

## **Fit of Political Skill to the Work Context: A Two-Study Investigation**

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A two-study investigation was designed to examine the role of job type (i.e. fit of political skill to work context) as a contextual moderator of the political skill–job performance relationship. Specifically, it was hypothesised that political skill operates most effectively in enterprising job contexts, and thus is most predictive of job performance in such contexts, but political skill would demonstrate no relationship with job performance in job contexts that did not emphasise interpersonal interaction and effectiveness. In Study 1, enterprising job demands interacted with political skill to affect job performance. That is, political skill positively and significantly predicted job performance in enterprising job contexts, as hypothesised. Study 2 selected one specific job context (i.e. insurance sales) high in enterprising job demands, and hypothesised that political skill would significantly predict objective measures of insurance sales (i.e. sales volume, performance-based income, performance-based commission rate, and performance-based status). The results demonstrated significant predictive effects of political skill (i.e. beyond age, sex, education level, tenure on the job, and experience in sales) on all four measures of sales performance.

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Contributions and implications of this research, strengths and limitations, and directions for future study are discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

Political skill is a recently developed interpersonal competency construct, which is defined as “the ability to effectively understand others at work and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and/or organizational objectives” (Ferris, Treadway, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, Kacmar, Douglas, & Frink, 2005, p. 127). Furthermore, political skill has been argued to predict job performance, and considerable empirical evidence to date has supported such arguments (e.g. Blickle, Ferris, Munyon, Momm, Zettler, Schneider, & Buckley, 2011a; Ferris, Treadway, Perrewé, Brouer, Douglas, & Lux, 2007).

The implicit assumption regarding political skill’s predictive effectiveness has been that it transcends specific contexts or situations, and predicts well across situations (e.g. types of jobs, organisations, etc.). However, nearly a decade ago, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, Blass, Kolodinsky, and Treadway (2002) argued that future research on political skill needed to consider the importance of context, and investigate the potential boundaries (i.e. moderators) of political skill’s predictability.

Recent appeals have been made to include context in organisational research, because it can be the source of both opportunities and constraints, which can influence perceptions and interpretations of workplace phenomena (Johns, 2001, 2006; Rousseau & Fried, 2001). However, only limited research has considered the social context when assessing the predictive ability of political skill on job performance. In one recent investigation, Kapoutsis, Papalexandris, Nikolopoulos, Hochwarter, and Ferris (2011) examined the influence of organisational politics perceptions, as a feature of the social context (Ferris & Hochwarter, 2011), on political skill–job performance relationships. In two cross-national studies (i.e. the United States and Greece), the hypothesis was developed and tested that the job performance of individuals high in political skill would increase in less political contexts, and be essentially unaffected in environments characterised by higher politics.

The results of the Kapoutsis et al. (2011) study provided support for the hypothesis, and confirmed the findings reported by Andrews, Kacmar, and Harris (2009), who studied justice as a contextual moderator, that the relationships between political skill and job performance are situation or context specific. Both of these studies suggested that future research should continue to investigate the potential boundary conditions that can exercise meaningful influence on political skill’s ability to predict performance and other relevant individual outcomes. One additional study, by Blickle, Kramer, Zettler, Momm, Summers, Munyon, and Ferris (2009), sought to investigate the

predictive effectiveness boundaries of political skill by examining occupational type as a moderator.

Blickle et al. (2009) used Holland's (1973, 1997) theory of vocational personalities and work environments, which generally is considered one of the most influential occupational taxonomies in vocational psychology (e.g. McDaniel & Snell, 1999). Personal and environmental factors (i.e. job demands) are predicted to interactively influence work outcomes. The essence of Holland's (1973) theory is that vocational performance is optimised by matching an individual's personal characteristics with the situational demands of the job. Fundamental to Holland's theory is the notion that individuals and work environments can be meaningfully categorised into six types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Conventional, and Enterprising. The job of a salesperson is found in the Enterprising classification.

Enterprising job demands are characterised by tasks that place a premium on verbal facility used to direct or persuade other people. These contexts typically require extensive talking and listening, and the ability to relate to a wide range of individuals across a variety of situations. Similarly, the ability to perceive the motives of others in order to lead and persuade is critical (Holland, 1973). Enterprising environments are full of uncertainty and ambiguity, placing an emphasis on interpersonal competency (Holland, 1976). Blickle et al. (2009) found empirical evidence that Holland's (1973) Enterprising job demands category moderated the relationship between political skill and job performance, demonstrating stronger predictability by political skill under high Enterprising job demands. However, this study used neither objective performance outcomes nor supervisory ratings of job performance, but instead relied on self-assessments of performance. In addition, it employed a cross-sectional design.

In order to adequately address the limitations of prior research in this neglected area of inquiry, Person–Environment (P–E) fit is proposed as a contextual boundary condition capable of altering political skill's predictability of job performance in response to suggestions made by scholars in political skill (e.g. Kapoutsis et al., 2011), and those in the P–E fit area (Edwards, 2008; Savickas, 2000). More specifically, this two-study investigation examined the moderating effects of the fit of political skill to the job demands context on the relationships between political skill and job performance.

The present investigation contributes to the body of existing literature in several ways. First, the political skill competency set has been argued to exercise influence on both supervisor subjective perceptions of employee job performance, and also to result in real differences in objective job performance (e.g. Ferris et al., 2007). In the present investigation, both effects are examined, which is important in order to clarify whether political skill exerts

influence only on perceptual assessments of job performance by supervisors (Luthans, 1988), or if it also demonstrates effects on objective job performance criteria.

Second, although some previous research has focused on the political skill–job performance relationship in Enterprising work contexts concurrently, Study 2 focuses on the prediction of objective archival performance outcome data using a broad range of outcomes. Thus, whereas previous research (i.e. Blickle et al., 2009) had focused on the subjective fit of work context and political skill, Study 1 of this investigation seeks constructive replication of those results, and Study 2 focuses on the objective fit of political skill and work context.

## THEORY, RESEARCH REVIEW, AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

### Enterprising Job Demands

Different jobs require different types of competencies to be successful. Interactional psychology (e.g. Endler & Magnusson, 1976; Lewin, 1951; Pervin, 1978; Schneider, 1983) contends that individual characteristics and situational characteristics interact with each other in determining individual behaviors. When there is congruence between the situation's cues, rewards, opportunities, and people's cognitions, abilities, and motivation, individuals thrive at the workplace (Terborg, 1981). Trait Activation Theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003) goes further to suggest that one's competencies only become salient when the environment enables the use of these competencies.

Based on interactional psychology, Holland (1976), in his framework for occupational classification, argued that each of the six occupational environments attracts or is sought after by a particular set of individuals who possess certain types of dominant personality traits. According to Holland (1976, 1985), enterprising job demands are characterised by ambiguous work environments, multiple job roles, and tasks that place a premium on directing or persuading people.

These contexts typically involve extensive interpersonal interactions, and thus require the ability to relate to a wide range of individuals across a variety of situations, and the ability to be perceptive of others' needs and motives. Enterprising work environments encourage and reward people to manipulate others to attain organisational or personal goals, and to view the world in terms of money, power, status, and responsibility. Occupations with high enterprising demands are buyer, managerial, sales, or supervisory jobs (Holland, 1985). Based on the logic of interactional psychology, and given the above characteristics of enterprising job demands, it is reasonable to expect that individuals' social competencies will be more likely to manifest

themselves in the enterprising job contexts to leverage performance in such jobs.

## Political Skill and Fit with the Job Context

*Overview of Political Skill.* Political skill combines social understanding with the ability to adjust behavior to the demands of the situation in ways that inspire trust, confidence, and support, appear genuine, and effectively influence others (Ferris et al., 2005, 2007). Political skill has been shown to emerge as the best predictor of managerial job performance when examined in competitive prediction with other social effectiveness constructs (i.e. self-monitoring, leadership self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence) (Semadar, Robins, & Ferris, 2006), and superior to self-efficacy in the prediction of contextual job performance (Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris, & Hochwarter, 2008). Likewise, political skill emerged as a significant predictor of overall job performance ratings after controlling for general mental ability and the Big Five personality characteristics, both cross-sectionally and predictively (Blickle, Kramer, Schneider, Meurs, Ferris, Mierke, Witzki, & Momm, 2011b; Liu, Ferris, Zinko, Perrewé, Weitz, & Xu, 2007). Furthermore, political skill was found to predict early employees' subsequent income level, hierarchical position, and career satisfaction (Ferris, Blickle, Schneider, Kramer, Zettler, Solga, Noethen, & Meurs, 2008; Todd, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2009).

Politically skilled persons possess social competencies that enhance their personal and/or organisational goals through their understanding and influence of others in social interactions at work. The social astuteness of politically skilled individuals provides them with a keen awareness of both self and others, which gives them the capacity to calibrate and adjust their behavior to different and changing contexts. Such astuteness and contextual adaptability allows politically skilled individuals to wield a great deal of interpersonal influence because their influence attempts are not perceived as such. Instead, they appear to possess high levels of genuineness and integrity, which help them to gain the trust and confidence of those with whom they interact. This set of mutually reinforcing competencies allows politically skilled individuals to develop large and diverse networks of contacts they can leverage for additional influence.

Thus, political skill enables individuals to situationally calibrate and adapt their behavior and influence to various contextual demands, indicating that politically skilled individuals should be able to manage a broad variety of people with divergent interests in a manner that inspires consistent and positive evaluations from multiple assessors. This claim was supported in a three-study investigation by Blickle et al. (2011a). The results of this investigation suggest a positive relationship between multiple-rater assessments of

political skill and multiple-rater assessments of job performance, thus providing strong support for this conception of the skill of ambidexterity (Smith, 2009).

*Moderators of the Political Skill–Job Performance Relationship.* Although the implicit notion has been that political skill should be expected to demonstrate cross-situational predictability, Ferris et al. (2002) suggested that contextual conditions should be explored that might moderate the relationship between political skill and work performance. Limited attention has been paid to this appeal, but a few recent studies have shed some light on this issue, with justice perceptions (i.e. Andrews et al., 2009) and organisational politics perceptions (i.e. Kapoutsis et al., 2011) being examined as contextual moderators of the political skill–job performance relationship. Also, Blickle et al. (2009) suggested that the type of job demands a person experiences in their work could also serve as a contextual moderator, providing limits or boundaries on political skill's predictability.

*Political Skill and Enterprising Job Demands.* It is likely that certain job contexts, such as enterprising job demands, represent a more conducive environment for politically skilled individuals to excel. Because of the importance of interpersonal interactions in enterprising job contexts, political skill is more likely to make a difference in enterprising performance; and because of the ambiguity inherent in enterprising job contexts, good impressions enabled by political skill also become important when it comes to performance evaluations. Consistent with the above arguments, Blickle et al. (2009) argued that political skill should be more salient, and a stronger performance predictor, within enterprising job demands. They found that political skill predicted job performance when enterprising demands were high as compared to when such demands are low. However, in that study, job performance was measured with self-ratings. In Study 1, job performance was not measured by self-ratings but by supervisory ratings.

*Hypothesis 1:* Enterprising job demands moderate the relationship between political skill and enterprising job performance ratings by supervisors. For jobs high in enterprising job demands, increases in political skill will be associated with increases in job performance ratings by supervisors. For jobs low in enterprising job demands, increases in political skill will show no relationship to job performance ratings by supervisors.

*Political Skill in Field Sales Jobs.* Typical occupations in Enterprising environments are business, publicity, advertising, and sales (Holland, 1985). The sales job is deserving of special attention for its importance to the success of economic organisations (Vinchur, Shippmann, Switzer, & Roth, 1998). To

be successful in sales jobs (Nerdinger, 2001), salespersons must be able to make customers feel comfortable and at ease around them, develop good rapport with them, and reflect the skill to generate increased affect or liking. This is represented by the interpersonal influence facet of political skill (Ferris et al., 2005). A successful salesperson should also be able to understand others very well, quickly identify what a customer really is seeking, and what might be their hidden agenda. Salespersons should be savvy about how to present themselves to others, and know the right things to say to influence others (Nerdinger, 2001). This is represented by the social astuteness facet of political skill (Ferris et al., 2005).

Inspiring trust in potential customers is an additional skill to be successful in sales jobs (Nerdinger, 2001), and this is represented by the apparent sincerity facet of political skill (Ferris et al., 2005). Finally, sales representatives being active in the field sales force can improve their performance if they are well connected, get referrals, and know important people personally in their sales district. These influential people can establish contacts, open doors, and provide useful information (Nerdinger, 2001). This is represented by the networking facet of political skill (Ferris et al., 2005). Thus, although political skill represents core interpersonal competencies for success in this type of occupation, no previous research has tested the relationship between political skill and outcomes in sales jobs.

The focus on performance *outcomes* is especially important because Vinchur et al. (1998) reported that predictors of supervisor ratings of subordinate performance do not always predict actual sales equally. For example, verbal ability was found in the meta-analyses by Vinchur et al. (1998) to be a positive predictor of supervisory performance ratings, but a negative predictor of actual sales success. General mental ability also predicted supervisory ratings of performance in sales jobs, but was not associated with sales success (Vinchur et al., 1998). Therefore, we argue that political skill should emerge as a significant predictor of field salespersons' objective performance outcomes, be it in a specific sales period or over a range of sales periods. We conducted Study 2 to test the following research hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 2:* Political skill will positively predict field salespersons' objective performance outcomes in a specific period and over a range of sales periods.

## PLAN OF THE RESEARCH

This two-study investigation was conducted in order to establish tests of the hypotheses regarding the relationship between political skill and job performance. Study 1 tested Hypothesis 1, i.e. the relationship between political skill and enterprising job performance. Study 2 tested Hypothesis 2, i.e. the relationship between political skill and performance in an enterprising job.

In Study 1, employees in a broad variety of jobs were surveyed regarding their political skill and the Enterprising nature of their job demands, and their supervisors provided assessments of the employees' job performance. Study 1 used a cross-sectional research design. In Study 2, a specific occupation was selected that is widely regarded to be high on Enterprising job demands (i.e. insurance sales), and political skill's ability to predict four objective measures of job performance (i.e. sales volume, performance-based income, performance-based commission rate, and performance-based status) was examined. Study 2 employed a predictive research design, with a time-interval of two years, and sampled employees from one company, thereby controlling for extraneous influences.

## STUDY 1: METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

The study was conducted in a large western city in Germany. Six hundred and forty-six employees from a broad range of jobs with at least three years of job experience were contacted personally to take part in the study. They were invited to voluntarily participate in a paper-and-pencil assessment of social skill at the workplace. Employees received two assessment forms in two separate envelopes. The employees were asked to work on their assessment alone when at home and send it back to the research team in a self-addressed, pre-stamped envelope; 263 employees participated (41% response rate).

After completing the self-assessment, employees were asked to pass a job performance evaluation form to their supervisors, and ask them to provide a job performance rating of them; 168 supervisors provided these ratings. Supervisors were instructed to send their job performance evaluations directly to the research team in a self-addressed, pre-stamped envelope. By the use of randomly generated codes, we were able to link employees' assessments of their social skill with supervisors' job performance ratings. Employees and supervisors were promised feedback on the research results, and were provided with the feedback at the end of the study. No other incentives were used.

We compared gender, age, educational level, job level, job tenure, enterprising job demands, and political skill of those 168 employees whose supervisors provided a job performance evaluation with those 89 employees whose supervisors did not. Only age was different between the two groups. Those 89 employees whose supervisors did not provide a job performance evaluation were on average two years younger. The group difference explained less than 2 per cent of the variance in age. In sum, these comparisons demonstrate that there were no critical differences between the two groups. Thus, the dropout

of supervisors was not based on a systematic difference between the two groups.

Of the 168 employees, 99 (59%) were female. The mean age of the employees was 40.7 ( $SD = 10.6$ ) years. Education varied at six levels, ranging from high school level (1) to doctoral level education (6) ( $M = 4.6$ ,  $SD = 1.5$ ). Jobs varied at 13 levels, ranging from blue-collar workers (2) to high-ranking managers (14) ( $M = 6.6$ ,  $SD = 1.8$ ). The average job tenure was 10.4 ( $SD = 8.6$ ) years.

## Measures

*Enterprising Job Demands.* The Enterprising job demands were measured with the enterprising items of the *UST (Umwelt-Struktur-Test; Environmental-Structure-Test)*. The *UST* was developed by Bergmann and Eder (1992), and it measures Holland's (1985) six occupational environment characteristics, using 10 items for each scale. The respondents were asked to report the importance of the job features using the scale from 4 (very important) to 0 (not relevant). The job features being rated are: (1) leading a group at work, (2) leading a business, (3) leading discussions, (4) advertising, (5) organising meetings, (6) supervising others, (7) selling, (8) persuading others, (9) bargaining, (10) speaking on behalf of a group. Employees provided ratings on their enterprising job demands. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) internal consistency reliability estimate of the enterprising job demands was  $\alpha = .86$ .

*Political Skill.* Political skill was measured with the German translation (Blickle et al., 2009) of the *Political Skill Inventory (PSI; Ferris et al., 2005)*, which comprises 18 items. Sample items are: "At work, I know a lot of important people and am well connected", "I understand people very well", "I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others", and "I try to show a genuine interest in other people". Items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type agreement scale. Ferris et al. (2005) found that *PSI* items do not correlate with social desirability. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for the *PSI* was .88.

*Enterprising Performance.* Previous researchers (Hogan & Holland, 2003) demonstrated the usefulness of aligning criterion measures with predictors by using the underlying performance construct. Therefore, instead of measuring job performance in terms of overall job performance, supervisors assessed the enterprising performance of their subordinates. Enterprising performance was assessed with the enterprising items of the *UST (Umwelt-Struktur-Test; Environmental-Structure-Test; Bergmann & Eder, 1992)*. The items were: How good is this person at . . . (1) leading a group at work, (2)

leading a business, (3) leading discussions, (4) advertising, (5) organising meetings, (6) supervising others, (7) selling, (8) persuading others, (9) bargaining, and (10) speaking on behalf of a group. The Likert-type assessment by supervisors used the following labels: 5 = much better than other people in a comparable position; 4 = better than other people in a comparable position; 3 = as good as other people in a comparable position; 2 = worse than other people in a comparable position; 1 = much worse than other people in a comparable position; x = can't say. Cronbach's alpha reliability of the scale was .92.

In order to validate the enterprising performance scale, we conducted an additional study with 67 subordinate dyads. Each dyad had different supervisors. Both members of the same subordinate dyad reported to the same supervisor. Both members of the dyads assessed their supervisors' enterprising performance. The positive correlation ( $r = .46, n = 67, p < .01$ ) within the dyads supported the validity of the enterprising performance scale. In previous research, the correlations in such performance ratings of supervisors by subordinate dyads have been found to vary between .31 and .36 (Viswesvaran, 2001).

*Control Variables.* Previous research has shown that gender (i.e. Bowen, Swim, & Jacobs, 2000) and age (i.e. Waldman & Avolio, 1986) are related to job performance ratings. Therefore, gender and age served as control variables in these data analyses. Because the employees were sampled from a broad range of jobs, we additionally controlled for educational level, job level, and job tenure. As a proxy for intelligence, we controlled for educational level, which employed six levels similar to the Educational Scale of Hollingshead's index of social position (ISP; Miller & Salkind, 2002). The lowest level was high school (1); the highest level was doctoral degree, MD, PhD, LL.D, and the like (6). To assess job level, we used a scale by Isserstedt, Middendorff, Fabian, Schnitzer, and Wolter (2007). This scale is similar to Hollingshead's index of social position (Miller & Salkind, 2002). The lowest level was unskilled worker (1); the highest level was owner of a large company (15). Job tenure was reported in years.

In order to parsimoniously control for the other performance facets (i.e. administrative competence, quality, productivity, job knowledge, effort, acceptance of authority; see Campbell, McCloy, Oppler, & Sager, 1993), we asked supervisors for an assessment of employees' overall job performance as an additional item in the performance assessment (Ferris, Witt, & Hochwarter, 2001). The item asked: "How do you assess the job performance of this person in general?" The item used the following anchors: 1 (much worse than other people in a comparable position), 2 (worse than other people in a comparable position), 3 (as good as other people in a comparable position), 4 (better than other people in a comparable position), 5 (much

better than other people in a comparable position). We used this item to control for overall job performance.

## Data Analyses

Hierarchical moderated multiple regression analyses (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003) were conducted to examine the moderating role of enterprising job demands on the political skill–enterprising performance ratings relationship. The enterprising job demands scale and the political skill scale were centered. We analysed the data in the following way. First, we included the control variables; namely, gender, age, education, position, tenure, and overall job performance assessment by supervisor. In the second step, we entered enterprising job demands and political skill. In the third step, the cross-product terms of enterprising job demands and political skill were entered. If the interaction effect of “enterprising job demands  $\times$  political skill” was significant and positive this would confirm Hypothesis 1.

## STUDY 1: RESULTS

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, correlations, and coefficient alpha ( $\alpha$ ) internal consistency reliability estimates of all variables. As expected, political skill ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ) related positively with enterprising performance ratings. Other correlates of enterprising performance ratings were enterprising job demands ( $r = .30, p < .01$ ) and overall job performance assessment ( $r = .58, p < .01$ ). Enterprising job demands were higher among males than females ( $r = -.26, p < .01$ ) and correlated positively with job level ( $r = .31, p < .01$ ). These correlations were in line with previous findings (Blickle et al., 2009). Table 2 presents hierarchical moderated regression results for the regression of enterprising job performance on the “enterprising job demands  $\times$  political skill” interaction

Hypothesis 1 stated that enterprising job demands would moderate the relationship between political skill and enterprising job performance ratings by supervisors. Specifically, for jobs high in enterprising job demands, increases in political skill would be associated with increases in job performance ratings by supervisors, and for jobs low in enterprising job demands, increases in political skill will show no relationship to job performance ratings by supervisors. The data confirmed this expectation. The interaction term of the centered enterprising job demands and political skill variables had a significant beta-weight ( $\beta = .13, p < .05$ ) and explained 2 per cent additional criterion variance. The form of the “enterprising job demands  $\times$  political skill” interaction was illustrated according to the procedure proposed by Cohen et al. (2003). Three levels of enterprising job

TABLE 1  
Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Reliabilities for all Variables in Study 1

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender	.59	.50	(-)								
2. Age	40.73	10.63	.05	(-)							
3. Educational level	4.55	1.47	-.14	-.22**	(-)						
4. Job level	6.55	1.77	-.28**	.07	.28**	(-)					
5. Job tenure in years	10.37	8.64	.12	.62**	-.30**	-.12	(-)				
6. Enterprising job demands	1.83	.90	-.26**	.00	.00	.31**	-.13	(.86)			
7. Political skill	4.77	.75	-.09	-.12	-.05	.17*	-.10	.35**	.88		
8. Overall job performance	3.82	.76	.00	-.11	-.02	.20**	-.09	.15*	.15*	(-)	
9. Enterprising performance	3.22	.70	.00	-.01	.12	.14	-.11	.30**	.25**	.58**	(.92)

Note: N = 168, † p < .05 (one-tailed); \* p < .05; \*\* p < .01. Gender (0 = male, 1 = female).

TABLE 2  
Hierarchical Regressions on Enterprising Performance in Study 1

<i>Predictor variables</i>	Criterion = Enterprising performance		
	St. B	$\Delta R^2$	$R^2$
First step			
— Gender	.04		
— Age	.13		
— Educational level	.14*		
— Job level	.05		
— Job tenure	-.05		
— Overall job performance	.57**		
		.36**	.36**
Second step			
— Enterprising job demands	.22**		
— Political skill	.12†		
		.06**	.43**
Third step			
— Enterprising demands $\times$ Political skill	.13*		
		.02*	.45**

Note:  $N = 168$ ; †  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ . Gender (0 = male, 1 = female).

demands were plotted: at one standard deviation below the mean, at the mean, and at one standard deviation above the mean.

Figure 1 presents the significant “enterprising job demands  $\times$  political skill” interaction effect. As expected, for individuals in jobs with high enterprising job demands, higher levels of political skill were associated with higher levels of enterprising job performance ratings. The slope of this regression line was positive and significant ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $t = 2.79$ ,  $p < .01$ ). For individuals in jobs with low enterprising job demands, political skill was not associated ( $\beta = -.03$ ,  $t = -.37$ ,  $p = ns$ ) with enterprising job performance ratings. Thus, the results provided support for Hypothesis 1.

## STUDY 2: PLAN OF THE RESEARCH

Study 2 was conducted in cooperation with a German insurance company operating nationwide and specialising in selling a variety of insurance products (e.g. car insurance, life insurance, liability insurance, etc.) to one special group of higher income professionals. All insurance salespersons of this company work on a self-employed basis at different local and regional districts, which are tailored so that each district has about the same number of potential client professionals. Salespersons in this company typically are hired through an assessment center selection procedure, and they receive

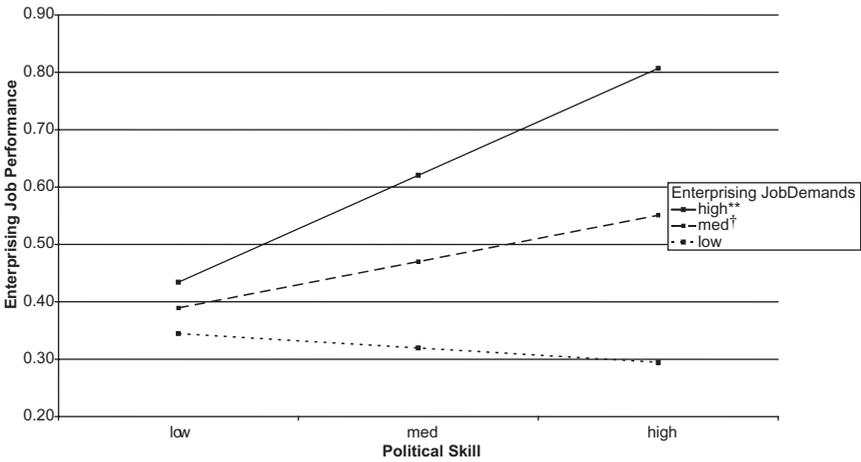


FIGURE 1. Regressions of Enterprising Job Performance on Political Skill as moderated by Enterprising Job Demands in Study 1.

Note:  $N = 168$ ; †  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

regular training concerning new insurance products, changes in existing insurance products, and selling techniques.

Short-term sales performance is directly reflected in the yearly sales volume and in yearly income based on sales. The selling commission rate reflects the sales performance in the previous two years. The higher the selling performance in the previous two years, the higher the commission rate in the current year. Finally, long-term success of the salespersons, so-called status, in this insurance company is evaluated over a five-year period. Thus, all these performance measures are related, but still preserve their unique character.

The salespersons were contacted by the researchers with the help of the insurance company, and asked to participate in the study at the end of 2008. There was no obligation to participate in the study by the company, and it was communicated as purely voluntary in nature. Salespersons were offered individual feedback on their social competencies in return for their participation in the study. They were also asked to give permission to the company to disclose to the researchers their sales volume, their sales-based pay, the commission rate, and their long-term sales performance in the company. If salespersons participated, they received individual feedback after the research project was completed. If they agreed to disclose their performance data, the company provided these to the researchers. In addition to political skill and performance data, socio-demographic details (i.e. sex, age, education, sales experience, and tenure) were collected.

## STUDY 2: METHOD

### Participants and Procedure

At the beginning of 2009, the insurance company had 341 salespersons who were all contacted by e-mail. They were invited to voluntarily participate in a web-based self-assessment of social effectiveness which could help them improve their sales performance. One hundred and sixty-two salespersons joined the study, which represents a participation rate of 47 per cent. At the beginning of 2011, 18 of those salespersons had left the company. Those who had left were lower in education, tenure, sales volume in 2008, provision rate from 2007 to 2008, and status based on 2005–09 compared to those who had not left the company in 2011. Thus, the remaining sample in 2011, on average, was already better performing in sales in 2009. Of the remaining 144 salespersons, 17 were female. Compared to the whole workforce of salespersons at the beginning of 2011, the sample was about 3 years younger ( $M = 43.43$  years,  $SD = 9.5$  years), about 3 years less tenured ( $M = 11.17$  years,  $SD = 7.8$  years) and more male (87.5% versus 76.8% male salespersons). This is because the insurance company has hired proportionally more young female salespersons over the last two years.

### Measures

*Political Skill.* As in Study 1, the German version (Blickle et al., 2009) of the *Political Skill Inventory (PSI)* was used to assess self-reported salesperson political skill (Ferris et al., 2005). A sample item of the networking facet is: “I spend a lot of time and effort at work networking with others”. A sample item of the social astuteness facet is: “I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others”. A sample item of the interpersonal influence facet is: “I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me”. And a sample item of the apparent sincerity facet is: “I try to show a genuine interest in other people”. Recent research has reported strong associations between employee self-reports of the facets of political skill and peer reports, subordinate reports, and supervisor reports of political skill (e.g. Ferris et al., 2008). The Cronbach’s alpha reliability of the overall political skill scale was  $\alpha = .90$ .

*Performance Outcomes.* Sales performance outcome in one sales period is expressed in sales volume and sales performance-based income. Sales volume captures the absolute monetary value of sales in a period calculated in Euro. Sales performance-based income captures the monetary profitability of the sales volume for the insurance company (i.e. the higher the profitability of the sales volume for the company, the higher the sales

performance-based income of the salesperson). Sales volume and sales performance-based income refer to cumulated sales in 2010 (i.e. two years after political skill was measured). Medium-term performance outcomes are reflected in the current commission rate, which is based on sales performance in 2009 and 2010.

The company also uses a measure of long-term performance (i.e. so-called status: top = 5, good = 4, ordinary = 3, low = 2, beginner = 1). The long-term *top performers* attain in three out of five successive years (2006–10) at least four times more total monetary value of sales than the cut-off criterion for low performers. The long-term *good performers* attain in two out of three successive years (2008–10) at least three times more total monetary value than the cut-off criterion for low performers. The ordinary performers attain in two successive years (2009–10) at least 67 per cent more total monetary value than the cut-off criterion for low performers. *Low performers* attain in their second year (2010) only about a cut-off monetary value of their sales. *Beginners* are allowed to perform below the cut-off monetary value for sales.

*Control Variables.* We asked salespersons to report sex, age, highest education level, years of sales experience, and years of tenure in the current organisation. Because previous research has shown that gender (i.e. Bowen et al., 2000) and age (i.e. Waldman & Avolio, 1986) affect job performance, these variables were controlled in the data analyses. Additionally, we controlled for educational level as a proxy for cognitive ability (Vinchur et al., 1998). Years of job experience has also been found to be a positive predictor of job performance (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998), and therefore was controlled in the present study. Also, the longer salespersons work in a specific job, the more repeat customers they can win. Consequently, in meta-analytic reviews, job tenure related positively to salary (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005), and therefore was controlled in the data analyses.

## Data Analyses

Hierarchical moderated multiple regression analyses (Cohen et al., 2003) were conducted to examine the role of political skill as predictor of sales performance outcomes beyond socio-demographic (gender, age) and human capital variables (educational level, years of job experience, years of job tenure). Because all four performance measures were related but still preserved their unique character, four different hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. Additionally, because of the high correlations among the PSI and (among) its facets (see Table 3) the predictors in the second step were entered alternatively.

Sex, age, educational level, years of sales experience, and years of job tenure were entered in the first step as demographic controls. Political skill

TABLE 3  
Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Reliabilities for all Variables in Study 2

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Sex	.88	.33	(-)												
2. Age	43.43	9.53	.02	(-)											
3. Education	5.94	1.47	-.09	-.16†	(-)										
4. Tenure	11.17	7.82	.08	.79**	-.28**	(-)									
5. Experience in sales jobs	14.06	8.91	.07	.85**	-.35**	.83**	(-)								
6. Political skill	5.61	.65	-.03	.06	-.05	-.01	.05	(.90)							
7. Networking ability	5.15	1.09	.01	.03	-.12	-.03	.02	.86**	(.91)						
8. Social astuteness	5.56	.75	-.10	.05	.02	.03	.04	.78**	.47**	(.78)					
9. Interpersonal influence	5.87	.68	-.01	-.08	.00	-.13	-.06	.76**	.49**	.55**	(.74)				
10. Apparent sincerity	6.27	.73	-.01	.22**	.09	.14†	.18*	.52**	.20*	.36**	.44**	(.66)			
11. Sales volume	19718.00	1572.85	-.02	-.17*	.01	-.01	-.07	.14†	.19*	.07	.06	-.01	(-)		
12. Income	139.72	140.76	.07	.02	-.07	.20*	.14†	.11	.14†	.03	.07	.07	.69**	(-)	
13. Commission rate	32.49	4.70	-.02	.16†	-.16†	.34**	.32**	.18*	.13	.20*	.04	.17*	.57**	.63**	(-)
14. Status	2.56	1.08	-.06	.02	.00	.19*	.13	.18*	.20*	.16*	.20*	.08	.77**	.73**	.78**

Note: N = 144, † p < .05 (one-tailed); \* p < .05 (two-tailed); \*\* p < .01 (two-tailed). Gender (0 = female, 1 = male), sales volume and income in thousand Euro.

and its dimensions (i.e. social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity) were entered alternatively in the second step of the regression analyses.

## STUDY 2: RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations

We had complete data, with values for all variables, for 144 salespersons. Table 3 reports the means, standard deviations, correlations, and coefficient alpha ( $\alpha$ ) internal consistency reliability estimates for all variables. The overall or composite political skill measure was related to sales volume in 2010 ( $r = .14, p < .10$ ), commission rate based on performance from 2009 to 2010 ( $r = .18, p < .05$ ), and status based on performance from 2006 to 2010 ( $r = .18, p < .05$ ).

The networking ability dimension of political skill related to sales volume in 2010 ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ), income based on sales performance in 2010 ( $r = .14, p < .10$ ), and status based on performance from 2006 to 2010 ( $r = .20, p < .05$ ). The social astuteness dimension of political skill correlated with commission rate based on performance from 2009 to 2010 ( $r = .20, p < .01$ ) and status based on performance from 2006 to 2010 ( $r = .16, p < .05$ ). Finally, the apparent sincerity dimension of political skill was correlated with commission rate based on performance from 2009 to 2010 ( $r = .17, p < .05$ ).

### Test of Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 stated that political skill positively predicts objective sales performance outcomes. The hypothesis was tested with hierarchical regression analyses (Cohen et al., 2003) by regressing the different performance outcome measures on political skill after controlling for socio-demographic (i.e. sex, age) and human capital (i.e. education level, tenure, experience in sales jobs) variables. The results are presented in Table 4. Age and tenure were the strongest predictors of performance outcomes.

Political skill predicted sales volume in 2010 ( $\beta = .18, p < .05$ ), income based on sales performance in 2010 ( $\beta = .14, p < .10$ ), commission rate based on performance from 2009 to 2010 ( $\beta = .19, p < .05$ ), and status based on sales performance from 2009 to 2010 ( $\beta = .21, p < .01$ ) (see Table 4). These findings supported Hypothesis 2.

In exploratory analyses, we also regressed the performance outcomes on the facets of political skill after controlling for socio-demographic and human capital variables. Networking ability predicted all performance outcome variables positively. Social astuteness predicted commission rate ( $\beta = .19, p < .05$ ) and status ( $\beta = .15, p < .05$ ) outcomes. Apparent sincerity

TABLE 4  
 Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Volume of Sales, Performance-Based Income, Commission Rate, and Performance-Based Status Two Years after Political Skill was Measured in Study 2

Predictor variables	Performance criteria in the second wave after two years											
	Sales volume in 2010			Income based on sales in 2010			Commission rate based on sales in 2009 and 2010			Status based on performance from 2006 to 2010		
	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$		$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$		$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$		$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	
First step												
— Sex	-.04		.04	-.08		-.09						
— Age	-.55**		-.47**	-.57**		-.55**						
— Education	.07		.05	.03		.13						
— Tenure	.30*		.38*	.39**		.41**						
— Experience in sales jobs	.18	.08*	.24	.49**	.10*	.32†	.20**				.11**	
Second step												
— Political skill	.18*	.03*	.14†	.19*	.02†	.21**	.04*				.04**	
— Networking ability	.24**	.05**	.18*	.16*	.03*	.24**	.03*				.06**	
— Social astuteness	.08	.01	.03	.19*	.01	.15*	.04*				.02†	
— Interper. influence	.07	.01	.10	.08	.01	.09	.01				.01	
— Apparent sincerity	.03	.00	.07	.15†	.01	.07	.02†				.01	

Note: N = 144, † p ≤ .05 (one-tailed); \* p ≤ .05 (two-tailed); \*\* p ≤ .01 (two-tailed); because of the high correlations among the PSI and (among) its facets (see Table 3) the predictors in the second step were entered alternatively.

marginally predicted commission rate ( $\beta = .15, p < .10$ ). These exploratory findings demonstrate that networking ability was a strong driver of the sales performance–political skill relationship.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Two studies were designed to investigate the contextual moderating role of job type and fit of political skill to work context on the political skill–job performance relationship. Specifically, it was hypothesised that political skill is most predictive of job performance in occupational classifications characterised as enterprising job demands, but political skill would demonstrate no relationship with job performance in job contexts that did not emphasise enterprising job demands. Study 1 surveyed employees who worked on many different types of jobs, and found that political skill positively and significantly predicted job performance in enterprising job contexts, but not in other job contexts, as hypothesised.

Study 2 selected insurance sales as one particular type of job high in enterprising job demands, and hypothesised that political skill would significantly predict objective measures of insurance sales (i.e. sales volume, performance-based income, performance-based commission rate, and performance-based status). The results demonstrated significant predictive effects of political skill (i.e. beyond age, sex, education level, tenure on the job, and experience in sales) on all four measures of sales performance. As such, the results of this two-study investigation make important contributions to both theory and research.

### Contributions to Theory and Research

This investigation is a response to Ferris et al. (2002), who appealed to scholars to search for boundary conditions or moderators of the political skill–work outcomes relationships. Along with Andrews et al. (2009), who investigated the moderating effects of justice perceptions, Blickle et al. (2009), who examined the moderating role of job demands, and Kapoutsis et al. (2011), who studied the moderating effects of organisational politics perceptions, the present investigation contributes to a broader collective understanding of the contextual moderators of the political skill–job performance relationship. Thus, this work makes contributions to theory and research in political skill.

The present investigation also contributes to an important, and often debated, issue in the area of influence and politics in organisations; that is, whether individuals with high political skill actually achieve better job performance than those with low political skill, or whether they are just better impression managers (i.e. whether they are in fact more effective, or just more

successful; Luthans, 1988). Positive associations with job performance ratings do not necessarily suggest that politically skilled employees are better *actual* performers than employees with lower levels of political skill. Rather, previous results have suggested that political skill exerts an influence on perceptions of job performance such that supervisors view politically skilled individuals as better *perceived* performers than individuals lower in political skill.

Previous studies have focused on subjective job performance ratings by peers and supervisors in research on political skill prediction of job performance, and the results of Study 1 provide constructive replication of that work. Todd et al. (2009) had also carried out research on the relationship between political skill and total compensation, including commission rate and supplementary income. However, Study 2 went beyond their research. First, our Study 2 assessed sales volume in addition to sales-based income. Second, in the Todd et al. (2009) study, only *some* of the respondents received income based on commission rate and supplementary income. In Study 2, however, *all* participants worked under the same sales performance-based pay system. Income was a direct and comprehensive reflection of current, mid-term, and long-term sales performance.

Finally, the Todd et al. (2009) study asked for total compensation in the previous year. In Study 2, however, political skill predicted income with a time interval of two years. So, Study 2 went beyond prior work to demonstrate political skill's ability to predict objective measures of sales performance, as the first study that used comprehensive objective performance criteria. The findings of Study 2 clearly demonstrated that political skill was closely associated with objective job performance criteria, thereby building additional confidence in the political skill predictor, and addressing the "perceived versus actual" performance issue. Thus, the present two-study investigation makes important contributions to theory and research in political skill.

This investigation makes additional contributions by recognising the increased importance of context in organisational research (e.g. Dierdorff, Rubin, & Morgeson, 2009). Because of its status as the source of both constraints and opportunities that influence perceptions and interpretations of behavior in organisations, Johns (2006) has argued for more attention to context on the part of organisational scholars. Furthermore, other advocates have appealed for an increased focus on context as it contributes to greater precision in theory development in the organisational sciences (Griffin, 2007; Whetten, 2009).

The results of the present investigation highlight the importance of and complexities of the social context, and the need to understand more about such contextual effects. The fit of political skill to enterprising job demands matched an environment that emphasised the importance of interpersonal/

social interactions as key features of the job, with interpersonal/social competencies that should contribute to performance effectiveness. In particular, because it is believed to serve as the backdrop that frames job performance in organisations (Dierdorff & Morgeson, 2007), there is a need for more research that begins to develop a more informed understanding of the impact of context.

The present investigation also makes contributions to theory and research on P–E fit. The results showing that the fit of political skill to the specific job context of enterprising job demands demonstrates support for an adaptation of the aspect of P–E fit that matches people to jobs (i.e. person–job fit). That is, this shows that specific personal characteristics/skills fit best in particular types of jobs that involve considerable interpersonal interaction, and thus require interpersonal competency to be effective. In essence, this ties Holland’s (1973, 1997) theory of vocational personalities and work environments (i.e. where interpersonal competency fits with only certain job types) to contemporary theory and research on P–E fit.

What will be interesting for future research is to carefully examine Holland’s (1973, 1997) other individual/occupational categories (i.e. Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, and Conventional), determine requisite personal knowledge, skills, and abilities to be effective in each category, and propose batteries of multiple personal competencies designed to best match occupational category job demands. Such research should add greater clarity to the fit construct, and continue to address Judge and Ferris’s (1992) appeal for greater specificity regarding the fit construct, particularly in light of the practical realities that organisations seek to hire people who “fit”.

## Strengths and Limitations

Study 1 addressed a number of weaknesses of prior studies examining similar issues. First, the study used supervisor job performance ratings rather than self-ratings. In addition, we controlled for general job performance rating. This allowed teasing out the variance associated with other performance facets on the job, and focusing primarily on enterprising performance. We thus ensured the construct validity of our findings. Additionally, in Study 1 we controlled for gender, age, educational level as proxy for intelligence, and the level of the job. Although Study 1 has many features that overcome weaknesses in designs of prior research, it is not without limitations. One important limitation of Study 1 was that it utilised a cross-sectional design, and that it sampled respondents from different jobs. However, Study 2 used a predictive design with a two-year time interval and objective performance criteria. In addition, these performance criteria covered sales volume, short-term, mid-term, and long-term sales performance based on the profitability of the sales for the insurance company.

In addition, Study 2 sampled study participants from one company in one kind of job. In Study 2, we also controlled for sex, age, education, tenure, and experience in sales jobs, thereby excluding extraneous sources of explanation. In Study 2, we also looked at the facets of political skill. Networking ability was the most consistent predictor of field sales performance. A limitation of both studies was that they used only self-assessments of political skill. Although self-reports of political skill have been shown to be significantly related to peer and supervisor assessments (Ferris et al., 2008; Liu et al., 2007), it would have been more informative if both measures had been included in the study (Blickle et al., 2011a; Connelly & Ones, 2010).

## Directions for Future Research

Because politically skilled individuals attain their performance objectives through the application of influence behavior (Ferris et al., 2007), which may range from ingratiation to intimidation through tactics such as assertiveness (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980), influence behaviors may act as intermediate linkages in the political skill–performance/outcomes relationships under different contextual conditions. Future research should explore the specific influence tactics that might mediate the relationships between political skill and important work outcomes.

Future research should analyse samples from other sales jobs and other enterprising jobs to provide a more complete picture. It should also investigate how employees and salespersons can improve their political skill, and leverage that set of competencies for performance improvement. Finally, political skill was measured and analysed as a composite construct (i.e. a simple sum of the 18 items that comprise the *Political Skill Inventory*), but in addition, the four dimensions of political skill were also examined in this research (i.e. Study 2). Future studies should continue to investigate the potential differential prediction of performance outcomes from specific dimensions of political skill, and try to establish more well-developed theory in this area to support predictions of specific political skill dimensions.

## Practical Implications

In a previous study, Blickle, Wendel, and Ferris (2010) examined the political skill–sales performance relationship, and found no direct effect of political skill on sales performance. However, while our Study 2 focused on field sales, that study focused on salespersons sitting in an exhibition space (i.e. a showroom for cars), and waiting until potential car buyers arrived. So, the potential car buyer already has a propensity to buy a car, and already has decided to go to the showrooms of particular car selling companies. It is only here that the job of the indoor car salesperson begins. The potential customer is

already attracted to the item, and has selected a certain car or car sales outlet. In the field insurance sales job, insurance salespersons actively go out and contact potential customers, and try to convince them that they need an insurance policy for their car, their health, their family, etc.

Field insurance salespersons have to identify people as potential customers, they have to get in contact with them, although the potential customer does not seek to get in contact with the salesperson, and they have to convince potential customers to think about their need for a certain insurance policy, although potential customers do not realise the need for such an item. If they are successful in making the potential customers aware of the necessity to buy an insurance policy, such potential customers might ask other insurance companies to provide a competitive offer. In sum, the degree of enterprising job demands is much higher in the field insurance sales job than in the indoor car sales job. So, the different findings in the Blickle et al. (2010) study and in Study 2 of this paper are completely in line with Hypothesis 1.

The distinction between field sales jobs and indoor sales jobs also highlights the importance of networking ability in sales success of field salespersons. Networking in the field sales business is like an entrepreneurial activity (Witt, 2004). Therefore, training in networking ability for field salespersons is important and should focus on how to expand their networks and leverage social capital. Success in one's social networking activities generates significant and tangible benefits. It facilitates access to important information and improves cooperation from others (Esser, 2008).

The findings of the present studies are especially important for practice because we did not sample inexperienced job beginners, particularly in Study 2 where they were preselected and thus experienced job incumbents. Therefore, the political skill construct can be used to improve organisations' performance either by training the political skill of the workforce in enterprising jobs or by resorting to political skill assessments in personnel selection decisions. Recent research has shown that self-reports of political skill in the situation of a job application reflect the same criterion-related validity as self-reports without an acquisitive impression management incentive (Blickle, von Below, & Johannsen, 2011c).

## Conclusion

The present two-study investigation is one of the few efforts to respond to Ferris et al.'s (2002) appeal to investigate the importance of context in establishing limits on the predictability of important work outcomes (e.g. job performance) from political skill. Specifically, Holland's (1973, 1997) enterprising job demands occupational category was argued to be, and was empirically shown to be, particularly conducive to the effective job perfor-

mance prediction from political skill. Furthermore, these results were constructively replicated in a specifically selected enterprising job demands position of insurance sales, providing further confidence in the validity of the findings obtained.

Collectively, then, these results contribute to the political skill literature by helping to increase our understanding of the boundaries that serve to explain the conditions under which political skill can be most effectively used to predict job performance (Andrews et al., 2009; Blickle et al., 2009; Kapoutsis et al., 2011), thus helping to establish the relative contextual limits of a predictor variable (Klimoski, 1993). Hopefully, this investigation will encourage scholars to pursue continued research in this area.

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