Revisiting Political Skill: When and How it Matters for Employee Performance Across Different Work Contexts

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Abstract
Political skill has been increasingly recognized as a pivotal determinant of workplace effectiveness, yet its influence on job performance remains conceptually and empirically fragmented. While numerous empirical studies have examined the relationship between political skill and employee performance, there remains a lack of cumulative knowledge on when political skill is most beneficial and how it enhances various dimensions of job performance. To address this gap, this paper conducts a systematic narrative review to synthesize theoretical and empirical insights, offering a more holistic perspective on the role of political skill in workplace settings. Specifically, this study explores (1) the unidimensional direct influences of political skill on different aspects of employee performance, (2) its relevance across diverse occupational and organizational contexts, and (3) the distinct contributions of its sub-dimensions in shaping employee effectiveness. By identifying critical theoretical gaps and empirical inconsistencies, this paper outlines a forward-looking research agenda to refine the conceptualization of political skill and its practical significance in contemporary work environments.
Keywords: Political Skill Dimension, Employee Performance, Work Contexts, Work Setting

Introduction
Political skill is a crucial competency that helps individuals navigate complex social and organizational environments effectively. Employees with strong political skill remain calm and composed under pressure, managing stress by minimizing emotional reactivity and drawing on resilience (Manggor et al., 2025). Extensive research has also highlighted its significant role

in workplace success, particularly in enhancing employee performance. However, despite a growing body of literature, there remains a fragmented understanding of how and under what conditions political skill enhances job performance across various work settings. While existing conceptual and empirical studies offer valuable insights, several critical questions remain unanswered. A review of four major conceptual works including Bing et al. (2011), Munyon et al. (2015), Kimura (2015), and Maher et al. (2021) reveals significant gaps, particularly regarding the contextual and dimensional influences of political skill. Specifically, there is a pressing need to examine its situational relevance: when does political skill serve as a key driver of performance, and when might it be less essential or even ineffective?.

One of the earliest systematic investigations into political skill's impact on job performance was conducted by Bing et al. (2011), who provided a meta-analytical review confirming the positive relationship between political skill and both task and contextual performance. While this study established political skill as a key predictor of workplace success, it largely examined the construct as a single-dimensional factor, without exploring the unique contributions of its four dimensions which are social astuteness, networking ability, interpersonal influence, and apparent sincerity. Additionally, the study focused primarily on general effects, offering limited insights into the specific conditions under which political skill is more or less beneficial.

Building upon this, Munyon et al. (2015) extended the theoretical understanding of political skill by presenting a framework that explained its broader implications in organizational settings. Their study reinforced the importance of political skill as a workplace asset, yet it did not comprehensively differentiate its effects across diverse job roles, industries, or hierarchical structures. While the paper acknowledged that political skill operates differently depending on context, it did not provide a synthesized review of empirical findings to clarify how and when these variations occur.

Recognizing these conceptual gaps, Kimura (2015) conducted a narrative review, calling for a more nuanced exploration of the mechanisms, conditions, and contexts in which political skill is most beneficial. The study suggested that political skill's effectiveness is not universal and may be shaped by factors such as organizational culture, job demands, and industry specific norms. However, despite these theoretical propositions, empirical studies following Kimura's review have remained fragmented, preventing a cumulative understanding of political skill's role in varying workplace conditions.

Most recently, Maher et al. (2021) provided a comprehensive review of 40 years of political skill research, offering a meta-theoretical framework that integrated political will into discussions of workplace behavior. While their work advanced theoretical perspectives, its primary focus was not on job performance per se, but rather on the broader influence of political skill and political will in organizational settings. Moreover, their synthesis covered research up to 2020, leaving room for an updated review of more recent empirical studies and their implications for the modern workplace.

Drawing from these conceptual works, this study seeks to bridge the existing gaps by addressing three critical issues 1) Updating the literature by synthesizing empirical findings from 2020–2025, providing a more current understanding of political skill's impact on

employee performance. 2) Examining the role of political skill across different work contexts, including variations in hierarchical structures, cultural settings, and job environments 3) Investigating the distinct effects of political skill's dimensions to determine how each component uniquely contributes to employee performance.

While prior research has confirmed the positive relationship between political skill and employee performance, the lack of integration across studies has resulted in fragmented knowledge about its contextual importance and dimensional effects. By systematically reviewing recent empirical work, this study aims to refine our understanding of when and how political skill is most beneficial in contemporary organizational settings, ultimately offering clearer theoretical and practical insights for both researchers and practitioners.

Overview Of Political Skill
Mintzberg (1983) introduced the concept of political skill, defining it as the ability to exert influence through persuasion, manipulation, and negotiation. Ferris et al. (2005) later refined this definition, describing political skill as the capacity to accurately understand others in the workplace and leverage that understanding to influence their actions in ways that enhance personal or organizational objectives. While no universal consensus exists on a single definition of political skill, much of the contemporary literature aligns with the conceptualization proposed by Ferris et al. This definition was further expanded by Ferris et al. (2007), who framed political skill as a multidimensional social competency encompassing cognitive, affective, and behavioral components that shape both individual and interpersonal dynamics in organizational settings.

Political skill comprises four key dimensions: apparent sincerity, social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and networking ability (Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris et al., 2007). These dimensions represent a set of competencies that enable individuals to navigate diverse interests in a manner that fosters consistently positive evaluations of their tasks and performance by multiple assessors (Blickle et al., 2011). While each dimension is conceptually distinct, they are interrelated and collectively contribute to an individual's overall political skill. Apparent sincerity allows individuals to project authenticity, genuineness, and honesty, shaping how others perceive their behavioral intentions. Social astuteness involves keen observational skills and the ability to accurately interpret social cues, understand both oneself and others, and navigate social interactions effectively. Interpersonal influence refers to the capacity to exert a strong yet subtle and persuasive impact on others, demonstrating adaptability in communication and behavior to elicit desired responses in different situations. Finally, networking ability reflects an individual's proficiency in building and leveraging diverse social networks to access valuable resources essential for personal and organizational success.

The measurement of political skill has evolved over time, with the initial scale for each dimension developed by Ferris et al. (1999). Recognizing the need for a more comprehensive and psychometrically sound measure, Ferris et al. (2005) revised and expanded the scale into an 18-item instrument, now widely known as the Political Skill Inventory (PSI). This scale has since become the most frequently used measure of political skill in organizational research, offering a standardized approach to assessing an individual's ability to navigate workplace dynamics effectively.

The validity and reliability of the PSI have been widely supported through empirical studies. Research has confirmed its construct validity, demonstrating that the PSI accurately captures the multidimensional nature of political skill (Ferris et al., 2008). Additionally, studies have provided evidence of its criterion-related validity, showing that political skill, as measured by the PSI, is significantly associated with critical workplace outcomes such as job performance, career success, and leadership effectiveness (Lvina et al., 2012; Shi & Chen, 2012). The cross-cultural reliability of the PSI has also been examined, with findings suggesting that the scale retains its psychometric integrity across different cultural and organizational contexts, further strengthening its applicability in global workforce research (Lvina et al., 2012).

Despite the widespread acceptance of the PSI, some concerns have been raised regarding the measurement of apparent sincerity, one of its four dimensions. Ferris et al. (2008) pointed out that the apparent sincerity subscale consists of only three items, which raises concerns about its internal consistency and factorial stability. In psychometric research, subscales with a very small number of items often exhibit lower reliability, potentially affecting the overall robustness of the construct measurement. This has led to debates about whether apparent sincerity is truly a distinct dimension of political skill or whether it is better conceptualized as an outcome of the effective application of political skill. Ferris et al. (2008) argued that individuals who exhibit high levels of social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and networking ability naturally project an image of sincerity and authenticity, making apparent sincerity more of a perceptual consequence rather than a separate competency.

However, in this review, we continue to consider apparent sincerity as a distinct dimension of political skill. While debates persist regarding its conceptualization, existing empirical studies largely treat it as an integral component of political skill, reinforcing its relevance in organizational contexts. Retaining apparent sincerity as an independent dimension allows for a more comprehensive examination of how individuals strategically manage impressions and build trust in workplace interactions. Moreover, as political skill is inherently a social construct that involves both perception and influence, apparent sincerity remains a crucial element in determining the effectiveness of politically skilled individuals in shaping interpersonal dynamics and workplace relationships.

Given these concerns, scholars have called for further refinement of the PSI, particularly regarding the measurement of apparent sincerity. Some researchers have suggested expanding the subscale by incorporating additional items that capture the complexity of sincerity in workplace interactions. Others propose a reconceptualization of apparent sincerity as an emergent characteristic rather than an independent dimension. These ongoing discussions highlight the dynamic nature of political skill research and the need for continued empirical validation to ensure that measurement instruments remain both theoretically grounded and practically useful.

Methodology
This study employs a narrative review approach to synthesize and critically evaluate existing research on the effects of political skill on employee performance. A narrative review was chosen as it enables a comprehensive and integrative analysis of theoretical and empirical studies, providing a deeper understanding of how and when political skill influences different

aspects of employee performance across various work contexts. Unlike systematic reviews or meta-analyses, which rely on statistical aggregation, this approach allows for a qualitative synthesis of diverse research findings, highlighting theoretical advancements, methodological trends, and research gaps.

To ensure a rigorous and structured review, a systematic search strategy was implemented using multiple academic databases, including sourced from the EBSCOhost database, Google Scholar, Scopus, and WoS. Several key search terms, such as "political skill," "dimensions of political skill," "employee performance," "task performance," "contextual performance," and "work context," were used to retrieve relevant literature. The review focused exclusively on peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025 in English and Malay, encompassing conceptual papers, literature reviews, and empirical studies that examine the functional effects of political skill on employee performance. To maintain scholarly rigor, studies that focused solely on political behavior without a direct link to employee performance, team performance, as well as non-peer-reviewed sources such as conference papers, and dissertations, were excluded.

Following the selection of relevant articles, a literature synthesis was conducted to organize key findings across studies. The literature was categorized based on three primary themes: (1) the direct effects of political skill on different employee performance, (2) the role of political skill in various work contexts, such as hierarchical levels, industry sectors, and cultural settings; and (3) the contributions of different political skill dimension which are social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity in shaping employee performance. Given the diversity in study designs, measurement approaches, and conceptual frameworks within the political skill literature, a meta-analytical approach was not feasible. Instead, a qualitative synthesis was performed to identify patterns, theoretical developments, and research gaps in this domain.

To ensure the credibility and scholarly impact of the reviewed literature, a quality assessment was conducted based on journal ranking, citation impact, methodological rigor, and theoretical contribution. Priority was given to articles published in high-impact management, organizational behavior, and psychology journals to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings. Overall, based on the selected keywords, the initial search yielded approximately 215 results. However, after applying relevance and inclusion criteria, only 20 journal articles published between 2020 and 2025 were deemed suitable for this literature review.

Political skill at Workplace
Political skill has been widely studied in various organizational contexts, not only as a key determinant of workplace dynamics but also as a significant predictor of job performance. Existing research highlights that political skill influences employee performance in multiple ways, either as a direct antecedent or as a mediating or moderating factor in the relationship between other organizational variables and performance outcomes. Employees with high political skill are better able to navigate workplace complexities, manage interpersonal relationships effectively, and leverage social networks to enhance their productivity and career success. Moreover, the impact of political skill extends across diverse occupational and organizational settings, demonstrating its universal relevance in shaping employee

effectiveness. Each dimension of political skill which are social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity plays a distinct role in enhancing employee performance by enabling individuals to interpret social cues, adapt their behavior, and strategically influence others to achieve work-related goals. Given its critical role in employee performance, political skill is increasingly recognized as a valuable competency that contributes to both individual and organizational success. Each of these aspects will be further explored in the following subtopics, providing a more in-depth discussion on the specific ways political skill enhances employee performance.

The Unidimensional Impact of Political Skill on Employee Performance
To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of political skill in employee performance and ensure its practical relevance, it is crucial to categorize performance more precisely. Specifically, it is important to determine whether political skill directly enhances actual job performance such as task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) or whether its primary benefit lies in influencing subjective performance evaluations. This distinction is essential, as subjective performance ratings may not always reflect an employee's true contributions but rather the perceptions of supervisors, peers, or other evaluators. By examining these dimensions separately, this study aims to clarify whether political skill serves as a genuine driver of workplace effectiveness or merely enhances employees' ability to manage impressions and navigate organizational politics to secure favorable evaluations.

The direct relationship between political skill and job performance is well established in the literature. Meta-analyses conducted by Bing et al. (2011) and Munyon et al. (2015) provide strong evidence supporting this link, demonstrating that political skill positively influences both task and contextual performance. These findings align with Mintzberg's (1983) perspective, which characterizes organizations as inherently political environments where individuals must leverage political skill to succeed. Bing et al.'s meta-analysis further reinforces this notion by emphasizing that, while technical knowledge is essential for job execution, political skill plays a critical role in shaping career trajectories. Since technical expertise can be acquired through education and training, political skill often serves as a key differentiator in workplace success.

Recent studies highlight political skill as a key enabler of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) by helping employees navigate workplace challenges. Ain et al. (2022) found that politically skilled individuals mitigate knowledge hiding and foster extra-role behaviors by maintaining social resources, reducing exclusion, and preventing emotional exhaustion. Rather than retaliating, they use their social competence to strengthen relationships, promoting discretionary performance. De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia (2022) further demonstrated that PS helps employees sustain OCB under role ambiguity, particularly when they strongly identify with their organization. Employees with both high PS and organizational identification maintained OCB, while those lacking political skill struggled. However, Hung et al. (2022) found that political skill did not moderate the relationship between compulsory citizenship behavior and contextual performance, suggesting that forced OCB may override its benefits.

Expanding on its role in navigating workplace politics, Chang & Pak (2024) emphasize that PS moderates the impact of high-performance work systems (HPWS) on OCB, particularly OCB toward supervisors (OCBS). In politically charged environments, politically skilled employees excel by leveraging relationships and managing impressions, especially through OCBS. However, when HPWS is well-structured, PS becomes less necessary, as formal systems provide sufficient guidance. In contrast, in low-politics environments, HPWS benefits employees who do not rely on PS, reinforcing the idea that PS is most valuable where political dynamics shape career success. From a Conservation of Resources (COR) theory perspective, Kaur and Kang (2023) position political skill as a personal resource, enabling employees to manage workplace politics effectively, reducing knowledge hiding and preserving OCB.

On the other hand, Chen et al. (2025) emphasize that political skill enhances task performance by strengthening the impact of demand-ability fit the alignment between job demands and an employee's capabilities. Employees with high political skill can navigate workplace dynamics, secure resources, and build strategic relationships, enabling them to perform their tasks more effectively. Additionally, political skill helps translate strong task performance into higher promotability ratings, as politically skilled employees can influence key decision-makers and position themselves for career advancement. This underscores political skill as a crucial factor in maximizing both task performance and career progression.

Recent literature not only reinforces previous findings on the impact of political skill on employee performance but also offers new insights, particularly in sales environments. Munyon et al. (2021) highlight the role of political skill in shaping salesperson performance through social network quality. Their study extends prior research by revealing how political skill influences the structure and utility of social networks, enabling salespeople to cultivate stronger, more resourceful connections. These enhanced networks, in turn, improve access to market opportunities and foster long-term client relationships. Similarly, Good and Schwepker (2022) examine political skill's impact on salesperson performance, emphasizing its role in relationship-building and ethical conduct. Their findings indicate that politically skilled salespeople excel in customer-oriented selling, leading to improved sales performance in metrics such as market share and revenue generation. Additionally, political skill indirectly mitigates unethical sales behaviors by strengthening ethical decision-making and customer relationship management. Building on this, Good and Schwepker (2024) explore how political skill amplifies the benefits of empathy in sales performance. They find that politically skilled salespeople leverage emotional intelligence strategically, transforming empathy into a performance advantage. By reading social cues and navigating interactions effectively, these individuals use political skill to influence customer decisions, strengthen relationships, and ultimately drive business success.

Additionally, empirical studies continue to expand our understanding of the positive correlation between political skill and employee performance, particularly in relation to personality traits like Machiavellianism. Blickle et al. (2020) examined how political skill moderates the relationship between Machiavellianism (MACH) and both career role performance (CRP) and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). Their findings suggest that individuals high in Machiavellianism can strategically manipulate workplace dynamics to maintain a strong professional reputation—especially when they also possess high political skill. Among highly politically skilled employees, Machiavellianism was positively associated

with career role performance, indicating that political skill enables Machiavellians to cultivate a favorable image and advance in their careers. In contrast, Machiavellians with low political skill struggled to sustain their reputation over time, as their manipulative tendencies became more apparent. Notably, when political skill was high, career role performance remained strong regardless of Machiavellianism, reinforcing the idea that political skill serves as a key factor in sustaining workplace influence.

A separate study by Kückelhaus, Meurs, and Blickle (2024) further examined the interplay between Machiavellianism, political skill, personal reputation, and job performance through the lens of Socioanalytic theory. Their research found that Machiavellianism indirectly affects job performance, with political skill acting as a moderator and personal reputation as a mediator. Political skill functions as both a buffer and a mask—on one hand, it prevents Machiavellians from harming their workplace reputation by fostering self-control and curbing unethical behavior. On the other hand, it can also serve as a tool for manipulation, allowing Machiavellians to conceal self-serving motives while maintaining a favorable professional image. These findings underscore the dual nature of political skill, highlighting its role in shaping workplace perceptions and career success.

Recent studies further highlight the critical influence of political skill on perceived job performance. Kwon (2020) identified political skill as a key predictor of performance ratings, emphasizing its influence on how employees are evaluated in the workplace. Expanding on this, Kranefeld and Blickle (2022) found that political skill enhances the positive effects of boldness on contextual, task, and adaptive performance. While boldness—marked by confidence and risk-taking—contributes to workplace effectiveness, its impact is significantly amplified when paired with political skill. Politically skilled employees use their boldness to build relationships, influence others, and navigate workplace dynamics, making them not only more effective but also more influential in their organizations. This highlights the strategic value of political skill in helping individuals maximize their strengths and gain recognition as high performers.

Similarly, Chong et al. (2023) demonstrated that political skill serves as a crucial moderator in the relationship between non-financial performance measures (NFPMs) and job performance. Their findings suggest that politically skilled employees are better able to interpret and strategically leverage performance feedback, aligning their contributions with organizational expectations. In politically complex environments where subjective biases can affect evaluations, political skill enables individuals to manage relationships and influence key decision-makers, ensuring their performance is accurately recognized. Additionally, political skill enhances self-presentation, allowing employees to build influential networks and shape how their performance is perceived. Rather than being passively evaluated based on NFPMs alone, politically skilled individuals actively manage their reputations, translating performance feedback into meaningful career advantages.

Another compelling perspective on performance suggests that political skill enhances employees' ability to become proficient in their roles. Liu et al. (2022) found that politically skilled newcomers are more likely to be entrusted with challenging assignments by their mentors. While these tasks may be demanding, they provide valuable opportunities to develop work-related knowledge and competencies. This accelerated learning process

enables politically skilled employees to acquire and master essential job-related skills more efficiently, ultimately enhancing their performance proficiency. Understanding political skill's role in performance proficiency adds to the broader discussion of its influence on various dimensions of employee performance, demonstrating that beyond influencing subjective evaluations, it also drives tangible improvements in task execution and workplace effectiveness.

Contextual Contingencies of Political Skill

Most research on political skill in the workplace has taken a variable-oriented approach, focusing on measurement properties and relationships between constructs. While valuable, this approach assumes homogeneity among individuals, overlooking variations in how political skill operates across different contexts. A person-oriented approach, by contrast, recognizes individual differences and explores distinct profiles of political skill effectiveness.

Recent studies have highlighted key moderators that shape the impact of political skill on performance. Kwon (2020) found that social similarity between employees and supervisors strengthened the relationship between political skill and performance ratings. Specifically, social astuteness (understanding the supervisor's needs), interpersonal influence (building rapport), and networking ability (leveraging connections) were more effective when employees and supervisors shared common backgrounds, such as birthplace, education, religion, and ethnicity. Similarly, Frieder, Ellen III, and Kapoutsis (2023) demonstrated that political will and perceptions of organizational politics moderated the effectiveness of political skill. Political skill enhanced task and contextual performance only when both political will and organizational politics were high, whereas in less politically charged environments, its impact was minimal.

Beyond moderation effects, researchers have explored the role of political skill in different workplace settings. Liu et al. (2022) emphasized its importance in newcomer socialization and skill acquisition, showing that politically skilled employees received more challenging assignments from mentors, accelerating their proficiency in job-related competencies. In a more specialized context, Ohlsson et al. (2022) investigated political skill in military staff operations, finding that networking ability was particularly critical for both individual effectiveness and team coordination in international and collaborative environments.

Expanding beyond traditional workplace applications, Saleem et al. (2024) explored the link between political skill and entrepreneurial intentions. Their study found that individuals with strong political skill and a positive reputation were more likely to pursue entrepreneurship, particularly in emerging economies with limited institutional support. In these uncertain environments, political skill became a crucial asset for navigating challenges, building strategic networks, and seizing opportunities outside conventional career paths.

Tiwari, Jain, and Anis (2021) examined how political skill varies across different industry sectors, revealing significant differences in its dimensions. Employees in the automobile and telecom sectors exhibited the highest levels of social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity compared to those in education, finance, IT, and FMCG. Specifically, social astuteness was most pronounced in the

automobile and telecom sectors, while interpersonal influence was strongest among telecom employees. Similarly, networking ability was more prevalent in the automobile and telecom sectors, and apparent sincerity was also higher in these industries compared to finance and IT. These findings suggest that industry context plays a crucial role in shaping employees' political skill. Sectors characterized by high competition, dynamic work environments, and strong relationship-based interactions—such as automobile and telecom—appear to encourage the development of political skill. In contrast, employees in structured or less relationship-driven industries, such as education and finance, may rely less on these capabilities. This highlights the importance of considering industry-specific factors when examining political skill and its impact on workplace effectiveness.

Distinct Contributions of Political Skill Dimensions
Political skill plays a crucial role in shaping employee performance, with different dimensions influencing various aspects of workplace success. Social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity are key facets that impact both job performance and career progression.

Social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and networking ability consistently emerge as strong predictors of employee performance. Munyon et al. (2021) found that these dimensions enhance a salesperson's ability to build and leverage social networks, ultimately improving sales outcomes. Similarly, Kwon (2020) highlighted their positive association with higher performance ratings, particularly when employees shared greater social similarity with their supervisors. Understanding a supervisor's needs (social astuteness), building strong rapport (interpersonal influence), and leveraging professional connections (networking ability) significantly enhance an employee's ability to perform and advance.

On the other hand, apparent sincerity has a more nuanced impact. While it may not directly contribute to task-related competencies (Kwon, 2020), Blickle et al. (2020) found that it plays a strategic role in career role performance. Specifically, apparent sincerity exhibited a curvilinear relationship, allowing Machiavellian individuals to maintain a strong career reputation by projecting trustworthiness, even when engaging in manipulative behaviors. This suggests that in certain contexts, apparent sincerity can be a powerful tool for influence and career advancement.

Limitations and Recommendations
A significant limitation of this literature review is that only journals meeting specific selection criteria were considered. The review focused exclusively on studies published between 2020 and 2025 to examine the development of research within this period. Additionally, keyword selection played a crucial role in journal inclusion, with only studies using terms such as "political skill," "dimensions of political skill," "task performance," and "contextual performance" being selected to ensure alignment with the review's objectives. Another key criterion was that only indexed journals were included in the analysis. Therefore, to provide a more comprehensive discussion of the role of political skill within the broader political literature, future research should consider expanding the timeframe for journal selection by including earlier publications. Moreover, incorporating additional sources such as books, conference proceedings, and other forms of scholarly publications could further enrich the analysis and provide a more holistic perspective.

Understanding these dynamics provides valuable insights for the broader literature on political skill, emphasizing its role as a critical competency in navigating workplace challenges. Rather than being a static trait, political skill is a flexible capability that can be developed to enhance employee effectiveness across various organizational contexts. However, existing research often assumes that political skill universally leads to positive outcomes, overlooking potential boundary conditions and ethical concerns. Factors such as organizational constraints, cultural variations, and industry-specific demands may shape how political skill influences workplace behavior. Future research should further examine these contextual moderators, ethical implications, and long-term effects to provide a more comprehensive understanding of political skill's role in organizational settings.

Conclusion

This study enhances existing knowledge on political skill by critically examining its conceptualization as both a unidimensional and multidimensional construct, shedding light on its distinct mechanisms in shaping various aspects of employee performance. While political skill has traditionally been treated as a broad, singular competency that enhances job effectiveness, this study refines the theoretical discourse by differentiating its core dimensions which are social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity and elucidating their unique contributions to workplace outcomes. By doing so, this research addresses theoretical ambiguities surrounding whether political skill primarily drives genuine performance improvements or serves as an impression management tool that influences subjective evaluations.

From a unidimensional perspective, political skill has been widely recognized as a critical determinant of workplace success, with research consistently affirming its positive association with task performance, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and career advancement. However, this broad conceptualization often overlooks the nuanced ways in which individual dimensions of political skill exert distinct influences across various performance domains. By adopting a multidimensional lens, this study advances theoretical clarity by demonstrating that while social astuteness, networking ability, and interpersonal influence function as direct enablers of task-related competencies and resource acquisition, apparent sincerity plays a more strategic role in shaping reputational outcomes. This refined perspective integrates insights from social capital theory, leader-member exchange (LMX) theory, and impression management theory, highlighting how political skill operates both as an adaptive workplace competency and as a mechanism for social positioning and influence.

Additionally, this study enriches theoretical frameworks by contextualizing the effectiveness of political skill within different workplace environments. The integration of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory suggests that political skill acts as a psychological resource that enables employees to navigate workplace stress, secure social support, and sustain performance under challenging conditions. Meanwhile, Socioanalytic theory provides a complementary perspective, positioning political skill as a strategic asset for reputation management, particularly in politically charged or hierarchical settings. By synthesizing these perspectives, this study deepens our understanding of how political skill functions differently depending on contextual contingencies, such as role ambiguity, power dynamics, and industry-specific demands.

Furthermore, this research challenges the assumption that all dimensions of political skill contribute uniformly to performance outcomes by emphasizing boundary conditions that determine when and how political skill is beneficial—or potentially detrimental. While social astuteness, networking ability, and interpersonal influence generally enhance job performance and career progression, apparent sincerity exhibits a curvilinear relationship with career success, particularly when leveraged for impression management and Machiavellian self-presentation. This insight refines existing discussions on ethical leadership, organizational justice, and the dual nature of political skill as both a constructive and opportunistic tool.

By bridging the gap between unidimensional and multidimensional perspectives, this study enhances theoretical clarity on the role of political skill in organizational settings. It highlights key performance mechanisms, ethical implications, and career trajectories associated with political skill, laying a foundation for future empirical research on its long-term impact. These insights contribute to a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of political skill, providing scholars and practitioners with a refined framework for assessing its role in employee effectiveness, workplace dynamics, and leadership development.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, this study provides critical insights into the context dependent nature of political skill, emphasizing that its effectiveness varies across different occupational, organizational, and cultural settings. Political skill is not a universally beneficial competency; rather, its impact is shaped by job roles, industry demands, organizational culture, and workplace dynamics. While some work environments reward social astuteness, networking ability, and interpersonal influence, others prioritize technical expertise, procedural knowledge, or formal authority. Recognizing these contextual variations is crucial for understanding when and how political skill enhances workplace effectiveness and career success.

A key contextual factor influencing the utility of political skill is the nature of workplace relationships. In organizations where employees and supervisors share common social backgrounds such as educational experiences, cultural values, or professional trajectoriespolitical skill becomes a powerful enabler of trust, rapport, and influence. In contrast, in workplaces with greater social diversity or hierarchical rigidity, political skill may require greater adaptability to bridge differences and establish credibility. Similarly, in highly political work environments, employees with strong political skill can navigate power structures effectively, whereas in more structured, rule-based organizations, its influence may be less pronounced.

Beyond organizational culture, industry-specific demands further shape the relevance of political skill. In competitive and fast-paced sectors, such as sales, consulting, and telecommunications, success is often contingent on networking ability, persuasion, and adaptability making political skill a valuable asset. Conversely, in bureaucratic industries such as finance, healthcare, or academia, formal expertise and adherence to hierarchical norms may hold greater weight than political skill, except in areas requiring leadership or stakeholder management. These industry-specific differences highlight the need for

organizations to design leadership development and talent management programs that align with their sector's unique realities.

Moreover, political skill is particularly critical in uncertain or resource-constrained environments, such as entrepreneurship, international business, and public sector management. In these settings, the ability to form alliances, gain stakeholder support, and maneuver through complex social landscapes can determine organizational and career success. Political skill, therefore, extends beyond corporate settings; it is a strategic advantage that enables individuals to navigate dynamic and unpredictable career trajectories, from executive leadership roles to independent ventures.

Understanding the contextual nature of political skill has significant implications for organizational policies, leadership development, and performance evaluations. Organizations should avoid treating political skill as a one-size-fits-all capability and instead consider its situational applications. By adopting a context-specific approach, organizations can identify, nurture, and strategically apply political skill where it is most beneficial, ensuring that employees are equipped to thrive in their respective work environments.

Additionally, this study challenges the assumption that all dimensions of political skill contribute equally to workplace success. In client-facing roles and collaborative work environments, social astuteness, networking ability, and interpersonal influence play a dominant role in business success and career progression. However, in hierarchical or politically charged organizations, apparent sincerity may be a more valuable asset, allowing employees to maintain influence and reputation, even in the absence of strong task performance. Furthermore, cultural factors and workplace power dynamics moderate the effectiveness of political skill, reinforcing the importance of power distance and social alignment in shaping its impact.

By differentiating the dimensions of political skill and examining its contextual applications, this study enhances theories related to performance evaluation, social capital, and political behavior in organizations. The insights generated not only refine theoretical discussions but also provide a foundation for future empirical research, particularly in exploring longitudinal effects, ethical implications, and industry specific applications of political skill. Ultimately, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of political skill, highlighting its role as both an adaptive workplace competency and a strategic career enabler across diverse professional landscapes.

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