (1990), influence attempts will be successful when actors are perceived to possess no ulterior motives. Individuals high in apparent sincerity inspire trust and confidence in and from those around them because their actions are not interpreted as manipulative or coercive.

The four dimensions of political skill (i.e., social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity) are assumed to be related to one another. Although the dimensions are presumed to correlate, they remain distinct constructs.

Construct Validity of Political Skill

Construct validity is perhaps the most important psychometric property a measure can possess, and it reflects evidence in several areas, including the extent to which a measure relates to similar constructs and does not relate to constructs from which it should differ (Schwab, 1980). This section presents information, discussion, and results regarding the constructs to which political skill should be related and the degree of construct overlap expected and found.

Other social competencies. Scholars have argued that political skill naturally somewhat overlaps with some other social competencies. For example, Ferris, Perrewé, and Douglas (2002) suggested that political skill would reflect some similarities with interpersonal acumen, sociopolitical intelligence, functional flexibility, social intelligence, and interpersonal intelligence. However, these authors noted that such overlap would not be expected to reflect more than modest-sized relationships, thereby allowing political skill to retain its distinctiveness as a construct that is sufficiently different from others.

Because of their obvious similarity, political savvy has been examined in light of its relationship to political skill. Political savvy suggests adeptness at the intuitive aspects of politics in organizations. Research by Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, and Gardner (1994) on organizational socialization identified a politics dimension of socialization. Closer inspection of the item content of this dimension reveals that it is actually measuring political savvy or understanding. The item content tended to focus on issues such as learning how things really work in the organization, identifying who are the most influential people in the organization, and developing a sound understanding of the motives behind the actions of people in the organization.

To the extent that political savvy might be driven by a knowledge or understanding component, notions of political savvy make reference to a degree of understanding, which is closely related to the social astuteness dimension. Ferris, Treadway, et al. (2005) provided supportive evidence for these ideas. The political skill composite score was significantly (albeit modestly) related to political savvy ($r = .47$, $p < .01$), and the strongest correlation political savvy demonstrated with the political skill dimensions was with social astuteness ($r = .60$, $p < .01$).

Another social competency construct that Ferris, Treadway, et al. (2005) deemed important to distinguish from political skill is emotional intelligence. For more than a decade, the concept of emotional intelligence has captured widespread interest from a scholarly perspective, but also, and even more noteworthy, from a popular perspective. Attracting considerable

attention in the popular and business press, primarily as a function of Goleman's (1995, 1998) best-selling books, emotional intelligence involves a facility with interpersonal behavior, which suggests that it might somewhat overlap with political skill.

The nature of emotional intelligence appears to predominantly focus on the emotion-based aspects of interpersonal effectiveness, influence, and control. Conversely, political skill is conceptualized as incorporating knowledge and skill that go beyond emotions. Particularly because Goleman tended to develop a very broad characterization of emotional intelligence (i.e., which led Hedlund and Sternberg [2000] to suggest that Goleman viewed emotional intelligence as including everything except IQ), it seems important to demonstrate the construct differentiation between emotional intelligence and political skill. Admittedly, there should be some overlap in constructs, as indicated by a relationship of modest magnitude. Ferris, Treadway, et al. (2005) demonstrated that the political skill composite score was related to emotional intelligence at a modest level ($r = .53$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, the dimensions of political skill demonstrated correlations with emotional intelligence that ranged from .38 to .43.

General mental ability (GMA). Social competency constructs, like political skill, which include cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements, bear the burden of demonstrating that such constructs are not simply driven, and/or subsumed, by GMA. At issue here is really that political skill and GMA are different constructs that tap into different domains. This is reflected in researchers' tendency to distinguish between fluid and crystallized categories of intelligence (Cattell & Horn, 1978). Fluid intelligence tests frequently assess perception, reasoning, and memory, whereas crystallized intelligence measures individuals' common understandings of real-world issues and concerns (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987).

Research has shown that crystallized intelligence is maintained and, in some cases, increases throughout life, whereas fluid intelligence tends to decline with age (e.g., Dixon & Baltes, 1986). The rationale for this distinction has its roots in the early work on social intelligence, where it was identified that individuals could be smart in ways that had little relationship to IQ (Thorndike, 1920). Furthermore, Sternberg (1985) identified a "social competence" dimension of intelligence, which he argued was independent of problem-solving and verbal abilities, that is, the abilities most typically associated with IQ.

The foregoing discussion addresses the construct distinctiveness of political skill and GMA; indeed, they are quite different constructs that tap into different domains. However, a different issue, but important for purposes of the political skill conceptualization presented in the article, is the extent to which we might expect GMA to reflect some relationship with political skill. We would expect to see some degree of relationship, albeit modest, between these two constructs given the role that cognition plays in the intrapsychic processes of the meta-theoretical framework.

Strain or anxiety. It has been suggested that political skill generates an increased sense of self-confidence and personal security because politically skilled individuals experience a greater degree of interpersonal control, or control over activities that take place in social interactions at work (Paulhus & Christie, 1981). Furthermore, greater perceptions of control should lead individuals high in political skill to perceive and interpret workplace stressors in different ways, resulting in such individuals experiencing significantly less strain or anxiety

at work (Kanter, 2004; Perrewé, Ferris, Frink, & Anthony, 2000). Indeed, Perrewé and her colleagues (2000) argued that political skill demonstrates an inverse relationship with trait anxiety, which reflects "relatively stable individual differences in anxiety-proneness, that is, to differences between people in the tendency to perceive stressful situations as dangerous or threatening and respond to such situations with elevations in the intensity of their state anxiety (S-Anxiety) reactions" (Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, Vagg, & Jacobs, 1983: 4).

In support of these notions, recent research indicates that political skill neutralizes the dysfunctional effects of role conflict on strain for both behavioral and physiological strain measures (Perrewé et al., 2004). Furthermore, Perrewé et al. (2005) found that political skill demonstrated a similar antidote effect, but this time on the role overload–strain reaction relationship. Finally, conceptualizing perceptions of organizational politics as a workplace stressor, Brouer, Ferris, Hochwarter, Laird, and Gilmore (2006) conducted a three-study investigation examining political skill as a moderator of the politics perceptions–strain reaction relationship, where the measure of strain used was employee depressive symptoms. The convergent results across all three studies demonstrated that, for those low in political skill, increases in politics perceptions were associated with increases in depressive symptoms, but for those high in political skill, increases in politics perceptions were associated with decreases in employee depressive symptoms.

Concerning the dimensions of political skill, we argue that interpersonal influence should exhibit the strongest negative relationship with trait anxiety. The heightened sense of personal security is likely to be associated with a perception of greater control over one's work environment, with particular reference to interpersonal control perceptions (e.g., Paulhus & Christie, 1981). Such feelings are likely reflective of the perceptions of greater interpersonal control they derive from past experiential success at exercising interpersonal influence. These increased perceptions of control provide a comfort level that would result in reduced strain or anxiety. Offering empirical support for these notions, Ferris, Treadway, et al. (2005) reported relationships of the Political Skill Inventory (PSI) composite score and trait anxiety of $r = -.27$ and $r = -.31$ ($p < .01$) in two samples. Furthermore, they found that the political skill dimensions demonstrated significant negative correlations with trait anxiety ranging from $r = -.11$ to $r = -.42$ in two samples, with interpersonal influence exhibiting the strongest relationships in both samples (i.e., $r = -.37$, $r = -.42$, $p < .01$).

Dispositional and Developmental Influences on Political Skill

Although political skill has been viewed as a competency that can be substantially shaped or developed through training and socialization (Ferris, Anthony, Kolodinsky, Gilmore, & Harvey, 2002), it is believed to have dispositional and personal ability antecedents. Because political skill is an interpersonal style construct that contributes to effectiveness in interpersonal interactions, the personality antecedents conceptualized are ones that position people to exercise personal influence and appropriately behave in social situations at work.

In an historical review of the personality field, Mayer (2005) argued that the absence of a more informed understanding was because of the approach taken by scholars who introduced particular perspectives but never attempted integration across such views, an approach

he referred to as the "perspective-by-perspective approach to personality." In reaction to this, Mayer proposed an alternative view. He introduced the "systems framework," which refocused personality on the mission originally proposed decades ago, which is the global psychological functioning of the individual. Mayer suggested that the system framework organizes personality into four major subsystems: energy lattice, knowledge works, social actor, and conscious executive.

In relation to political skill, the social actor subsystem is most relevant, and Mayer (2005) argued that it "represents the expression of personality in a socially adaptive fashion. It includes social skills, role knowledge, and emotionally preferred expressions" (p. 299). The central traits in the social actor subsystem were extraversion and self-monitoring. Extraversion reflects an affability or sociability theme, and self-monitoring echoes a theme of perceptiveness. The social actor subsystem thus serves as an initial input to the dispositional themes that might serve as antecedents of the social actor–oriented political skill dimensions. The definition and characterization of the political skill construct also would add to this control and action-oriented dispositional themes.

The conceptualization presented in Figure 1 illustrates the characteristic themes reflected by certain dispositional constructs and the particular dimensions of political skill they predict. Perceptiveness, control, affability, and active influence are the dispositional themes we believe serve as antecedents of political skill dimensions, and there are examples of specific constructs under each of these themes.

Perceptiveness. The perceptiveness theme reflects the ability of individuals to monitor and regulate their own behavior. Social astuteness should be most strongly related to conscientiousness and self-monitoring, which are reflective of the perceptiveness dispositional theme. Social astuteness seems to best capture the essence of the self-monitoring construct. High self-monitors tend to "monitor or control the images of the self they project in social interaction to a great extent" (Snyder, 1987: 5), whereas low self-monitors are much less concerned about monitoring their surroundings, and their behavior tends to express how they really feel. Similarly, people high in social astuteness are keen and intuitive observers of their surroundings and others and have an accurate understanding of social situations and their own behavior in these settings. Accordingly, Ferris, Treadway, et al. (2005) reported significant relationships between self-monitoring and social astuteness in two studies ($r = .37$, $r = .32$, $p < .01$), and these reflected the highest correlations self-monitoring demonstrated with any of the political skill dimensions.

The attention to detail and, as Pfeffer (1992) stated, the "almost clinical interest in the observation of behavior" (p. 173) suggest that social astuteness relates well to conscientiousness. Because politically skilled individuals are self-confident though not self-absorbed, they tend to maintain their focus outward toward others and the environment rather than inward. This allows such individuals to maintain proper balance and perspective, thus permitting them to keep a healthy gauge on their accountability to both self and others. This accountability perspective for politically skilled individuals suggests that they are conscientious, and, indeed, Ferris, Treadway, et al. (2005) reported significant relationships between conscientiousness and social astuteness (Study 1 $r = .31$, Study 2 $r = .27$, $p < .01$), and this was the strongest relationship conscientiousness demonstrated with any of the political skill dimensions.

Figure 1
Dispositional and Personal Ability Antecedents of Political Skill
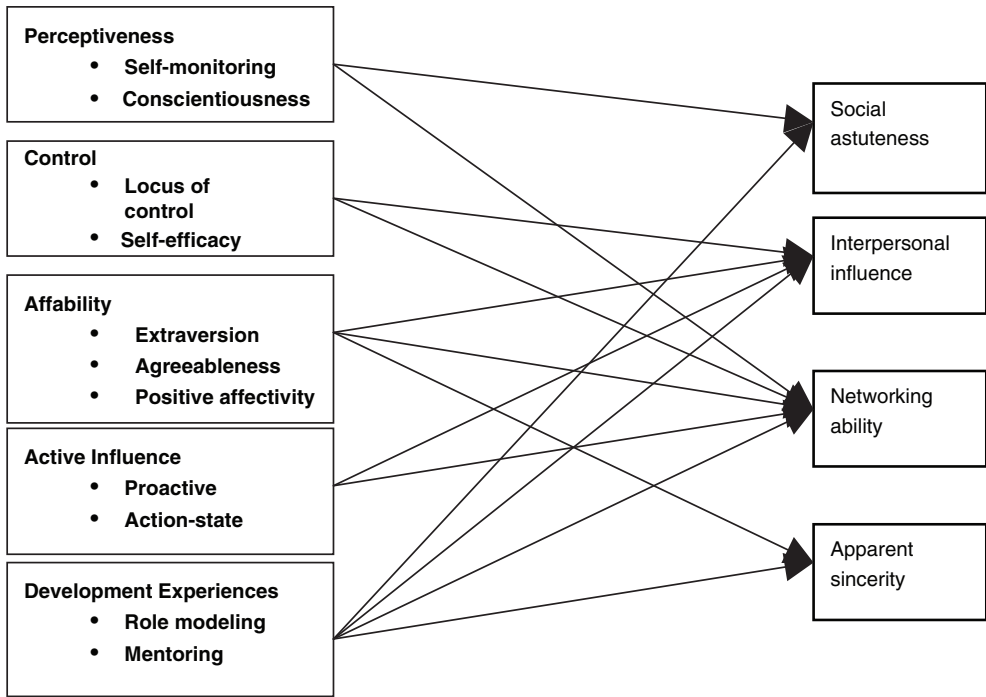
Control. Locus of control and self-efficacy are reflective of the control dispositional theme, which is concerned with the extent to which individuals perceive control over themselves and/or their environments. Locus of control involves generalized expectancies about the control over rewards and punishments, whereby individuals see that either they control (i.e., internal locus) or that such rewards and punishments are controlled by others or by luck or fate (i.e., external locus; Perrewé & Spector, 2002). Self-efficacy refers to how much individuals believe they have the capabilities to organize and execute particular courses of action that are required to attain certain outcomes, that is, a sense of mastery and control over their environment (Perrewé & Spector, 2002).

Such reflections of the control dispositional theme should have the strongest relationships with interpersonal influence and networking ability. Beliefs that individuals can control their environment, and the people in that environment, should be associated with the capacity to influence others because of the confidence such individuals express both to self and others. Politically skilled individuals exude a calm self-confidence that comes from expecting favorable outcomes from influence attempts toward others, most likely generated from the success experienced in past encounters. Because of such confidence in themselves, individuals

will invest their resources in such influence activities, and this demeanor tends to send signals to others of these individuals' competencies (e.g., Kanter, 2004). The confidence derived from beliefs about personal control should be associated with effective interpersonal influence attempts, positioning and networking with others, and social capital creation.

Affability. The affability dispositional theme reflects an outgoing, likeable, and interpersonally pleasant orientation, and it is represented by such constructs as extraversion, agreeableness, and positive affectivity. Furthermore, this dispositional theme is expected to relate most strongly with the interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity dimensions of political skill. Indeed, significant positive correlations between positive affectivity and political skill have been reported in two studies (Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2004). In addition, Liu, Ferris, Zinko, Perrewé, Weitz, and Xu (in press) reported significant correlations of the political skill composite with extraversion ($r = .58$, $p < .01$), and extraversion related most strongly with the interpersonal influence and networking ability dimensions of political skill.

Active influence. This dispositional perspective suggests particular constructs that have a strong action-oriented component. A proactive personality reflects a personal disposition toward proactive behavior, or the extent to which individuals take action to influence their environments (Bateman & Crant, 1993). Crant (1995) suggested that "proactive personalities identify opportunities and act on them; they show initiative, take action, and persevere until they bring about meaningful change" (p. 532), and those individuals are not much affected by situational forces. As those proactively taking initiative to bring about goal-oriented action and accomplishment, proactive personality should be most strongly associated with the interpersonal influence and networking ability dimensions of political skill. Research has indicated that proactive personality is associated with network building (Thompson, 2005). Liu et al. (in press) reported significant relationships between proactive personality and political skill ($r = .38$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, the two strongest relationships found for the political skill dimensions and proactive personality were with the interpersonal influence and networking ability dimensions.

Action-state orientation refers to "individual differences in the ability to properly regulate actions and cognitions to accomplish intentional actions (goals and objectives). . . . An action-oriented person is able to internally regulate behaviors, cognitions, and emotions that are relevant for the accomplishment of volitional actions" (Perrewé & Spector, 2002: 42). As such, action-oriented individuals can effectively screen out irrelevant or competing impulses or thoughts and thus remain focused on activities that facilitate goal accomplishment. Such action-state orientation promotes decisive, goal-directed behavior and therefore should be expected to be most strongly associated with the interpersonal influence and networking dimensions of political skill. That is, action-state orientation would propel individuals to utilize influence tactics and strategies in the pursuit of goal accomplishment and to leverage the social capital that is derived from effective networking and positioning in pursuit of goal attainment.

Developmental experiences. We have examined a number of dispositional antecedents to political skill; however, political skill is not simply trait based. Political skill is also a learned behavior that can be developed. Effective techniques to develop political skill must provide participants with feedback about their social interactions, including their level of awareness

in social situations, about how well they understand such situations, and about multiple behavioral response alternatives. Developmental experiences, such as role modeling and mentoring, can increase the four dimensions of political skill.

Based on Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, and often included as part of overall leadership training, behavioral modeling is perhaps the primary developmental experience used in business today (May & Kahnweiler, 2000), and its efficacy for training effectiveness has been widely validated (e.g., Burke & Day, 1986). In behavioral role modeling, experts demonstrate the proper way to exercise a particular skill, such as political skill. Once the new skill is modeled, effective transfer of training, generalization, and maintenance typically occurs with repeated practice by participants (May & Kahnweiler, 2000). We suggest that the best way to practice influencing others is to use the newly acquired skill in social settings in which an influence situation occurs.

Working with skilled mentors is another important way to develop political skill. Individuals observe professionals in real work situations as they exercise political skill and influence in meetings with their subordinates and peers. The way in which politically skilled mentors use language, facial expressions, body posture, and gestures will convey messages to observers as to how influence is best exercised. The keys are to be sure that individuals are working with talented and politically skilled mentors who have plenty of social influence interactions and are given plenty of opportunities to discuss various social influence interactions encountered. Hence, effective mentors not only engage in politically skilled influence behaviors so that protégés learn by observation but also take time to discuss various social interactions so that protégés can more fully understand how and why mentors act in such a manner.
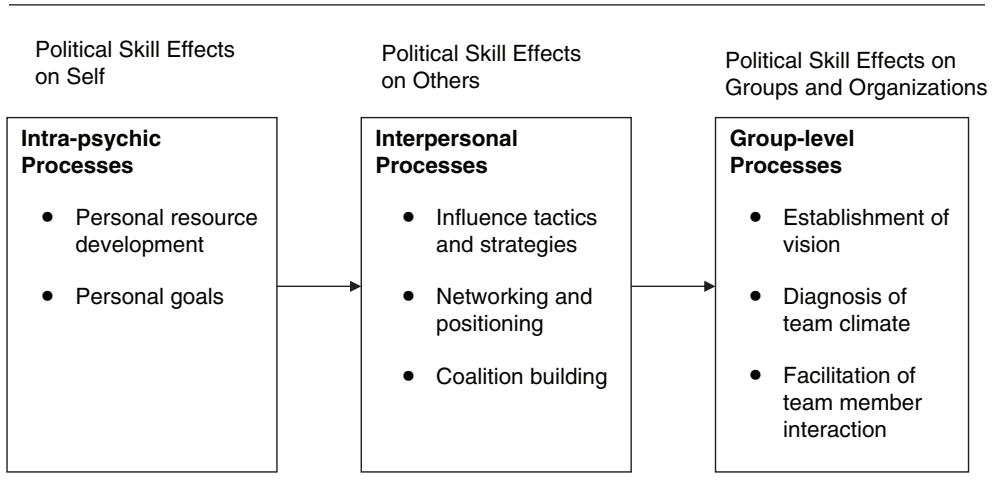
A primary role of a mentor in a mentoring relationship is to help the protégé develop a richer and more informed understanding of the work environment. Because politics and political skill are key considerations in work environments, it has been suggested that a primary content focus of mentoring relationships is the development of political skill in protégés (e.g., Perrewé, Young, & Blass, 2002). Furthermore, it has been found that mentoring relationships are associated with individual learning and that good mentors increase such individual learning, which relates to both the work content and interpersonal competencies (e.g., political skill; Lankau & Scandura, 2002). Ultimately, mentoring involves not only the informal training and development of what to do in the work environment, when, and with whom but also the building of the interpersonal and social effectiveness competencies that round out the concept of political skill.

Collectively, this perspective and associated evidence indicate that dispositional traits and personal abilities that are developed determine the extent to which individuals are politically skilled. Indeed, the syndrome of social competencies we refer to as political skill is substantially grounded in inherent general dispositions and in learned personal skills and abilities.

Meta-Theoretical Framework of Political Skill

As a cognitive-affective-behavioral comprehensive configuration of social competencies, political skill can be understood to incorporate intrapsychic processes, interpersonal processes,

Figure 2
Meta-Theoretical Framework of Political Skill

Political Skill Effects
on Self

Political Skill Effects
on Others

Political Skill Effects on
Groups and Organizations

Intra-psychic Processes	**Interpersonal Processes**	**Group-level Processes**
• Personal resource development • Personal goals	• Influence tactics and strategies • Networking and positioning • Coalition building	• Establishment of vision • Diagnosis of team climate • Facilitation of team member interaction

and group-level processes, as noted in Figure 2. Each of these sets of processes are discussed in the sections that follow.

Intrapsychic Processes

Personal Resource Development

As the definition of political skill noted, the ability to read and understand others is used to accomplish personal and organizational goals. We suggest that political skill is the mechanism through which goal-directed behavior is activated in pursuit of interpersonal objectives and/or outcomes achievement. This line of reasoning was fundamental to early interpretations of influence behavior in organizations. Indeed, Jones (1964) adopted similar reasoning in his classic treatment of ingratiation behavior in organizations. He argued that the ability of personal goals to arouse ingratiatory behavior is the product of three forces: the importance of the goal to the actor, the unique ability of the target to provide the goal, and the perceived disposition of the target toward the action. We extend Jones's ideas of arousal to explain the activation of political skill.

Within the political arena, the acquisition and control of resources is paramount to the possession of power (Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1992). As stated by Pfeffer (1992), the golden rule in organizations is that "the person with the gold, makes the rules" (p. 83). As such, the accumulation of valued commodities provides a mechanism through which organizational participants can cultivate interpersonal dependencies within their organization. In turn, these dependencies reflect the manifestation of power within the organizational and social structure.

Theoretically, this discussion of resource acquisition is viewed through the lens of conservation of resources (COR) theory. From this perspective, resources are defined as "those entities that either are centrally valued in their own right (e.g., self-esteem, close attachments, health, and inner peace) or act as means to obtain centrally valued ends (e.g., money, social support, and credit)" (Hobfoll, 2002: 307). Currently, the study of how people gain, use, and deplete their resources has been largely concerned with individual coping strategies to stress and strain (e.g., Grandey & Cropanzano, 1998; Hobfoll, 1989, 2002; Ito & Brotheridge, 2003). However, we assert that the acquisition and protection of resources parallels the motivational goals of the political processes in organizations.

Similar to Pfeffer (1992) and Mintzberg's (1983, 1985) arguments regarding political activity, COR theory suggests that individuals seek to garner, protect, and retain resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002). Furthermore, this theory stipulates that stress occurs when resources are lost or threatened or when there is a failure of gain after a significant investment of other resources. According to COR theory, resources can be objects, conditions, personal characteristics, or energies (e.g., Grandey & Cropanzano, 1998). Objects are things such as clothing and other material possessions, conditions encompass things such as material status and organizational tenure, personal characteristics include such things as self-esteem, hardiness, and skills, and they help safeguard individuals from stress, and energy resources include such things as money, time, and knowledge, and they allow the acquisition of other resources (Hobfoll, 2002).

COR theory's framing of resources in this manner appears to present a paradox in relation to political skill. Political skill is quite obviously a personal resource in itself. However, when activated by resource threat or opportunity, political skill serves as a critical internal resource that facilitates the acquisition of valued resources in organizations. This line or reasoning is consistent with COR theorists' arguments that internal resources, those resources "possessed by the self or are within the domain of the self" (Hobfoll, 1998: 57), may assist in the management of external resource pools. As such, politically skilled individuals are in a better position to accumulate and protect scarce organizational resources.

Personal Goals

The likelihood of political skill activation is dependent on the salience of the resource (Jones, 1964). We assert that the salience of any personal or organizational resource is partly the product of the individual motivations of the organizational participant. Therefore, although we have positioned COR theory as an overarching framework for understanding the activation of political skill, we would be remiss if we did not discuss the potential impact of individual differences in motivation on individual perceptions of resource importance. Indeed, these motivational biases serve to explain the likelihood of resource activation.

Political scholars have echoed this assertion. That is, people develop goals, objectives, motivations, and strivings that guide and channel work behavior toward goal accomplishment. Mintzberg (1983, 1985) argued that, to be effective in organizations, individuals needed to possess both political will and political skill. Accordingly, political will represents an individual's willingness to expend energy in pursuit of personal goals (Treadway, Hochwarter, Kacmar, & Ferris, 2005). Despite ample conceptual development, few studies

have assessed the role of motivation in political behavior, and only one study has attempted to operationalize the underlying components of the political will. Specifically, previous research has suggested two components of political will: intrinsic motivation and need for achievement (Treadway et al., 2005).

Congruent with the traditional notions of organizational politics that emphasize the self-serving nature of political activity, intrinsic motivation is goal-directed behavior that motivates individuals to pursue their interests and develop personal competencies (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Furthermore, Treadway et al. (2005) argued that because need for achievement is related to political self-confidence (Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Lindskold, 1972) and heightened levels of political activity (Mowday, 1978), individuals high in need for achievement will be more willing to expend political capital to obtain valued resources.

In extending the framework set forth by Treadway et al. (2005), we argue that need for power is the most intuitively obvious and theoretically grounded addition to this framework. Defined as the need to influence others toward personal or organizational objectives (McClelland & Burnham, 1976), some scholars have suggested that the power motive is closely related to the ability to "detect and quickly identify the motive bases of others and to relate one's power sources in order to rearrange the incentives of the other person's consequences" (Heckhausen, 1991: 322). As such, high need for power should make the activation of political skill more likely.

Effects of Political Skill on Self

Political skill is conceptualized to demonstrate effects on both self and others, and we propose a framework that classifies the criterion-related validity studies according to the relationships conceptualized and demonstrated by political skill in organizations in Figure 3, which illustrates such effects. In this section, we examine the specific linkages in this framework that pertain to how political skill works inward on self-reactions and discuss the theoretical dynamics driving the way political skill operates in organizational settings to affect the self.

Political skill effects on self-evaluations. Because of their ability to read people and situations well and act on that knowledge in ways that lead to interpersonal effectiveness, politically skilled individuals develop a personal security that results from favorable evaluations of self. Feedback over time from such successful interpersonal encounters contributes to the experience of control and mastery over others in their work environment, which leads politically skilled individuals to evaluate themselves positively (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005).

Self-evaluation effects on job attitudes. The effects of political skill on job attitudes are not easy to decipher. On one hand, it would make sense to predict a significant negative relationship between political skill and job tension because politically skilled people perceive and interpret stressful environmental stimuli in ways that neutralize their detrimental effects; that is, political skill contributes to a calm self-confidence that makes people experience less strain. However, the relationship between political skill and job attitudes such as satisfaction seem a bit more complex. It makes sense to suspect a positive linear relationship between

Figure 3
Political Skill Effects on Self and Others
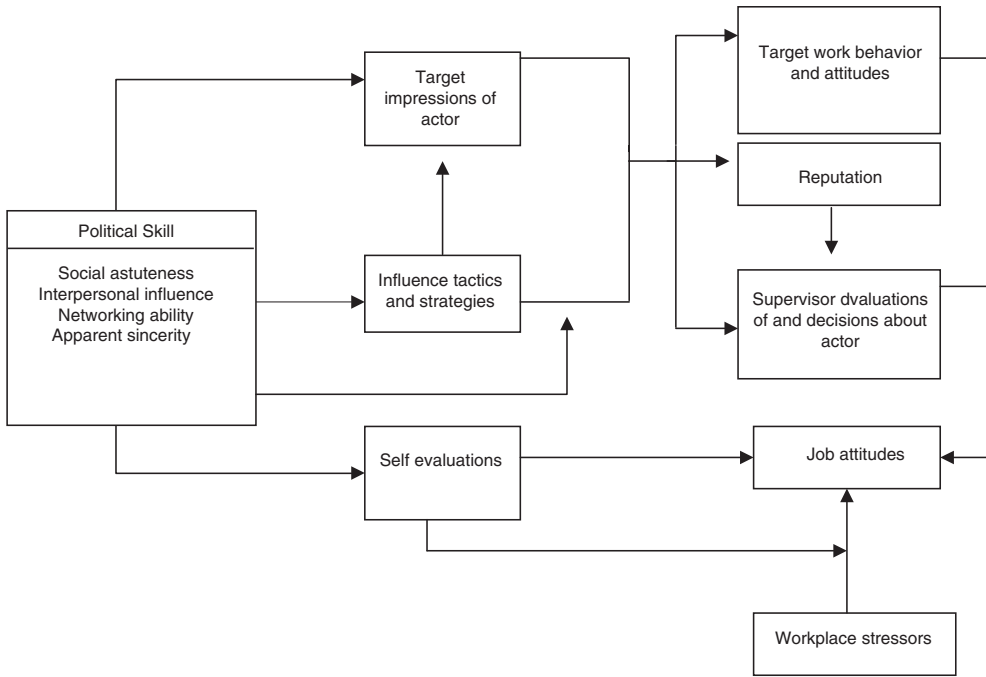
political skill and job satisfaction, and such a relationship was reported by Kolodinsky et al. (2004). However, when they added the nonlinear political skill term into the regression equation, it accounted for a significant increment in variance explained, suggesting an inverted *U*-shaped relationship with job satisfaction.

In the context of political skill, several prominent researchers have characterized interpersonal skill-related constructs to be complex (e.g., Riggio, 1986; Schneider, Ackerman, & Kanfer, 1996). In fact, Schneider and colleagues (1996), in their investigation of an interpersonal skill construct that they term social competence, suggested that linear models could be faulty, offering that some social competence dimensions, in fact, might prove to be curvilinear, where higher scores might not be preferable on certain dimensions. They wrote, "More is not necessarily better where certain social competence dimensions are involved" (p. 479). For example, they suggested that when social influence (i.e., one of their social competence dimensions) is extreme, it is likely to be seen as domineering. Moreover, high levels of warmth (i.e., another social competence dimension) might be viewed as too trusting and permissive.

Self-evaluation effects on stressor–strain relationships. Political skill has been argued to demonstrate neutralizing effects on workplace stressors, thus reducing the potentially

dysfunctional effects of stressors on strain reactions. Furthermore, we argue in this model that political skill should demonstrate such effects through the self-evaluations that produce the security and self-confidence that results from the perceived control and mastery politically skilled people have over others and their work environment.

Because political skill gives people a calm self-confidence that comes from a sense of control and personal security, individuals should perceive environmental stressors as less threatening and neutralize their impact on strain reactions. Several studies have demonstrated the moderating and neutralizing effects of political skill on the stressor–strain relationships for role conflict and role overload stressors (Perrewé et al., 2004; Perrewé et al., 2005), for perceptions of organizational politics as a workplace stressor (i.e., Brouer et al., 2006), and for perceived or felt accountability as a source of stress, which affected job performance through job tension (Hochwarter et al., 2007). Psychosocial resources theories would suggest that political skill demonstrates such a neutralizing effect on stressors because the additional resources possessed by those high in political skill render stressors as nonthreats.

Interpersonal Processes

Political skill is also conceptualized to demonstrate effects on others, and in this section, we examine influence tactics and strategies, networking, and positioning (see Figure 2). We also discuss those aspects of the framework in Figure 3 pertaining to the effects of political skill on others.

Influence Tactics and Strategies

Political skill reflects the capacity to effectively exercise influence over others at work. Individuals high in political skill know which particular type of influence tactic or strategy to employ in each situation. These individuals also know precisely how to execute a specific tactic or strategy in just the right way to demonstrate the desired effect, thus ensuring the success of the influence attempt. For example, ingratiation and self-promotion can be quite differently perceived and interpreted based on whether the actor is more, or less, politically skilled.

Ingratiation. Ingratiation refers to behaviors that are designed to get you on the "good" side of others and/or to be liked by them, as either an end in itself or so that you can receive some rewards (Jones, 1990). Ingratiation has been referred to as simply flattery, and defined as

> strategic praise, praise with a purpose. It may be inflated or exaggerated or it may be accurate and truthful, but it is praise that seeks some result, whether it is increased liking or an office with a window. It is a kind of manipulation of reality that uses the enhancement of another for our own self-advantage. It can even be genuine praise. (Stengel, 2000: 14-15)

Because ingratiation is an effort to gain or achieve some outcome, the individual employing it needs to be concerned about how it is perceived, which is a function of how effectively it is presented. Essentially, ingratiation is an attempt to influence others, which must appear

to be sincere for it to work at all. What distinguishes the skilled execution of ingratiation from the perceived manipulative and failed attempt is political skill (Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, in press).

Self-promotion. Besides ingratiation, another frequently studied (and used) influence tactic is self-promotion, which has the objective of appearing to be competent and involves trying to show how one is accomplished (Jones, 1990). Obviously, self-promotion can be difficult to effectively enact. If too little emphasis is applied, one appears to understate things and fail to impress people, whereas if too much emphasis is made, one appears arrogant, conceited, and self-important, which our society generally finds offensive. Once again, the difference in how self-promotion behavior is interpreted and reacted to depends on the person's political skill. People who have poor political skill are seen as self-promoters who are artificially saying and doing whatever they can just to get ahead. People high in political skill are viewed as genuine, sincere, and authentic.

Taken together, these arguments indicate that political skill affects the way influence tactics are perceived and interpreted, often changing a positive interpretation (i.e., for those high in political skill) to a negative one (i.e., for those low in political skill). Political skill plays a key role in the dynamics of influence tactics and strategies as they are demonstrated and interpreted in the workplace.

Assertiveness. To this point in our formulation, we have suggested that when highly skilled organizational politicians engage in influence tactics, they do so in an effective way. However, this does not imply that they enact a full range of influence tactics. In fact, we argue that those high in political skill might simply avoid some influence tactics in favor of others.

Assertiveness involves demanding, ordering, setting deadlines, and checking up on others to exercise influence (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980). The use of assertiveness, as a way to influence others, can be intricate, and its effects sometimes can be positive and sometimes negative. We suggest that individuals who possess a high degree of networking ability will be well positioned (e.g., by virtue of the connections, alliances, and social capital they control) to employ assertiveness as a successful influence tactic. Furthermore, individuals who are socially astute should be better able to read the temporal and social cues that will determine the limited normative and interpersonal conditions under which assertiveness will be an effective tactic.

Networking and Positioning

Social networks are a source of advantage in organizations. Individuals who possess social networks characterized by open structure, heterogeneous contacts, and structural holes are more likely to develop information asymmetries than peers with densely structured social networks characterized by homogenous contacts and a lack of structural holes (Burt, 1992, 2005). Structural holes are spaces between two otherwise unrelated individuals and/or groups (Burt, 1992). Relationships that bridge structural holes are described as bridging ties,

which provide the opportunity to engage in arbitrage and information brokering between the two parties. Empirical evidence suggests that individuals with a large number of intra- and interorganizational bridging ties in their social networks have higher performance evaluations, are more likely to be promoted, and have higher levels of compensation than do peers with fewer bridging ties (Burt, 2004).

Individual attributes influence how social networks are developed and utilized (Burt, 2005; Burt, Jannotta, & Mahoney, 1998). For example, empirical evidence suggested that high self-monitors obtain network central positions and subsequent high performance evaluations (Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001). Support has also been found for personality attributes (Burt et al., 1998) and proactive personality (Thompson, 2005) relating to effective social network structure and social capital.

Networking ability and social astuteness are two primary aspects of political skill that influence the degree to which a social network is efficiently structured. As we noted, individuals possessing political skill are astute observers of others and well in touch with a diversity of social situations. Social astuteness allows individuals to comprehend social interactions and accurately interpret their behavior, and that of others, in social settings. Pfeffer (1992) referred to this characteristic as "sensitivity to others," and he argued, "Somewhat ironically, it is this capacity to identify with others that is actually critical in obtaining things for oneself" (p. 173).

Politically skilled individuals are competent at developing and using diverse networks of people. People in these networks are valuable assets, seen as important and necessary for successful personal and organizational functioning. Furthermore, politically skilled individuals possess a subtle style that allows them to easily develop friendships and build strong alliances and coalitions, resulting in social capital that can be leveraged. In addition, individuals high in networking ability use their social astuteness to determine how and where they will position themselves to both create and take advantage of opportunities (Pfeffer, 1992).

Burt (2000) observed that it is not a question of whether to trust but who to trust in competitive environments. Social astuteness is one's ability to identify the nuances of social interaction. Specifically, politically skilled individuals have the ability to perceive how other individuals enhance or diminish social interaction, the motives of others, and subsequently the level of reliability in reciprocating information, resources, and favors. This enables politically skilled individuals to avoid or reduce contact with other social actors who are not valuable members in an actor's social network and to enhance and solidify relationships with valuable, trustworthy social network members.

Coalition Building

Closely related to the ability to establish broad and strong networks is the ability to build and develop coalitions and engage in upward appeals. Kipnis et al. (1980) discussed coalition tactics as mounting coworker or subordinate support to reinforce a position taken or resources requested, counting on a "strength in numbers" approach. Upward appeals involve obtaining the support of individuals higher up in the organizational hierarchy, which, in essence, shares considerable similarities with building coalitions.

It is intuitively obvious that a significant positive relationship should exist between the networking-ability dimension of political skill and the implementation of coalition influence tactics. Perhaps less intuitive is the relationship between networking ability and the use of upward appeals. We argue that networking ability should be a precursor of the upward-appeals, influence-tactic usage. Indeed, strong network ties are necessary to facilitate the enactment of upward-appeal tactics because such linkages allow individuals to operate from a position of greater strength (i.e., through such connections and social capital).

In the recent political skill scale development and construct validation article by Ferris, Treadway, et al. (2005), supportive results were provided, confirming much of the foregoing discussion regarding influence tactics and political skill. For the overall composite political skill score, it related to the upward-appeal and coalition influence tactics, but not to assertiveness, in two samples. Regarding the political skill dimensions, network building was significantly related to coalitions, upward appeals, and assertiveness in two samples. Interestingly, social astuteness also related to all three of these influence tactics in one of the studies but not the other.

Effects of Political Skill on Others

Effects on impressions of others and influence tactic selection. Political skill gives individuals a calm sense of self-confidence that inspires trust and confidence in others and promotes credibility. In Figure 3, the influence of political skill on others directly progresses on others' impressions of trust, confidence, and credibility, which also are indirectly affected through selection and use of situationally appropriate, and effectively executed, influence tactics and strategies.

Politically skilled persons are very adaptable, which is an increasingly important characteristic in organizations today. Indeed, research has noted the importance of individual adaptation as an important predictor of performance across a wide variety of work domains (e.g., Chan, 2000; LePine, Colquitt, & Erez, 2000; Pulakos, Arad, Donovan, & Plamondon, 2000). In addition, research has indicated that individuals possessing social competency are better able to meet the demands of most environments by adjusting and calibrating their actions to the proper level (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1987).

Individuals high in political skill utilize their social astuteness to strategically select methods of influence and self-presentation that present the most situationally appropriate behavior, or "situated identities" (Alexander & Knight, 1971; Gergen & Taylor, 1969). Furthermore, they employ their interpersonal influence attempts and their capacity for apparent sincerity to appear genuine and authentic in their behavior, with no ulterior motive. Finally, the networking ability of politically skilled individuals allows them to build social capital and leverage it when needed to be even more influential.

Collectively, these aspects of political skill, and the influence tactics selected, combine to shape the impressions formed by the target person or persons of the actor. Specifically, target persons tend to view politically skilled individuals as trustworthy, credible, accountable, and likable. Furthermore, individuals high in political skill are perceived to be charismatic and to attract and inspire others. Finally, politically skilled individuals' behaviors are designed to

influence others' impressions of their competence and similarity and their reputations, which, along with affect or liking, were the intermediate linkages proposed by Ferris and Judge (1991) in their political model of human resources management. Although the Ferris and Judge conceptualization was primarily directed at political or influence behavior, it is implicit that for this to work, the behaviors have to be effectively executed, which requires political skill.

Impressions and influence tactics effects on other outcomes. It is then these increased positive target reactions toward the individual that lead to positive target evaluations of the individual in the form of increased reputation, higher performance ratings, favorable promotion ratings, and job survival decisions. Also, favorable impressions by subordinates of the individual tend to be associated with higher performance and more positive job attitudes. More specifically, politically skilled individuals possess the capacity to control or self-regulate their behavior in ways that influence and manage the reactions and behavior of others. Indeed, politically skilled individuals are better capable of disguising their intentions (Treadway et al., in press).

Political skill main effects on performance and reputation. The research evidence to date examining the effects of political skill on others has been consistent. Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, and Ammeter (2004) found leader political skill to be a positive predictor of team performance. Furthermore, Higgins (2000) reported that political skill was significantly related to recruitment interviewer ratings and evaluations of job applicants. Douglas and Ammeter (2004) found leader political skill to be a significant predictor of ratings of leader effectiveness.

Political skill has been found to differentially predict several aspects of job performance. For example, research has shown self-efficacy to be more strongly related to task performance than to contextual performance and political skill to be more strongly related to contextual than to task performance. In addition, political skill appears to be a stronger predictor of contextual performance than self-efficacy, and self-efficacy is a stronger predictor of task performance than political skill (Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris, & Hochwarter, in press). In addition, political skill has been found to explain a significant increment in supervisor ratings of employee job performance beyond self-monitoring and influence tactics (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005). Furthermore, social astuteness was the most explanatory dimension of political skill.

The most extensive study to date examining the impact of political skill on job performance distinguished political skill from three social effectiveness measures: self-monitoring, emotional intelligence, and leadership self-efficacy. This study indicated that political skill was both the strongest predictor of managerial performance and a differentiating factor between top performers and others. Interestingly, although emotional intelligence was also a significant predictor of managerial performance, it did not explain significant variance in performance above and beyond political skill. In addition, leadership self-efficacy and self-monitoring were not significant predictors of performance (Semadar, Robins, & Ferris, 2006).

Expanding the domain of job performance, recent research indicated that political skill serves as a key antecedent of both personal reputation (Ferris, Blass, Douglas, Kolodinsky, & Treadway, 2003; Zinko, Ferris, Blass, & Laird, 2006) and leader reputation (Ammeter, Douglas, Gardner, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2002; Blass & Ferris, 2007; Hall, Blass, Ferris, & Massengale, 2004). Furthermore, research has provided empirical support of this relationship,

with significant correlations reported between political skill and reputation in two studies ($r =$ .35, $r = .40$, $p < .05$; Liu et al., in press). Also, Liu et al. (in press) found evidence for the mediating role of reputation between political skill and job performance in two studies, detecting full mediation.

The studies linking political skill to performance evaluations, reputation, and other work behaviors and attitudes did not examine the impression of the actor or influence tactics as mediating factors. We argue that the reason political skill affects these outcomes is because political skill affects the target's general impression of the actor, the type of influence tactic chosen, and the way the influence tactic is executed.

Interaction of influence tactics and political skill. We propose that in addition to making the situationally appropriate selection of influence tactics, politically skilled people execute influence attempts in a manner that contributes to their effectiveness. More than 15 years ago, Jones (1990) framed what he essentially viewed as the foundational concern at the root of the influence tactics–outcomes relationships, that is, to understand what it is that explains how and why influence attempts are positively perceived, are successfully executed, and result in positive results. He argued that after many years of research, we know quite a bit about different influence behaviors, but virtually nothing about the style with which individuals execute and deliver influence attempts, which probably explains most of why they are effective.

Political skill represents the type of style construct to which Jones (1990) was referring in his appeal for such research on influence effectiveness. Therefore, we suggest that how the influence behavior of employees is perceived and interpreted by supervisors is a function of employees' political skill, which facilitates the delivery and execution of the influence behavior and becomes the decisive factor in the effectiveness of the influence behavior on the supervisors' reactions. Indeed, prior work has argued that the very same behavior by employees (e.g., ingratiation-type behavior) can be interpreted and classified as either "citizenship behavior" or as "political behavior" based on the intentionality the perceiver assigns to the behavior, which is probably triggered by the employee's style of execution and delivery (Bolino, 1999; Ferris, Bhawuk, Fedor, & Judge, 1995), that is, for example, the employee's political skill.

Treadway et al. (in press) tested the notion that political skill would affect the perception and interpretation of influence tactics and thus would moderate the relationship between employee-reported ingratiation and the reports of the employees' ingratiation provided by supervisors. Also, it was hypothesized that supervisor reports of subordinate ingratiation would be negatively related to supervisor ratings of subordinate interpersonal facilitation. Results provided evidence that subordinates with high political skill were less likely than those low in political skill to have their ingratiation behavior perceived by supervisors as a self-serving or manipulative influence attempt. Furthermore, when employees were perceived by their supervisors to engage in more ingratiation behavior, the employees received lower ratings of interpersonal facilitation from their supervisors.

Similarly, research has evaluated the moderating role of political skill on the relationships between five different impression management tactics (i.e., intimidation, exemplification, ingratiation, self-promotion, and supplication) and supervisor evaluations of employee performance. The results of this research indicated that increases in influence tactic use were associated with increased supervisor evaluations of subordinate performance for those high

in political skill. The opposite results were found when impression management usage was low, whereby individuals low in political skill created a more favorable image than did those high in political skill when they did not use the influence tactics (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007).

Group-Level Processes

Increasingly, organizations are making greater use of team-based organizational structures, and research corroborates the importance of the leader behavior effects on team performance (Kozlowski, Gully, McHugh, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers, 1996; Stewart & Manz, 1997). Because successful leaders in contemporary organizations will need to focus their energies toward interpersonal leader attributes such as coaching, coordination, and orchestration (e.g., House, 1995), political skill gives leaders the social astuteness and behavioral flexibility required to address the individual needs and motivations of their employees. Such an individualized, tailored approach by such leaders to the particular perspectives and nuances of each of their employees should lead to favorable effects on employee behavior. We argue that political skill is fundamental to the establishment of vision, diagnosis of team climate, and facilitation of team-member interactions (see Figure 2).

Establishment of Vision

Formulation and articulation of vision. A vision is a symbol of possibilities, an attractive, credible future destination (Nanus, 1992). Targets and goals are important for group success, but a strong, articulated vision allows us to see beyond our immediate needs and onto a new horizon. The power of a vision is that it provides a number of benefits for organizations and their members, creates shared meaning and common identity, energizes and provides a challenge, and brings the future into the present (Nanus, 1992). In establishing an effective vision, both leaders and followers must contribute to the process. Kotter (2001) posited that leaders must create and get employees to buy into the vision, and employees must collectively implement or carry out the vision. Simply put, because of the needed collaboration between leaders and employees, political skill is important to this process.

In formulating a vision, leaders can take the top-down approach or the bottom-up approach, each relying on different interpersonal processes. With the top-down approach, leaders attempt to get others to buy into their vision, and, in doing so, they try to create self-schemas for the followers to match the vision (Sims & Lorenzi, 1992). In this instance, leaders might rely on reputation, networking and positioning, and positive impressions to generate support for their vision. However, in using the bottom-up approach, leaders will establish a vision derived from the collective understanding of what the group or organizational members hope to accomplish (Raelin, 2006), requiring leaders to use influence tactics that support greater involvement and network building.

In either case, the successful implementation of vision requires the careful use of political skill by the person formulating and articulating the vision. It is the social astuteness, combined with a keen sense of self-awareness, possessed by politically skilled individuals that

allows them to see the end result of what they are trying to accomplish. This represents a key initial quality contributing to the successful formulation and implementation of vision.

Vision, charisma, and political skill. The quality we see associated with leadership probably more than any other is charisma, which is variously referred to as a special quality or charm that tends to inspire people to follow a vision or course of action (e.g., Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Khurana, 2002). The leaders of large corporations, for example, used to be selected on the basis of their prior track record of performance, until a couple of decades ago. Khurana (2002: 71), who conducted one of the largest studies of CEO selection, confirmed that you cannot just be a "competent manager" today and be selected to run a *Fortune* 500 company; you must be seen as a "charismatic leader."

Leader charisma has, indeed, been a topic of intense interest. However, it appears that charisma and political skill may be quite similar. If the ability to inspire people to action toward an articulated vision or set of mutually reinforcing and integrative goals is what we generally mean by charisma, then charisma and political skill would appear to be quite closely related. That is, politically skilled leaders are effective because they astutely read contexts, situationally adjust, adapt, and calibrate their behavior to create the desired image, leverage their social capital to further reinforce their image, and do all this in a sincere, authentic, and convincing way (Douglas, Ferris, & Perrewé, 2005). Charismatic people have been argued to easily adjust to different situations, and effectively read others' interests, motivations, and emotions (Greer, 2005).

From this perspective, charisma becomes simply part of the social competency set we call political skill. Indeed, it has been recently suggested that leaders engage in active efforts to manage impressions of their charisma (Gardner & Avolio, 1998). We would agree and emphasize even more that it is political skill that allows them to be successful in doing so. Although some might regard charisma as a separate and totally different concept, others have suggested that charisma is really just well-developed social skill (Riggio, 1986, 1987, 1998). Because of our distinction between social and political skill, we would suggest that political skill and charisma are closely related constructs (see Coole [2006] for a recent empirical examination of the political skill and charisma constructs).

Diagnosis of Team Climate

Research on group dynamics shows climate as a variable of interest affecting team success. At the individual level, climate is the cognitive representation of the immediate environment (James & Sells, 1981), but at the group level, team climate depends on group members having shared experiences (Anderson & West, 1998). The existence of team climate is based on cognitive agreement among team members, and to accurately assess team climate, leaders need good perceptiveness and effective relationships with team members.

Studies have emphasized the importance of the leadership climate relationship and have shown that leadership has a direct impact on team climate (Kozlowski & Doherty, 1989). Furthermore, team climate influences the leadership–performance relationship (Smith-Jentsch, Salas, & Brannick, 2001). Through its reliance on interpersonal processes, political

skill is seen as an aid to understanding, diagnosing, and monitoring team climate. Social astuteness allows leaders to make careful assessments of team members for areas of agreement and shared perceptions. Also, leaders must balance their use of interpersonal influence to foster a sense of continuity, which will enhance cognitive agreement among team members. Furthermore, as leaders attempt to redirect team activities, all dimensions of political skill will aid leaders in changing existing norms, attitudes, and expectations.

Facilitation of Team-Member Interaction

Perhaps best characterized as a social influence process, leadership effectiveness is the extent to which leaders can influence followers to engage in both in-role and extrarole behaviors that contribute to the performance and effectiveness of the unit. We argue that leader political skill is one of the key skills that differentiate effective from ineffective leaders. Furthermore, one way political skill contributes to unit performance and effectiveness is through leaders' ability to coordinate, orchestrate, and facilitate group or team-member interaction in productive ways. Kotter (1985) suggested that a sophisticated type of leader social or political skill is required, one that can both inspire and mobilize people to coordinated action in pursuit of key goal accomplishment.

The coordination of efforts with and through others contributes to leader effectiveness, particularly when used in conjunction with networking, positioning, coalition building, and social capital creation (e.g., Brass, 2001; House, 1995), which are facilitated by political skill, as noted in an earlier section of this article. House (1995) argued that leaders who are networked and well positioned are better able to maximize resource attainment for their units and thus tend to be more valued and appreciated by their teams.

Leaders often need to implement change to enhance unit effectiveness. Furthermore, change implementation cannot be successfully executed alone but typically requires the leveraging of social capital leaders have established through the accumulation of connections, friendships, and alliances. In addition, the networks leaders have accessed, and the positions they occupy in those networks, demonstrate increased reputational benefits for such leaders, which are believed to favorably influence follower reactions (Ammeter et al., 2002).

Politically skilled leaders demonstrate a confident demeanor, expectation of success, and demonstration of efficacy or being in charge, conveyed through both behavior and/or speech, which tend to inspire others to follow and elicits their positive reactions to such leaders. Accordingly, leader political skill has been argued to increase followers' trust in the leader, support of the leader, perceptions of leader competence, and credibility and to favorably influence outcome measures such as increased member job satisfaction and citizenship behavior and reduced intent to turnover (Ahearn et al., 2004; Ammeter et al., 2002; Douglas et al., 2005; Hall et al., 2004; Treadway et al., 2004).

Effects of Political Skill on Groups and Organizations

The syndrome of social competencies that comprise political skill, including the ability to perceive and attend to individual employee interests and needs, can affect group performance.

Furthermore, the specific type of participation that leaders allow and encourage in their teams can demonstrate considerable influence on team performance. Batt and Appelbaum (1995) found that teams where there is "substantive" participation (i.e., participation where leaders relinquish some measure of control to subordinates) generally perform better than teams where subordinate input is limited to "consultative" participation.

At issue here is the degree of control relinquished by leaders, whereby substantive participation suggests increased risk for leaders than using consultative participation because of the less direct leader control with the former type. Because of this, it might be that political skill can be used to effectively constrain certain autonomous subordinates and coordinate their efforts together with others to bring about unit effectiveness. Thus, political skill is used as a subtle means of accomplishing a behavior coordination and control goal in a similar way that group norms can channel and shape behavior in organizationally appropriate directions. Thus, possessing a high degree of political skill would appear to be beneficial if we assume that one critical job of leaders is to eliminate many of the barriers that might derail team effectiveness.

Ahearn et al. (2004) examined the relationship of leader political skill and team performance in a state child welfare system. In that study, team performance was operationalized as "permanency rate," or the successful placement of children in legally final living arrangements, as defined by adoption, successor guardianship, or return to natural parents. After controlling for several contextually important factors (i.e., average caseload, average age of children served, average number of team placements, team-member experience, leader experience, and team empowerment), leader political skill was found to account for a significant proportion of variance in team performance scores. Furthermore, even though the intermediate linkages were not actually measured in that study, Ahearn et al. argued that leader political skill inspired trust, confidence, and support in followers and also that politically skilled leaders effectively orchestrated and facilitated the interaction among case worker team members in ways that promoted team performance.

Discussion

Political skill is characterized as a comprehensive pattern of social competencies, which reflect cognitive, affective, and behavioral manifestations and which demonstrate effects on both self and others. Furthermore, political skill is characterized as being essential for effectiveness at work and in successfully dealing with the political realities of organizations. Political skill has established the boundaries of its construct domain, its construct validity, and initial empirical evidence for criterion-related validity. The conceptualization proposed in this article provides immediate directions for future research, which initially involve testing linkages in the model presented in Figure 3. In addition, there are some other issues in this area that should receive systematic examination in the future, as discussed in the next section.

Directions for Future Research

Psychometric issues. Future research needs to continue to use and validate the 18-item PSI, even though initial tests have produced sound results (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005;

Semadar et al., 2006). Also, future research needs to collect measures of political skill from another source, in addition to self-report. Semadar (2004) found that supervisor reports of employee political skill were significantly correlated with employee self-reports. Finally, more precision needs to be developed regarding the dimensions of political skill and how they should be expected to relate to organizational phenomena.

Social construct differentiation. We believe there are other construct validity challenges not only for political skill but also for the broad set of social or interpersonal constructs that have emerged in the literature over the years. Ferris, Perrewé, et al. (2002) discussed this proliferation of social constructs and the need for each to more precisely delineate their individual uniqueness and identity, at the same time acknowledging that there might be some degree of covariation with other constructs. We observe the ongoing development of constructs such as social intelligence, social skill, emotional intelligence, social competence, self-monitoring, and interpersonal acumen, to name but a few, and we see natural overlap among these.

Although each measure does probably maintain an individual identity, they also are likely to share some degree of common construct domain space. Ferris, Perrewé, et al. (2002) argued that many of these constructs shared in common a cognitive understanding or perceptiveness component in addition to a behavioral action component used to act on the former knowledge, and therefore all are reflective of a higher-order construct we might refer to as *social effectiveness*. Hall and Bernieri (2001) made similar arguments about the increase in social constructs, but used the term *interpersonal sensitivity* as the categorical or higher-order term.

The point here is that we need to empirically examine the relationships among some of these constructs. In the case of political skill, it is perhaps most critical to demonstrate that it is indeed different than social skill, primarily because the two sometimes are interchangeably used in discussion. Scholars in this area have argued that social skill and political skill are, in fact, different (Luthans et al., 1988; Peled, 2000).

Peled (2000) argued that social skill refers to "the ease and comfort of communication between leaders and their employees, peers, superiors, and clients" (p. 27). Alternatively, Peled suggested that political skill refers to "the manager's ability to manipulate his/her inter-personal relationships with employees, colleagues, clients, and supervisors to ensure the ultimate success of the project" (p. 27). Future research should empirically validate such claims and demonstrate that although perhaps related at a modest level, social skill and political skill largely are separate and unique constructs.

Interesting work on social skill by Riggio and colleagues (e.g., Riggio, 1986; Riggio & Riggio, 2001) has produced measurement instruments for social skill. Research should examine how such measures relate to political skill as measured by the PSI. Furthermore, it might make good sense to focus further construct differentiation at the underlying dimension level, whereby the dimensions of political skill reflect differentiation from social skill construct dimensions.

Practical Implications

Political skill involves contextually specific knowledge acquisition acquired through work experience, mentoring relationships, and other developmental experiences. Such contextually

specific knowledge is reflected in the types of personal learning discussed by Lankau and Scandura (2002), which, they argued, is transmitted through mentoring relationships. That is, in any work environment, there are numerous stimuli, cues, pieces of information, and tacit knowledge bits available for consumption. However, because individuals are finite information processors, and because all this contextual information is not equally important for the individuals' effectiveness, there needs to be a mechanism that helps to select out, and make salient, the important information and disregard the rest.

The guidance provided by experienced mentors can target and make salient particularly important pieces of contextual information and provide the experiential development that will build political skill in individuals. Therefore, we would expect political skill to increase somewhat over time as one gains additional experience and contextual knowledge, and so mentoring and developmental experiences like this should provide useful ways to increase and build political skill.

Conclusion

The political perspective on organizations has become an important one, and, as such, we need to be able to appropriately characterize the attitudes, behavior, and effectiveness of individuals working in such environments. Mintzberg (1983, 1985) viewed organizations as political arenas, and he suggested that survival and effectiveness in such contexts required political will and political skill. Pfeffer (1981) argued that there is an optimal match between individuals' political skill and their preference for political environments and that a priority for research should be to learn much more about the political skill construct. The present conceptualization of political skill in organizations is an attempt to respond to these earlier appeals, report on contemporary efforts to shed light on this construct, and present a model to guide future research in this important area.

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Biographical Notes

Gerald R. Ferris is the Francis Eppes Professor of Management and professor of psychology at Florida State University. He received a PhD in business administration from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He has research interests in the areas of social influence and effectiveness processes in organizations and the role of reputation in organizations.

Darren C. Treadway is an assistant professor of organization and human resources at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He received a PhD from Florida State University and an MBA from Virginia Tech. His research interests include political skill, diversity, age in the workplace, and social influence processes in organizations.

Pamela L. Perrewé is the Distinguished Research Professor and Jim Moran Professor of Management in the College of Business at Florida State University. She received a PhD in management from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. She has focused her research in the areas of job stress, coping, organizational politics, emotion, and personality.

Robyn L. Brouer is a PhD candidate in management at Florida State University. She has research interests in the areas of the leadership, social effectiveness, multiple dimensions of person-environment fit, work stress, and social influence processes, including impression management and politics.

Ceasar Douglas is associate professor of management at Florida State University. He received a PhD in management from the University of Mississippi, an MBA from Grand Valley State University, and a bachelor's degree in biology from Illinois Wesleyan University. His research interests are in the areas of work team development, leadership, leader political skill, and temporary work force issues.

Sean Lux is a visiting instructor in entrepreneurship at the University of South Florida and a PhD candidate at Florida State University. His research examines how actors shape social systems over time. He is examining how entrepreneurs develop performance-enabling social networks and how firms shape economic institutions.