



THE EFFECT OF POLITICAL SKILL ON EMPLOYEES' CAREER SUCCESS

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ABSTRACT

The present study tried to explore the relationship of political skill with six career-related dimensions (Income, Career related Satisfaction, Growth Opportunity, Recognition, Social Status, Reputation). The data was obtained from a sample of 350 middle level managers working in an Iron and Steel company (Godavari, Power and Ispat Limited) Chattisgarh, Raipur. The findings suggest that all the dimensions of political skill are significantly related with five of the entire six career related outcomes. Also, among all the dimensions of political skill "networking ability" was found dominantly yielding the various career related factors. The current research provides evidence that Zanzi and O'Neill's (2001) classification of political tactics, based on their social desirability, can predict career success. Such a classification is both useful and necessary for understanding the social interactions at the workplace. Understanding the social dynamics within the workplace can greatly enhance career attainment, since the eradication of politics is both infeasible and perhaps undesired given its positive aspect. The authors have discussed theoretical and practical implications of the study.

KEYWORDS: Political Skill, Income, Career Satisfaction, Growth Opportunity, Recognition, Social Status, Reputation.

INTRODUCTION

Politics was introduced into the literature of management around three decades ago (e.g. Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Mayes & Allen, 1977; Mintzberg, 1983). The significance of organisational politics for the private as well as for the public sector has been validated by a sizeable amount of research across the globe concerning its correlates and outcomes (Ferris & Treadway, 2012; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, 2006). Within recent years, research on organizational politics at work has primarily focused on the construct of political skill (e.g. Blickle, John, Ferris, Momm, Liu, Haag, Meyer, Weber, & Oerder, 2012a; Gentry, Gilmore, Shuffler, & Leslie, 2012; Silvester, 2008; Ferris, Treadway, 2012). Defining briefly, political skill can be conceptualized as "a comprehensive pattern of social competencies, with cognitive, affective, and behavioral manifestations" (Ferris, Treadway, Perrewé, Brouer, Douglas, & Lux, 2007). Examples of such manifestations summarized by political skill are networking with others, influencing others, or paying close attention to others' (non)verbal behavior (Ferris, Treadway, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, Kacmar, Douglas, & Frink, 2005).

Taking into consideration, the sponsored-mobility model of career success (Turner, 1960), employee competency and potential are of paramount importance in career growth. Those employees who are able to create early favorable impressions on their supervisors receive more attention, greater career sponsorship, and more favorable treatment in the organization, which puts them on a fast track of career growth leading to future career success (Cooper, Graham, & Dyke, 1993; Rosenbaum, 1984; Wayne, Liden, Graf, &

Ferris, 1997). The study examines whether political tactics is helpful to the formation of such favorable impressions and, thereby, to advantageous career outcomes.

RESEARCH GAP

Very few studies have examined the personal factors of political skill (i.e., social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity), and their relationships with employees' career success. Numerous empirical studies conducted have looked at the antecedents of the individual dimensions of political skill and not the outcomes. Owing to the extant research in this area, the present study focuses on the association of political tactics and employees' career success.

CURRENT THEORIZING ON THE RELATION BETWEEN POLITICAL SKILL AND EMPLOYEES' CAREER SUCCESS

Researchers have been trying to considerably explore the political skill construct since 10 years, and it has been concluded that it affects employees career success in a positive manner. There has been studies which investigated political skill's predictability of career success (Blickle, Oerder, & Summers, 2010; Blickle, Schneider, Liu, & Ferris, in press; Wei, Liu, Chen, & Wu, 2010).

The present study focuses on six career dimensions namely Income, Growth Opportunity, Career Satisfaction, Recognition, Social Status, and Reputation. Studies have investigated that politically skilled individuals also may get involved in Organizational Citizenship Behavior as a means

to achieve recognition (Liu et al., 2007). Also scholars have argued that political skill serve as an important antecedent of personal reputation (Ferris et al., 2003; Zinko, Ferris, Blass, & Laird, 2007).

When consequences of political skill are studied, they have always been examined as objective career success indicators. In examining career-related outcomes, network building, social skills, and influence on others predicted career satisfaction. Blickle et al. (2009b) also investigated the relationship between mentoring and networking ability, specifically investigating self-initiated mentoring, networking ability, and mentoring received. Further, career satisfaction was related to networking ability. Taken together, these studies conclude that mentoring is an important predictor of networking ability and that networking ability predicts objective career success, at least in early careers. Also, alliances, coalitions, and networking ability have been argued to be related to the success of entrepreneurs (e.g., Baron & Markman, 2000).

Finally, Blickle, Oerder et al. (2010) examined the political skill of German work ambassadors and its predictability of their career success. This study measured these works ambassadors political skill and concluded that it significantly contributed to their career success (i.e., where career success was assessed based on success in elections), when sex, age, and union membership are controlled.

The construct of career success has always been heavily explored for years and found to be affected by traditional factors, for instance job-related abilities and one's performance record, and also by networking abilities, political tactics, and social skill competencies (Ng et al., 2005). It seems pertinent, then, to investigate the role political skill play in career success and satisfaction. When perceived from the perspective of organizational politics, careers can be termed as political campaigns (Inkson, 2004), involving contact hunting (Granovetter, 1974), networking (Treadway, Breland, Adams, Duke, & Williams, 2010), self-promotion (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003), impression management (Bolino & Turnley, 2003), and use of influence tactics (Judge & Bretz, 1994). Therefore, career success rely significantly on individual expertise, such as political skill (Blickle, Oerder, & Summers, 2010), that make possible the effective management and projection of positive images across various work environments, especially for images that influence the assessment of performance and career potential. Furthermore, because politically skilled individuals are able to more successfully acquire their desired career goals, they are more likely to be satisfied with their careers.

Five studies investigated political skill's predictability of promotability ratings (Gentry, Gilmore, Porter, & Leslie, in press), occupational choice (Kaplan, 2008), and career success (Blickle, Oerder, & Summers, 2010; Blickle, Schneider, Liu, & Ferris, in press; Wei, Liu, Chen, & Wu, 2010). Gentry et al. attempted to address limitations in prior research by examining the association between political skill and Promotability, and whether such relationship varied as a function of which rater source was evaluating Promotability. Kaplan (2008) investigated the extent to which political skill would be related

to career decisions and occupational choices. He found that political skill tends to influence the pursuit of jobs that fall within the enterprising and social occupational types. Blickle, Schneider et al. (in press) investigated theoretical arguments suggesting that career success is predicted by political skill, and that this relationship operates through (i.e., is mediated by) employees' reputation at work. Wei et al. (2010) examined the role of political skill in the supervisor-subordinate relationship dynamics contributing to career prospects, using multiple data sources in Chinese firms. A total of 343 employees, their 343 direct supervisors, and 662 peers completed surveys to test a model concluding that subordinates use their political skill in order to influence their *guanxi* with their supervisors, which ultimately contributes to greater career prospects and development.

Also, a meta-analysis (cf. Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005) concludes that political expertise and social capital (i.e., quantity or quality of accumulated contacts) can act as dominant predictors of career success. Quite recently, scholars have debated on the role of political skill in the gender and career success relationship (Perrewe' and Nelson, 2004).

METHOD

Sample: The participants (N=350) for the present study were selected from an Iron and Steel Industry i.e Godavari, Power and Ispat Ltd Raipur, Chattisgarh.

Tools of Measurement

Following psychometric tools were employed in the investigation

Political Skill Inventory (PSI) Ferris, Treadway, kolodinsky & Hochwarters' 2005

This seven point likert scale was used to assess political skill and its four dimensions, including social astuteness (five items), interpersonal influence (four items), networking ability (six items), and apparent sincerity (three items). The reliability index for each of the four dimensions were 0.85 for social astuteness, 0.88 for interpersonal influence, 0.87 for networking ability and 0.87 for apparent sincerity respectively.

Career Success

The scale developed by Miles and Huberman's (1994) was used to measure six dimensions of career success namely income, career satisfaction, growth, reputation, recognition and social status. The reliability index of the scale is 0.73.

RESULTS

The obtained data were analyzed using suitable statistics to analyze the relationship of employees' political skill and employees' career success. The obtained results are depicted in following tables (1& 2).

To examine the relationship of career success with political skill coefficients of correlation was analyzed which is displayed in Table 1. The results indicate that overall employees' career success score as well as all the dimensions

of career success except income were significantly and positively related to total as well as dimension wise score on political skill. ‘Income’ dimension of career success correlated positively only to ‘networking ability’. The study also investigated the individual dimensions of political skill in the prediction of employees’ career success, and found that interpersonal influence was the most dominant

dimension of political skill (Table 2). Although apparent sincerity and networking ability were also found to be significant predictors of employees’ career success, they failed to account for significant variance in employees’ career success beyond interpersonal influence. Furthermore, social astuteness did not prove to be a significant predictor in explaining employees’ career success.

Table 1: Correlation of Various Dimensions of Career Success with Various Dimensions of Employees Political Skill

Variables	Career Success Dimensions					
	Income	Career Satisfaction	Growth Opportunity	Recognition	Social Status	Reputation
Networking ability	.188*	.176**	.209**	0.213**	.297**	.320**
Interpersonal Influence	-.008	.175**	.346**	0.376**	.287**	.427**
Social Astuteness	.007	.149**	.210**	.262**	.297**	.368**
Apparent Sincerity	.041	.179**	.230**	.314**	.318**	.376**

r between overall political skill and career success=.446**
 **p<.01

Table 2: Result of Step Wise Regression Analysis using Dimensions of Political Skill as Predictor Variables and Career Success as Criterion

	R	R square	R square change	F change	Sig of F change	Beta	T	Significance
Interpersonal Influence	.387 ^a	.149	.149	61.486	.000	.387	7.841	.000
Apparent Sincerity	.427 ^b	.182	.033	14.017	.000	.205	3.744	.000
Networking Ability	.455 ^c	.207	.025	11.054	.001	.178	3.325	.001

Dependent variable: Career success

DISCUSSION

Individuals choose their course of action from a vast range of political tactics to attain career goals. The present study provided support to this notion. First, the use of political skill positively predicted the components of career success, such as income, career satisfaction, growth, social status, recognition and reputation. As such, career attainment is a political process. This is of particular importance for career studies since it is in line with the concept of protean career which underlines the active role of individuals in directing their careers (Baruch & Bozionelos 2010). Ferris et al. (2007) also concluded that politically skilled employees’ would be more successful and promotable in organizations because they are the ones who are socially active, possess interpersonal influence on others, are able to network well, and appear quite sincere. Hence, they comprehend and control the work environment, perceive, analyze, and react to environmental stimuli better than those who are less politically skilled.

Interpersonal Influence came out to be the most explanatory dimension of political skill in predicting career success. This finding is congruent with those of past studies (Pfeffer, 1992). The politically skilled are characterized by a capability to subtly influence those around them. They have an effective communication style that puts others at ease. This equips the politically skilled with the facility to act as chameleons, changing and adapting to the environment in ways that provoke desired responses from others. Pfeffer (1992) termed this “flexibility” and saw it as important to achieving one’s goals of career success effectively.

Apparent sincerity came out to be the second dominant predictor of career success. Individuals who are politically skilled appear being honest and sincere in their words and actions. This is crucial to the success of influence, helping the politically skilled to mask any hidden motives exist. Because the politically skilled are not seen as manipulative or coercive, their influence behavior is likely to be more successful (Jones, 1990).

Networking ability came to be the third significant predictor of employee's career success. According to literature even, the politically skilled know how to leverage their networks by ensuring that they are connected to influential others and that they are in a position to receive and generate opportunities (Pfeffer, 1992). Moreover, Blickle et al. (2009a), in their longitudinal study proved that networking ability predicted career satisfaction, hierarchical position, and income. Only when employees are strong with networking ability, are they able to navigate the political environment at workplace thereby optimizing resources and power, can exercise influence, and are able to gain personal goals of career success effectively.

Social Astuteness, a component of political skill, failed to significantly predict employee career success. This is consistent with the past findings of Pfeffer. He named this quality as "sensitivity to others," and he debated, it is this characteristic to identify with others that is actually critical in obtaining things for oneself" (1992: 173). It appears that when "sensitivity to others" is high, individuals' political behavior is difficult to be exercised in more pronounced ways, which potentially hinders career success.

IMPLICATIONS

The current research provides evidence that Zanzi and O'Neill's (2001) classification of political tactics, based on their social desirability, can predict career success. Such a classification is both useful and necessary for understanding the social interactions at the workplace. Political behavior is endemic in organizational settings and perhaps necessary for promoting or safeguarding career objectives. However, the use of sanctioned and non-sanctioned political tactics will vary according to contextual cues. This provides support to Ferris et al. (2000) who suggested that when individuals perceive their organizational environment as political, they will tend to behave politically. All these positive or negative contextual cues can delineate individuals' behavioral patterns since they denote which course of action has the largest possibility of leading to the desired output. This research has two important implications for professionals in an organization. Understanding social dynamics within workplace can greatly enhance career attainment, since the eradication of politics is both infeasible and perhaps undesired given its positive aspects (Hochwarter et al. 2003a). Therefore, human resource professionals should enhance the organization's policies to reinforce supportive signals to the employees that translate into positive in-role and extra-role behaviors. Such signals trigger reciprocal reactions that lead to integrative conflict resolutions and a fair reward allocation. In addition, organizations should bolster human resource practices that increase teambuilding and lead to trust and cooperation among employees. Such practices can reduce the pervasiveness of politics in the workplace thus ameliorating their disruptive effects. The influence of power and politics in shaping organizational practices on a global and local level has been relevant to the Human Resource Management literature.

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