

1 **A Predictive Investigation of Reputation as Mediator of the**
2 **Political-Skill/Career-Success Relationship¹**
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11
12 Career success is determined by a number of factors, including some combination of
13 specific competencies and a performance record, along with network development,
14 organizational politics, and reputation building. Theory and research suggest that
15 employees' political skill predicts their career success, and that this relationship is
16 mediated by employees' reputation in the workplace. These hypotheses were tested
17 in a predictive study, collecting 2 waves of data from 135 career employees, covering
18 a 1-year timeframe. Political skill at Time 1 predicted hierarchical position, income,
19 and career satisfaction at Time 2. Furthermore, reputation mediated the relation-
20 ships between political skill, hierarchical position, and career satisfaction. Contri-
21 butions, implications, limitations, strengths, and future research directions are
22 discussed.

23
24 Career success in organizations has been actively investigated for years. It
25 has been found to be determined not only by many traditional factors,
26 including job-related skills and performance record, but also by networking,
27 politics, and social effectiveness competencies (for a review, see Ng, Eby,
28 Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005). Indeed, political perspectives on organizations
29 (e.g., Ferris et al., 2002; Ferris & Judge, 1991; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981)
30 have argued that performance, promotions, compensation, and other factors
31 known to be manifestations of career success are strongly affected by orga-
32 nizational politics, a proposition that has received consistent empirical
33 support (e.g., Judge & Bretz, 1994; Wayne, Liden, Graf, & Ferris, 1997).

34 Today's competitive environment has magnified the importance of social
35 effectiveness competencies that facilitate effective interpersonal interactions,
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1 performance, and career progression. One such pattern of competencies is
2 reflected in the construct of *political skill*, which has been defined as “The
3 ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to
4 influence others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and/or organiza-
5 tional objectives” (Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005, p. 127).

6 Theory and research on political skill argue that individuals high in
7 political skill possess social awareness, which is combined with an ability to
8 adjust and calibrate behavior to different situations in a genuine and sincere
9 manner. This competency inspires the support, confidence, and trust of
10 others and influences their attitudinal and behavioral responses toward these
11 politically skilled individuals (Ferris et al., 2007). As such, political skill has
12 been theorized to influence performance and career-success evaluations by
13 decision makers through intermediate linkages, such as reputation (e.g.,
14 Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005; Ferris et al., 2007).

15 Liu et al. (2007) suggested that political skill shapes the perceptions and
16 impressions that raters form of employees—with specific reference to others’
17 impressions of trust, confidence, and credibility—all of which go into the
18 formation of reputation. In a four-study investigation, Liu et al. provided
19 evidence of the mediating influence of reputation on the political-skill/job-
20 performance relationship. However, although the process dynamics of this
21 reputation-mediating process have been argued to operate similarly for
22 political-skill/career- success relationships (Ferris et al., 2007), these impor-
23 tant relationships have not been examined to date, and are in need of empiri-
24 cal verification.

25 The primary purpose of the present investigation is to examine the nature
26 of the relationship between political skill and career-success indicators of
27 hierarchical position, income, and career satisfaction. Second, employee
28 reputation is investigated as a potential mediator of the relationships between
29 political skill and career success. We test the proposed relationships in
30 a predictive study involving two waves of data collection over a 1-year
31 timeframe.

32 33 Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

34
35 Personal reputation plays a pivotal mediating role in the conceptualiza-
36 tion tested in the present study to help explain the relationship between
37 political skill and career outcomes. As such, it seeks to contribute to both the
38 political-skill and the reputation literatures. More specifically, this investiga-
39 tion examines how employees can leverage their political skill to build posi-
40 tive personal reputations through their interactions with others. Bromley
41 (1993) argued that the development of reputations typically involves pur-

1 poseful action, whereby individuals are motivated to manage impressions in
2 order to achieve goals of reputation creation in the eyes of others, which then
3 contributes to the prevention of punishment and acquisition of rewards
4 (Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997). Furthermore, Ferris and Judge (1991) suggested
5 that individuals may attempt to manipulate reputational signaling to their
6 advantage through social and political influence efforts.

7 The personal reputations built by politically skilled individuals tend to be
8 effective because they make use of proactive network-building activities and
9 situationally appropriate influence tactics to transmit signals that establish a
10 favorable image to their constituencies. Politically skilled individuals possess
11 a high degree of social astuteness, which allows them to be flexible and
12 adaptive in their interpersonal influence attempts. They know exactly how to
13 exhibit their behavioral repertoire in ways that transmit the desired favorable
14 image (e.g., Ferris et al., 2007). Additionally, such signal transmission by
15 politically skilled individuals likely spreads rapidly because of their estab-
16 lished connections with influential people.

17 Thus, we suggest that politically skilled individuals form strong, positive
18 relationships with their supervisors in order to attain the rewards typically
19 associated with positive personal reputations. As a result, such supervisor/
20 decision makers who observe these politically skilled individuals' situa-
21 tionally appropriate behavior are expected to reciprocate their efforts from a
22 social-exchange perspective (e.g., Blau, 1964) and evaluate them favorably,
23 assigning them positive personal reputations and allocating disproportion-
24 ately greater rewards.

25 26 *Theoretical Foundations*

27
28 The present investigation draws on signaling and social-exchange theo-
29 ries, in addition to Ferris et al.'s (2007) conceptualization of political skill
30 (which draws on social influence theory) to explain how politically skilled
31 individuals develop their personal reputations through interactions with
32 others. Politically skilled individuals can read situations and people well,
33 which allows them to adjust their behavior to best fit the situation. According
34 to Ferris et al., those high in political skill "combine social astuteness with the
35 capacity to adjust their behavior to different and changing situational
36 demands in a manner that appears to be sincere, inspires support and trust,
37 and effectively influences and controls the responses of others" (p. 291). This
38 mutually reinforcing set of competencies tends to transmit a calm sense of
39 self-confidence that influences others' perceptions of the individuals' compe-
40 tence and credibility (Ferris et al., 2007). This is similar to the performance
41 and character dimensions of personal reputation at work discussed by Zinko,
42 Ferris, Blass, and Laird (2007).

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1 Spence (1973) argued that signaling conveys information about the
2 actions of individuals and their intentions and abilities to others. He argued
3 that individuals send signals in order to transmit information, reduce ambi-
4 guity, or influence observers' beliefs. The characteristics, behaviors, and
5 actions signaled tend to reduce environmental perceptual uncertainty and
6 serve to distinguish reputation in the eyes of observers, making reputation
7 more salient by promoting attentional focus. By developing strong relation-
8 ships with their supervisors, politically skilled individuals signal their effec-
9 tive work performance and personal character to other organizational
10 members. As such, these signals should affect observers' perceptions of politi-
11 cally skilled individuals in desired and intended ways.

12 In addition to signal transmission, these behaviors may help politically
13 skilled individuals develop social-exchange relationships with their supervi-
14 sors and coworkers, which, in turn, should facilitate the establishment of
15 positive personal reputations. *Social exchange* involves a series of interac-
16 tions that generate obligations (e.g., Blau, 1964), implying that supervisors
17 who benefit from positive behaviors associated with high-quality work rela-
18 tionships will reciprocate by awarding politically skilled employees positive
19 personal reputation assessments, as well as favorable career outcomes mea-
20 sures they control (e.g., pay increases, promotions).

21 22 *Political Skill and Career Success*

23
24 Political perspectives on organizations have been prevalent and influential
25 in organizational theory and research for more than a quarter century (e.g.,
26 Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981). Fundamental to this view about organiza-
27 tions is that reality often is enacted and socially constructed between indi-
28 viduals. Employees' political activities play an important role in shaping
29 others' perceptions and assessment of their characteristics, performance, and
30 potential. In turn, these perceptions influence the degree to which individuals
31 are successful in their careers, as indicated by their ability to obtain organi-
32 zational resources and rewards, such as pay and positions (Ferris, Fedor, &
33 King, 1994; Ferris & Judge, 1991).

34 Over the past couple decades, considerable empirical evidence has been
35 accumulated to support this notion. For example, career success has been
36 linked with tactics of influence (e.g., Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003; Judge &
37 Bretz, 1994; Wayne et al., 1997), political behaviors (e.g., Wolff & Moser,
38 2009), as well as political knowledge and skill (Chao, O'Leary-Kelly, Wolf,
39 Klein, & Gardner, 1994; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Indeed, the politi-
40 cal side of human-resource decisions is so prevalent that it has led some to
41 suggest that perceptions of raters necessarily exhibit at least as much, if not

1 more, influence on decisions than the objective conditions of target employ-
2 ees' behaviors and aggregate contribution (e.g., Ferris, Munyon, Basik, &
3 Buckley, 2008).

4 Viewed through this lens of organizational politics, careers can be seen as
5 political campaigns (Inkson, 2004), involving contact hunting (Granovetter,
6 1974), self-promotion (Higgins et al., 2003), impression management
7 (Bolino & Turnley, 2003), and use of influence tactics (Judge & Bretz, 1994).
8 The success of such campaigns depends critically on individual competencies
9 (e.g., political skill) that enable the effective management and projection of
10 positive images across different work environments, especially for images
11 that influence the assessment of performance and career potential.

12 Ferris et al. (2007) characterized *political skill* as "a comprehensive
13 pattern of social competencies, with cognitive, affective, and behavioral
14 manifestations" (p. 291). Theory and research on political skill have sug-
15 gested that this set of competencies enables individuals to astutely diagnose
16 contexts and to effectively calibrate and adapt their behavior and influence to
17 various situational and interpersonal demands (Ferris et al., 2007). Ferris,
18 Treadway and colleagues (2005) suggested that a major benefit of political
19 skill is the ability to navigate effectively between multiple constituencies in
20 creating and managing positive perceptions made by observers. In organiza-
21 tions today, this suggests that those high in political skill are capable of
22 managing divergent interests in a manner that inspires consistently positive
23 ratings of performance, promotability, and compensation from multiple con-
24 stituencies or evaluators.

25 To date, empirical research has reported strong, consistent, and positive
26 predictability of political skill on job performance ratings (e.g., Ferris, Tread-
27 way et al., 2005; Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris, & Hochwarter, 2008; Kolodinsky,
28 Treadway, & Ferris, 2007; Liu et al., 2007; Semadar, Robins, & Ferris, 2006).
29 Theory and research in this area would argue that similar patterns of rela-
30 tionships exist between political skill and career-success measures. In recent
31 meta-analyses, political knowledge and understanding have been shown to be
32 related to salary, promotion, and career satisfaction (Ng et al., 2005). Yet,
33 this research was limited in scope and has not focused on the particular
34 construct of political skill.

35 In the present study, we focus on three typical manifestations of career
36 success, including position attainment, income, and career satisfaction
37 (Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999; Wayne et al., 1997). These vari-
38 ables capture both the objective (i.e., position attainment and income) and
39 subjective (i.e., career satisfaction) dimensions of career success (e.g., Ng
40 et al., 2005). Advancement opportunities or promotions are widely consid-
41 ered to be among the most political decisions made in organizations (Ferris &
42 Judge, 1991). In addition, salary and salary progression both have substan-

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1 tive and symbolic meanings to individuals (Ferris, Blass, Douglas, Kolodinsky,
2 & Treadway, 2003) and often are used by individuals to evaluate their
3 careers (Judge & Bretz, 1994).

4 Further, career satisfaction is one of the most frequently used indicators
5 of subjective career success (Ng et al., 2005). Ferris et al. (2007) suggested
6 that political skill influences one's self-evaluation. Individuals high in political
7 skill develop a sense of personal security because of their ability to read
8 people and situations well, and to act on that knowledge to achieve interpersonal
9 effectiveness. In addition, because political skill generates positive perceptions
10 and behavioral reactions in others (Ferris et al., 2007), it also may
11 enhance individuals' subjective judgments about their career attainments,
12 such as job and career satisfaction (Ng et al., 2005). Thus, enhanced sense of
13 efficacy, together with positive regard by others, give individuals who are
14 high in political skill a sense of career satisfaction. Based on the previous
15 arguments, we formulate the following hypotheses:

16
17 *Hypothesis 1.* Political skill at Time 1 will predict hierarchical
18 position attained at Time 2 (1 year later).

19
20 *Hypothesis 2.* Political skill at Time 1 will predict income at
21 Time 2 (1 year later).

22
23 *Hypothesis 3.* Political skill at Time 1 will predict career satisfaction
24 at Time 2 (1 year later).

24 *Reputation as a Mediator of Political-Skill/Career-Success Relationships*

25
26 *Reputation.* Ferris and colleagues (2003) defined *personal reputation* as a
27 "complex combination of salient personal characteristics and accomplishments,
28 demonstrated behavior, and intended images presented over some
29 period of time" (p. 213). Thus, reputation is a proxy for individuals' observable
30 attributes, past behavior, and performance. Also, because it is a collective
31 perception by others, it can be construed as a socially constructed reality.
32 Reputation often is formed based on a consistent pattern of past behaviors
33 (Ching, Holsapple, & Whinston, 1992; Raub & Weesie, 1990). Because reputation
34 takes both time and effort to build—and is costly but easily damaged
35 by inconsistent behaviors—individuals tend to behave in ways that are consistent
36 with their reputations (Baumeister, 1982). Thus, reputation often is
37 used by observers as a proxy for true ability to predict future behavior and
38 performance (Whitmeyer, 2000).

39 Importantly, reputation is formed both directly through observation and
40 indirectly based on information shared by third parties (Becker, 1982;

1 Emler & Hopkins, 1990; Raub & Weesie, 1990). Bromley (1993) suggested
2 that *reputation* is “a nucleus of interconnected impressions shared and
3 expressed by a high proportion of members of a defined social network” (p.
4 42). Thus, the formation of widely held reputations involves extensive social
5 sharing of information and, therefore, may depend on the focal person’s
6 ability to transmit information effectively that conveys their reputations
7 within their social networks.

8 *Political skill and reputation.* The development and maintenance of repu-
9 tation often involves deliberate actions (Bromley, 1993). Bozeman and
10 Kacmar (1997) argued that people are motivated to manage their impressions
11 because they have a goal of creating and maintaining a certain identity that
12 they find rewarding or useful. Furthermore, Ferris and colleagues (Ferris,
13 Hochwarter, Buckley, Harrell-Cook, & Frink, 1999; Ferris & Judge, 1991)
14 suggested that individuals may use political maneuvering to manipulate repu-
15 tational signaling advantageously.

16 Individuals with political skill are at a vantage point of building their
17 personal reputations because they transmit signals conducive to a favorable
18 image to the public through their proactive networking activities, and the use
19 of influential and situationally appropriate influence tactics (Liu et al., 2007).
20 Tsui (1984) suggested that the most reputationally effective individuals are
21 those who are able to meet the expectations of multiple constituents within a
22 role set. With the social astuteness and adaptive approach to interpersonal
23 influence (Ferris et al., 2002; Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005), it appears that
24 politically skilled individuals are precisely those who will skilfully meet these
25 various expectations, and thereby, form favorable reputations for them-
26 selves. Reputation-related signals of politically skilled individuals also are
27 likely to spread quickly because of well established connections with influ-
28 ential people in their social networks. Finally, in a qualitative investigation,
29 Smith, Plowman, Duchon, and Quinn (2009) found in their field interviews
30 and observations of high-reputation plant managers from 11 manufacturing
31 plants that effective political skill enabled them to influence subordinates in
32 ways that contributed positively to organizational outcomes.

33 *Reputation and career success.* A favorable reputation is conducive to
34 beneficial career outcomes for a number of reasons. First of all, individuals
35 with favorable reputations may, in fact, perform better. The sponsored-
36 mobility model of career success (Turner, 1960) suggests that early impres-
37 sions by decision makers are very important in advancement or promotion
38 decisions. Those who are able to create favorable impressions in their early
39 career stages receive greater attention and career sponsorship from the elites
40 in their organization, which help them to gain competitive advantage in the
41 career tournament, eventually leading to career success (Cooper, Graham, &
42 Dyke, 1993; Rosenbaum, 1989; Wayne et al., 1997). Thus, it is reasonable to

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1 expect that favorable reputations will make individuals stand out from other
2 employees, and receive career sponsorship and career success.

3 Moreover, reputable individuals also are perceived as being more power-
4 ful, capable, and attuned to the workings of the organization (Ferris et al.
5 2003; Gioia & Sims, 1983). Their manifestation of power may propel others
6 to react positively to their appeals for help or assistance in the hope of
7 immediate or future interpersonal rewards. Consistently, Pfeffer (1992) sug-
8 gested that the powerful image that reputable individuals portray in the eyes
9 of observers over time helps them to gain more power and influence, which
10 permits them to accomplish things with less effort, thus resulting in higher
11 performance and effectiveness.

12 However, besides its performance-enhancing function, reputation also
13 benefits individuals through performance-irrelevant mechanisms. It has been
14 suggested that performance evaluation and organizational reward allocation
15 involve complex cognitive, affective, and social processes that are character-
16 ized by a great deal of ambiguity and uncertainty (Ferris, Judge, Rowland, &
17 Fitzgibbons, 1994; Ferris et al., 2008). From the cognitive perspective,
18 because of limited personal and cognitive resources typically allocated to
19 performance-evaluation and reward-allocation decisions (Judge & Bretz,
20 1994), as well as lack of complete information (Spence, 1973), decision
21 makers often depend on salient—but non-performance-related—cues to
22 assist decisions (Allen & Rush, 1998; Spence, 1973).

23 With its origin in the field of economics, signaling theory argues that
24 decisions such as hiring and promotions often are made with incomplete
25 information, and decision makers must rely on cues, or *signals*, that convey
26 information about the ratee's intentions or abilities (Spence, 1973). Zinko
27 et al. (2007) suggested that a principal aspect of reputation's value to raters is
28 that the intended images presented over some period of time by employees
29 tend to result in the formation of more stable, consistent perceptions, which
30 reduce ambiguity about expected future behavior. Thus, reputation reduces
31 uncertainty and ambiguity for decision makers through the important sig-
32 naling function that it serves.

33 From the affective perspective, raters react to perceived information
34 about focal employees with emotions, which further influence decision
35 making (Ferris & Judge, 1991). Information about focal employees is stored
36 in memory with different emotion labels, which tends to be recalled auto-
37 matically when making performance-related decisions (cf. Schwarz, 2000).
38 This affective information regarding the focal employee that is retrieved will,
39 in turn, influence raters' perceptions and evaluations regarding the attributes
40 and qualities of these focal employees (cf. Isen, 2000). In addition, good
41 reputations likely generate good feelings about individuals, such as interper-
42 sonal liking (Johnson, Erez, Kiker, & Motowidlo, 2002), which have been

1 shown to predict positive reactions to individuals, including favorable
2 performance ratings and reward allocation (e.g., Cardy & Dobbins, 1986;
3 Judge & Ferris, 1993; Kolodinsky et al., 2007).

4 From the social perspective, when making human-resource decisions
5 (e.g., pay raises, promotions), decision makers frequently are pressured to
6 justify their decisions among multiple constituencies. Because future perfor-
7 mance of employees always involves uncertainty, selecting reputable indi-
8 viduals may help justify decision makers' choices, and reduce their potential
9 liability for making wrong decisions when the person chosen fails to deliver
10 effective performance (Bok, 1993).

11 Besides obtaining pay-raise and promotion opportunities, reputation
12 may contribute to career satisfaction because it indicates one's success in
13 building a desirable image (Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997; Doby & Caplan,
14 1995). Further, because reputation ultimately is "given" by others (e.g.,
15 Bromley, 1993), favorable reputation also reflects social inclusion and
16 acceptance (de Cremer & Tyler, 2005), as well as others' respect and grant-
17 ing of status and power (Gioia & Sims, 1983). Thus, gaining reputation also
18 helps satisfy individuals' needs for belonging and power, which likely con-
19 tribute to a sense of career satisfaction. Thus, based on the previous argu-
20 ments, it is proposed that reputation will serve as a mediator of the
21 relationships between political skill and career success. More specifically, we
22 hypothesize the following:

23
24 *Hypothesis 4.* The relationship between political skill and posi-
25 tion attainment 1 year later will be mediated by reputation.

26 *Hypothesis 5.* The relationship between political skill and
27 income 1 year later will be mediated by reputation.

28 *Hypothesis 6.* The relationship between political skill and career
29 satisfaction 1 year later will be mediated by reputation.

30
31 It is important to note that although income/salary, position attainment,
32 and career satisfaction have been found to represent conceptually distinct
33 aspects of career success (Ng et al., 2005), these various indicators are not
34 totally independent of one another. Because it is quite common for some of
35 the same individuals to be responsible for making decisions about perfor-
36 mance ratings, promotability, and salary for a particular individual, it is
37 inevitable that there will be cross-decision biases, driven by the same
38 political-skill competencies that help manage effective reputation percep-
39 tions. Objective and subjective dimensions of career success also tend to be
40 significantly correlated (Ng et al., 2005). However, it seems to be the case that
41 the higher an individual's political skill, the greater will be the reputation

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1 perceived by evaluators and, thus, the greater will be the attainment of
2 different career outcomes. Therefore, we propose the following:

3
4 *Hypothesis 7.* The career-success indicators of position attain-
5 ment, income, and career satisfaction will be significantly
6 interrelated.

7
8 Method

9
10 *Research Design, Sample, and Procedure*

11
12 The present study was conducted predictively, with a time span of 1 year
13 involving two waves of data collection. We contacted 338 employees in
14 Germany. The participants were sent questionnaires and prepaid return
15 envelopes. In Wave 1, the employees were asked to report on their political
16 skill and to indicate their age and gender. One year later (Wave 2), the
17 participants of Wave 1 were contacted again and were asked to report on
18 their reputation at work and to indicate their current hierarchical position,
19 income, and career satisfaction.

20 In the first wave, 202 employees returned their questionnaires, while in the
21 second wave, 180 employees returned their questionnaires. We had complete
22 data over both waves from 135 employees. The Wave 2 sample did not differ
23 (*t* tests) from the sample in Wave 1 with respect to age and gender proportion
24 (χ^2 test). The final sample was composed of 135 employees (99 males, 36
25 females). Participants' age was 35.2 years ($SD = 5.3$).

26
27 *Measures*

28
29 *Political skill.* Political skill was measured with the German translation
30 (Blickle et al., 2008) of the Political Skill Inventory (PSI; Ferris, Treadway
31 et al., 2005). The scale is comprised of 18 items. Sample items are "At work,
32 I know a lot of important people and am well connected," and "I understand
33 people very well." Items were rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging
34 from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). In the present study, Cron-
35 bach's alpha (α) reliability for the PSI was .76.

36 *Career success.* To measure career success, in Wave 2 the employees were
37 asked to report their current hierarchical position within their present
38 company on a scale ranging from 0% (*bottom*) to 100% (*top*). Additionally,
39 they were asked to report their current annual gross income in Euros. Such
40 self-reports have been shown to correlate highly with archival company

1 records (e.g., Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995; Turban & Dougherty,
2 1994). Career satisfaction was assessed using the method employed by
3 Weymann (2001), with 14 items reflecting satisfaction with various aspects of
4 career, such as fit between job content and education, rank attained, and
5 current income. Responses were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very*
6 *unsatisfied*) to 5 (*very satisfied*). Coefficient alpha of the career satisfaction
7 scale was .84.

8 *Reputation.* As in previous research (e.g., Hochwarter, Ferris, Zinko,
9 Arnell, & James, 2007; Liu et al., 2007), we used a self-report measure of
10 reputation. This is appropriate because individuals gain knowledge and
11 understanding of their own reputations by the way others behave toward
12 them (Emler & Hopkins, 1990). Prior research has demonstrated that self-
13 reports of personal reputation are significantly related to peer reports
14 (Hochwarter et al., 2007; Liu et al., 2007). Therefore, we measured reputa-
15 tion with four items of Eby, Butts, and Lockwood's (2003) Marketability
16 Scale, because these items reflect the collective perceptions of others at work.
17 A German version of the items was generated and back-translated to Ameri-
18 can English. The back-translation was then compared with the original items
19 by an American professor of management. No discrepancies were detected. A
20 sample item of the scale is "My company views me as an asset to the orga-
21 nization." Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly*
22 *disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach's alpha of the reputation scale
23 was .75.

24 *Control variables.* Previous research has shown gender (Bowen, Swim, &
25 Jacobs, 2000) and age (i.e., Waldman & Avolio, 1986) to have an impact on
26 career success. Therefore, gender and age served as control variables in the
27 present analyses.

28 29 *Data Analyses*

30
31 We tested the hypotheses with hierarchical regression analyses (Cohen,
32 Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). In order to test Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3,
33 hierarchical position, income, and career satisfaction in Wave 2 were
34 regressed on political skill (entered in Step 2) with the effects of gender and
35 age controlled (entered in Step 1).

36 We used standard procedures for mediation analyses (Baron & Kenny,
37 1986; Cohen et al., 2003; Sobel, 1982) to test Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6. To test
38 these mediation hypotheses, we added reputation in Step 3 of the aforemen-
39 tioned regression models. If reputation explains additional variance and the
40 beta weight of political skill drops significantly in the Step 3, then an impor-
41 tant condition for mediation is fulfilled (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Then, we

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1 tested additionally whether political skill predicted reputation and whether
2 reputation predicted the different measures of career success (Baron &
3 Kenny, 1986).

4 When the aforementioned conditions for mediation were met, we con-
5 ducted Sobel (1982) tests. The existence of mediation is established if all of
6 these analyses turn out to be significant. Complete mediation exists if the beta
7 weight of political skill at Step 3 is no longer significant; while partial medi-
8 ation exists if the beta weight of political skill at Step 3 has dropped signifi-
9 cantly but remains significant (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

11 Results

12 *Descriptive Statistics and Regression Analyses*

13 Means and correlations of the variables are presented in Table 1. All of
14 the correlations were consistent with the prediction and mediation hypothe-
15 ses. Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 postulated that political skill in Wave 1 would
16 predict hierarchical position, income, and career satisfaction in Wave 2. As
17 Table 2 (Step 2) shows, political skill in Wave 1 indeed predicted hierarchical
18 position ($\beta = .37, p < .005$) 1 year later after controlling for gender and age.
19 This confirms Hypothesis 1. As shown in Table 2 and as expected, political
20 skill in Wave 1 also predicted income ($\beta = .25, p < .005$) 1 year later. This
21 confirms Hypothesis 2. Finally, as shown in Table 2, political skill in Wave 1
22 also predicted career satisfaction ($\beta = .25, p < .005$) 1 year later. This confirms
23 Hypothesis 3.
24
25

26 *Mediation Analysis*

27 Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 postulated that reputation would mediate between
28 political skill in Wave 1 and hierarchical position, income, and satisfaction in
29 Wave 2. As seen in Table 2 (Step 3), the reputation variable predicted hier-
30 archical position ($\beta = .21, p < .05$), income ($\beta = .25, p < .05$), and career sat-
31 isfaction ($\beta = .29, p < .005$). The beta weight of political skill predicting
32 hierarchical position dropped from $.37 (p < .0005)$ to $.28 (p < .005)$; the beta
33 weight of political skill predicting income dropped from $.25 (p < .005)$ to $.14$
34 ($p > .05$); and the beta weight of political skill predicting career satisfaction
35 dropped from $.25 (p < .005)$ to $.13 (p > .05)$; see Table 2). This is in line with
36 the mediation hypotheses.
37
38

39 Additionally, political skill significantly predicted reputation and reputa-
40 tion significantly predicted the different measures of career success (Baron &

Table 1
 Means, Coefficient Alpha Reliabilities, and Correlations of Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender, Wave 1	1.26	0.44	—						
2. Age, Wave 1	35.21	5.27	-.10	—					
3. Overall PSI, Wave 1	5.16	0.79	-.11	-.15	(.76)				
4. Reputation, Wave 2	3.65	0.77	-.13	.02	.42**	(.75)			
5. Income, Wave 2	62557.61	26741.99	-.23**	.15	.24**	.33**	—		
6. Position, Wave 2	67.14	23.32	-.13	.09	.36**	.34**	.26**	—	
7. Satisfaction, Wave 2	3.82	0.56	.02	.02	.24**	.34**	.28**	.33**	(.84)

Note. N = 135. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female.

*p < .05 (two-tailed). **p < .01 (two-tailed tests).

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Table 2

Hierarchical Regression Analyses and Sobel Tests

Predictor	Hierarchical position, Wave 2		Income, Wave 2		Career satisfaction, Wave 2	
	B	ΔR^2	B	ΔR^2	B	ΔR^2
Step 1		.024		.070*		.001
Gender	-.125		-.220*		.023	
Age	.081		.128		.020	
Step 2		.134***		.059*		.061**
Gender	-.078		-.189*		.054	
Age	.142		.168*		.060	
Political skill, Wave 1	.373***		.248**		.250**	
Step 3		.037*		.051*		.069**
Gender	-.061		-.169*		.078	
Age	.127		.151		.040	
Political skill, Wave 1	.284**		.144		.128	
Reputation, Wave 2	.212*		.248*		.293**	
R^2		.195***		.180***		.131***
Sobel test		Z = 2.21*		Z = 2.48*		Z = 2.74*

Note. N = 135. Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female. Income was measured in Euro (€).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$, *** $p < .0005$ (all two-tailed).

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1 Kenny, 1986; see Table 1). Finally, the Sobel tests for hierarchical position
2 ($Z = 2.21$, $p < .05$), income ($Z = 2.48$, $p < .05$), and satisfaction ($Z = 2.74$,
3 $p < .05$) were significant. Thus, the results support a partial mediation by
4 reputation between political skill and hierarchical position and a complete
5 mediation by reputation between political skill and income, and between
6 political skill and career satisfaction.

7 8 *Structural Equation Modeling*

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10 In an additional statistical analysis, we integrated all variables
11 simultaneously in one structural equation model (Jöreskog & Sörbom,
12 2002). That is, instead of calculating for each dependent variable one
13 mediation analysis, we calculated a conjoint mediation analysis for all three
14 dependent variables by controlling for the measurement errors and the
15 interdependencies between the dependent variables (Bollen, 1989). In order
16 to have two indicators for each construct, the PSI scale, the reputation
17 scale, and the career satisfaction scale were each cut into two halves, one
18 with the odd-numbered items and one with the even-numbered items.
19 Income and position were used as indicators for the construct of extrinsic
20 career success. Thus, our latent constructs were political skill, reputation,
21 career satisfaction, and extrinsic career success. We started from a covari-
22 ance matrix of the variables and use maximum likelihood parameter
23 estimates.

24 As expected, in the two-predictor model (PSI, reputation), political skill
25 neither predicted career satisfaction nor extrinsic career success, whereas
26 reputation predicted both significantly. The overall model fit parameters
27 (Spector, 2001) were as follows: $\chi^2(19) = 35.52$, $p = .01$; root mean square
28 error of approximation (RMSEA) = .08. In the mediation model, political
29 skill significantly predicted reputation ($\beta = .59$), and reputation predicted
30 career satisfaction ($\beta = .47$) and extrinsic career success ($\beta = .88$). The
31 overall model fit parameters were as follows: $\chi^2(21) = 38.59$, $p = .01$;
32 RMSEA = .08.

33 Because the mediation model has two more degrees of freedom, it is more
34 parsimonious (Bollen, 1989). Because the decrease of the chi-square value,
35 $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 3.07$, in the more restricted two-predictor model was not a signifi-
36 cant improvement over the more parsimonious model, the more parsimoni-
37 ous model should be preferred (Bollen, 1989). The partial mediation model
38 had the same overall fit as did the two-predictor model. In addition, in the
39 partial mediation model, PSI neither significantly predicted career satisfac-
40 tion nor extrinsic career success. In sum, these structural equation modeling
41 results additionally provide support for our hypotheses.

1 Discussion

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3 The political view of organizations has generated a considerable amount
4 of research in the past few decades. The recognition of organizations as a
5 political arena reveals the important role of individual competencies (e.g.,
6 political skill) in individuals' career advancement and success. Using data
7 that followed participants' careers over a period of 1 year, the current study
8 demonstrates convincing evidence that political skill helps individuals to
9 obtain early career success in its extrinsic, objective, and intrinsic dimensions.

10
11 *Contributions of the Present Study*

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13 The study makes important contributions to the literature. This investi-
14 gation tested some central predictions from the meta-theoretical framework
15 of political skill by Ferris et al. (2007), and theory and research on reputation
16 in organizations (Ferris et al., 2003; Zinko et al., 2007). In support of Ferris
17 and colleagues' (2007) theoretical framework of political skill, the present
18 results suggest that political skill is an effective predictor of the subsequent
19 career-success measures of hierarchical position, income, and career satisfac-
20 tion attained. To our knowledge, this is the first study that has examined the
21 main effects of political skill on career outcomes using a predictive design,
22 which adds to the knowledge base of both the organizational-politics and the
23 career-success literatures.

24 Based on their meta-analysis, Ng and colleagues (2005) pointed out that
25 future research on career success should consider variables that reflect the
26 political reality of promotion decision making, including building network
27 ties and individual characteristics that help increase one's visibility within the
28 organization. Political skill appears to represent such a variable that helps
29 reveal the political factor in human-resource decisions within organizations.
30 The finding that political skill appeared to make a difference over time
31 provides strong support for the political metaphor of careers that views
32 careers as political campaigns (Inkson, 2004).

33 Moreover, in support of Ferris and colleagues' (Ferris et al., 2003; Zinko
34 et al., 2007) theoretical framework of reputation in organizations, the present
35 results suggest that reputation mediated the effects of political skill on all
36 three career-success measures studied (i.e., hierarchical position, income,
37 career satisfaction). The fact that reputation, as a socially constructed reality,
38 explained the relationships between political skill and career outcomes
39 reflects the notion proposed earlier by Ferris and colleagues (e.g., Ferris
40 et al., 1994) that the essence of organizational politics is about the creation
41 and management of shared meaning. However, although part of the political-

1 skill/hierarchical-position relationship was mediated by reputation, there was
2 also a direct influence of political skill on hierarchical position attained 1 year
3 later, demonstrating that promotion decisions are not only influenced by
4 reputation, but also directly by political activity in organizations.

5 Finally, the present investigation has contributed to the emerging litera-
6 ture on reputation in organizations by examining the contribution of political
7 skill in the formation of reputation. The results of our study provide evidence
8 that political skill plays a vital role in developing a favorable personal repu-
9 tation, unveiling the political nature of reputation and confirming the prior
10 notion that reputation building involves deliberative effort (e.g., Bozeman &
11 Kacmar, 1997; Bromley, 1993).

12 *Limitations and Strengths of the Present Study*

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15 One limitation of this study is the self-reported nature of the variables of
16 interest. However, self-reports have been shown to correlate highly with
17 archival company records (Judge et al., 1995; Turban & Dougherty, 1994).
18 For example, Liu et al. (2007) found that self-reports of reputation at the
19 workplace and assessments by two other persons from the same workplace
20 exhibited a great level of agreement ($.72 \leq ICC2 \leq .73$).

21 Another limitation of the present study is that the mediator variable was
22 measured at the same time as the criteria. In an ideal study, it would have
23 been preferable to measure the mediator variable at an intermediate point in
24 time between the predictor and the criteria. However, all statistical mediator
25 analyses were consistent with a mediator interpretation of the data.

26 This study also exhibited several strengths that increase confidence in the
27 validity of the findings. First, the study had an accepted and solid theoretical
28 foundation. Second, the predictor and criteria variables were separated by 1
29 year to help mitigate potential consistency bias.

30 *Directions for Future Research*

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33 The mechanisms through which political skill influence performance and
34 career outcomes require continuous investigation. Besides reputation, other
35 factors, such as network position (Ferris et al., 2007), personal power
36 (Pfeffer, 1992), and access to information (Jawahar et al., 2008) also have
37 been suggested to be influenced by political skill. The relationships between
38 these potential mediators with political skill and its outcomes deserve schol-
39 arly attention.

40 The role of political skill in reputation building and maintenance also can
41 be examined further. Drawing on the branding literature in marketing,

1 Ranft, Zinko, Ferris, and Buckley (2006) discussed how reputable CEOs of
2 large corporations, like celebrities, build with the help of media “brands” for
3 themselves that are so unique and strong representing “deep brands” that no
4 longer need to promote themselves. If this branding metaphor applies to all
5 political actors on the within-organization platform, how these actors choose
6 their branding target, media, and branding tactics to build a strong and
7 favorable brand image is an interesting question to explore. Finally, a poten-
8 tially fruitful area for future research is studying the underlying mechanisms
9 that explain how reputation delivers its impact on career-related outcomes;
10 for example, whether reputation enhances career success through greater
11 objective performance, or primarily through performance-irrelevant cogni-
12 tive, affective, or social mechanisms discussed earlier.

13 *Practical Implications*

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15
16 The most obvious implication of the study is that it is important for
17 individuals pursuing career success to develop their political skill and repu-
18 tation at work. It appears that in their early careers, individuals high in
19 political skill not only obtain pay increases and promotions faster than do
20 others, they also enjoy better reputations and a higher sense of career satis-
21 faction. Prior research has suggested that political skill is an individual
22 competency that can be enhanced through training (Ferris, Davidson et al.,
23 2005). Thus, individuals may consider improving their political skill through
24 mentoring or training, and by navigating more proactively their social envi-
25 ronment at work, so that they enrich their political knowledge and under-
26 standing, and learn to deliver interpersonal influence more effectively.

27 From the organization’s perspective, the present study—along with many
28 others that indicate the existence of rater bias—provides a point of caution
29 for organizational decision makers. The fact that political skill and reputa-
30 tion influenced raters’ reward decisions regarding focal employees suggests
31 that biases are likely an inherent part of human-resource decisions. There-
32 fore, it is critical that decision makers become aware of the potential impact
33 of their perceptions, affect, and social concerns in their evaluations, and be
34 diligent to avoid these elements from unfairly affecting employees’ ability to
35 obtain rewards they deserve.

36 The present study suggests that political skill predicts hierarchical posi-
37 tion, income, and career satisfaction over time. Furthermore, the findings
38 suggest that the relationships between political-skill and career-success out-
39 comes were mediated by employees’ reputation in the workplace. We hope
40 that this study will generate more research interest in the political perspective
41 on organizations, and on issues regarding the role of politics and political
42 skill in job and career success.

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