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How Work Context and Age Shape Political Skill

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Purpose – This study seeks to predict increases in political skill, and more specifically networking ability, based on hierarchical position, time involvement, and the moderating effects of job incumbents' age.

Design/methodology/approach – These hypotheses were tested in a panel design with hierarchical regression analyses over two years with 150 works councillors from Germany. Self-reported political skill, time involvement, and position were measured at time 1, and political skill was measured again two years later.

Findings – Works council members increase their political skill when they hold a higher position and have more time involvement. Further, councillors' age was found to moderate these relationships. That is, older councillors develop political skill (specifically networking ability) at a higher rate than middle aged employees.

Research limitations – Future research should test the hypotheses in different populations and also include other-ratings of political skill.

Practical implications – It might not always be necessary to have available relevant social skills for a new job already, as these skills can develop over time.

Social implications – Political skill is a resource at the workplace with the potential to promote fairness, health, and well-being.

Originality/value – The present findings add a new perspective to interpersonal skill development: certain job demands moderated by age can change a job incumbent's social skills, particularly networking ability, over time and make her or him more capable of doing well. Thus, it is not always necessary to have available relevant social skills for a new job, as these relevant skills can developed within the context of the new job.

Key words: Political skill; learning on the job; networking ability; social skill development

How Work Context and Age Shape Political Skill

The development of interpersonal skills has been an important practical and scholarly endeavor for more than three decades (Eisler and Frederiksen, 1980; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981; Silvester, 2008). Organizations annually spend more than \$125 billion on executive and employee development and learning in an attempt to increase the interpersonal effectiveness of their management and trainees (Stern, 2011). They do this because interpersonal skills have been identified as being paramount for career success, job performance, and acquiring influence in organizations, especially in jobs which involve influencing and leading others (e.g., Blickle, John et al., 2012; Lievens and Sackett, 2012; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, and Feldman, 2005; Pfeffer, 2010).

Within the domain of interpersonal skills at work the multi-dimensional political skill construct often has been utilized in organizational research (Blickle, Fröhlich, et al., 2011; Ferris, Treadway, Brouer, and Munyon, 2012). It consists of interpreting communication and the behavior of others in the workplace (i.e., social astuteness), behavioral flexibility (i.e., interpersonal influence), developing friendship and alliances (i.e., networking ability), and demonstrating honesty and integrity (i.e., apparent sincerity) (Ferris and Hochwarter, 2011). Political skill has been described as containing components that are innate (e.g., dispositions) and those that are learned (e.g., based on mentoring), and has demonstrated effects on performance and career success (Blickle, Kramer et al., 2011; Blickle, Schneider, Liu, and Ferris, 2011; Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005; Ferris, Treadway, Perrewé, Brouer, Douglas, and Lux, 2007). Yet, it remains equivocal how individuals may develop political skill autonomously—that is without formal training and mentoring. Thus, this paper attempts to delineate two situational factors which contribute to some employees developing political skill in comparison to their counterparts, namely, hierarchical level in the organization and formal time involvement in the job council.

Thus, this study contributes to the existing body of literature in the following ways. First, little systematic effort has been devoted to determining the conditions in which individuals in the workplace develop interpersonal skills on their own as opposed to formal training, even though prior research has described that political skill can be acquired or developed on the job (e.g., using mentoring, Ferris et al., 2008; Pfeffer, 2010). Second, more research needs to include contextual factors for theoretical development and empirical examination of constructs and phenomenon (Johns, 2006; Rousseau and Fried, 2001). Third, we investigated the potential moderating role of age of job incumbents in bringing about change in political skill, specifically the networking ability dimension.

We address this deficiency by examining political skill development across a two-year window using employees, namely works councillors (i.e., legally and formally elected employee representatives at the work place in Germany) (Dribbusch and Birke, 2012). In many European countries and especially in Germany, members of the works council are elected by the work force, and the works council's rights and duties are specified by law. The works council negotiates working time and breaks, the form of remuneration, the principles of leave arrangements, the introduction and use of technical devices, the protection of health and accident prevention, and the fixing of job and bonus rates (Mintzberg, 1983, chap. 27).

Theory and Hypotheses Development

Political Skill

Pfeffer (1981) and Mintzberg (1983) independently developed and articulated political perspectives on organizations, each using the term *political skill* in reference to an important set of interpersonal competencies. Pfeffer argued that to be successful in organizations, individuals must understand political dynamics and complex power structures. Mintzberg reasoned that political skill referred to the exercise of influence through building coalitions, negotiation, and persuasion. And, if organizations can be characterized as political arenas,

then acquisition or development of political skill was fundamental for surviving and successfully navigating organizational dynamics.

Two decades later, Ferris et al. (2007, p. 331) proposed a conceptualization of political skill in organizations that considers the effects on both self and others, and defined it as, “the ability to effectively understand others at work, and use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and/or organizational objectives.” This characterized political skill as a coherent and comprehensive pattern of social competencies, which demonstrated direct effects on work outcomes as well as moderating effects on predictor – outcome relationships. Individuals high in political skill are able to combine their social acuity with the resilience and adaptability to select and demonstrate situationally-appropriate behavior, and to do so utilizing a style that is authentic, genuine, and sincere, inspires trust and support, and exercises control and influence over the responses of others.

Political skill has been associated with the capacity to manipulate people, to foment, and utilize factions for personal gain, a disregard for others in the pursuit of selfish aims, etc. (Mintzberg, 1983). This one-sided view has neglected the potential of political behavior as source of information, as a legitimate form of voice with the potential to generate, maintain or alter shared meaning, and the capacity to promote justice, fairness, health, and well-being (Hochwarter, 2012). Therefore, a growing number of scholars regard political behavior in neutral ways which is neither inherently positive nor inherently negative (Ferris and Hochwarter, 2011). This view is supported by a study by Smith, Plowman, Duchon, and Quinn (2009), which observed that politically skilled leaders possessed self-motivation, a sense of humility and a likable/affable style.

Political Skill and Employee Learning

“Strategically changing individual attributes to become more personally effective is both possible and desirable” (Pfeffer, 2010, p. 39). Lankau and Scandura (2002) label this

type of learning as personal skill development, and define it as, “the acquisition of new skills/abilities that enable better working relationships” (p. 780). Formal training programs and mentoring have been found to be effective vehicles for political skill development (Ferris et al., 2008; Harvey, and Novicevic, 2004; Lankau and Scandura, 2002; Whiteman, 2004). However, the ability for employees to develop political skill through their own means is a path that needs further elucidation.

The developmental features of some jobs represent challenging situations, because they provide two important aspects of learning situations: opportunity (i.e., the situation provides a platform for trying new behavior or reframing old ways of thinking or acting) and motivation (i.e., a desire to close the gap between actual and desired levels of job competency, to achieve an outcome with significant reward potential, to avoid a negative outcome, or to reduce the discomfort of a painful situation) to learn (McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, and Morrow, 1994). Challenging jobs tend to have one or more of the following components: new situations with unfamiliar responsibilities, tasks or projects that require the individual to create change, manage across organizational boundaries, build relationships with diverse people, and high level, high latitude responsibilities (McCauley et al., 1994). These components are positively correlated with job incumbents’ reports of on-the-job-learning (McCall, Lombardo, and Morrison, 1988).

Hierarchical position in organizations and political skill. Within most organizations, the organizational hierarchy is faced with the need for individuals to have and / or acquire more people skills in order to be effective (Ferris, Davison, and Perrewé, 2005). As employees “climb the organizational ladder”, there is a greater need to develop and leverage relationships, exercise influence over multiple groups, and mobilize resources as needed (Finkelstein, Hambrick, and Cannella, 2009). Furthermore, the organizational environment is

often characterized as political (Mintzberg, 1983), and the ability to manage that environment is critical for success (Ferris et al., 2007).

These political situations provide opportunities for learning as they are often challenging. The resulting challenges and opportunities afforded to individuals vary as a function of the position, with higher levels of responsibilities and more obstacles to overcome corresponding with higher positions (Hall, 2002; Kelleher, Finestone, and Lowry 1986; McCall et al., 1988; Field and Harris, 1991). Further, due to span of control and the need to leverage multiple organizational arenas, the higher the hierarchical position an individual holds, the more necessary it is to develop and access social capital. Consequently, individuals in higher hierarchical positions are provided with more opportunities to develop political skill due to the responsibilities and tasks associated with that higher position (cf. Halevy, Chou, and Galinsky, 2011). Thus, we expect individuals to differentially develop their political skill.

Hypothesis 1. Hierarchical position in the works council is positively related to improvement on networking ability and therefore the improvement on the composite score of political skill.

Formal time involvement in the works council and political skill. The development of political skill takes time and is the result of habit and hard work, whereas a lack of time and effort is why some individuals do not succeed (Pfeffer, 2010). Further, the development of social capital does not occur instantaneously, as time is needed to develop the skill to cultivate networks and leverage social capital. Consequently, the higher the formal time involvement of individuals in political jobs, the more challenging situations will be thrust upon them, which should lead to the development of political skill. Thus, we argue that not only does hierarchical position affect political skill development but also the objective amount of time available for learning is important (Johns, 2006; Schmidt and Hunter, 2004).

Hypothesis 2. Formal time involvement of employees in a political job is positively related to improvement on their networking ability and therefore the improvement on the composite score of political skill.

The moderating role of employee age. Moving forward with the developmental component of political skill, we expect differences in political skill development (especially networking ability) across positions and time involvement. Although we expect the position of the employee in a political job and the time involvement to positively affect political skill development, research has demonstrated the positive effect that age has on work outcomes. Based on in prior meta-analyses, age is often used as a reflector of experience known to affect employee attitudes and performance (Ng and Feldman, 2010; Waldman and Avolio, 1986). As individuals age, they arguably develop a repertoire of experiences that enable them to more correctly identify and act on situations to influence others. Thus, age may strengthen political skill development related to position and formal time involvement by giving people additional experiences from which to draw and engage others via social influence mechanisms. These experiences also provide individuals with skills that arguably enable them to more accurately diagnose situations, and respond accordingly. Further, as individuals' age, they also are more cognizant of their limitations, so are more likely to involve others in their decision-making processes. Consequently, the ability to develop social capital that comes from political skill is more recognized by older employees. Thus,

Hypothesis 3. Employees' age moderates the relationship between the position of the employee in a political job and increase in networking ability (and therefore the improvement on the composite score of political skill). With increasing age, the relationship between position and increase in networking ability becomes more positive.

Hypothesis 4. Employees' age moderates the relationship between the time involvement of the employee in a political job and increase in networking ability (and therefore the improvement on the composite score of political skill). With increasing age, the relationship between time involvement and increase in networking ability becomes more positive.

Study Context

A works council is led by the chairperson who is assisted by the deputy-chairperson. Another important position in the works council is being a member of the works committee. The works committee manages the day-to-day business. It is elected by the members of the works council. The members of the works committee have more information and responsibility than regular members. Specifically, the chairman represents the works council in all critical situations, including those opposing management. The most complicated and critical bargaining is conducted with representatives of management (e.g., top management team), and is never left to regular works council members. Here, the chairperson learns to handle delicate situations, which results in the development of interpersonal skills such as negotiation (Dribbusch and Birke, 2012). Additionally, the chairperson is responsible for conducting employee meetings and publicizing the works council's achievements. These situations are characterized by a great deal of responsibility.

A member of the works council often is confronted with sudden and unexpected situations, ranging from employees' personal problems to management/union relations (Dribbusch and Birke, 2012). These challenging learning opportunities of negotiating, networking, and influencing others all provide occasions to develop political skill (Cooper and Kurland, 2002; Kakabadse, Bank, and Vinnicombe, 2004; Kelleher et al., 1986; McCall et al., 1988). In fact, research has demonstrated that spending time directly engaged in activities such as networking, increases their skill in those areas (Burt and Ronchi, 2007).

High positions in a works council come with new challenges and developmental opportunities. Further, the more time works council members are formally involved with their duties, the more opportunities they will have to develop their political skill. Consequently, we examine the position of works council members (Hypothesis 1) and their formal time involvement (Hypothesis 2) as contextual predictors of political skill development and how age moderates these relationships (Hypotheses 3 and 4).

Method

Participants and Procedure

In a previous study on political skill of works council members in Germany 558 works council members participated; 363 of them had provided their email address for future email exchange (Blickle, Oerder, and Summers, 2010). These works council members were contacted again by email in the second wave of the study two years later. As incentives for participating in the study, participants were offered feedback regarding the general findings of the survey as well as consideration in a lottery drawing with the possibility of winning a book package or a subscription for a journal on employment law.

Those who provided their email address for future email exchange did not differ from those who had not provided their email address with respect to gender ($\chi^2(1) = 1.78, p > .05$) and age ($t(552) = -1.65, p > .05$). However, the email address providers consisted of more union members ($\chi^2(1) = 5.38, p < .05$), had higher positions in the works council ($t(558) = -3.65, p < .05$), were more formally involved in the works council job ($t(558) = -4.94, p < .05$), and reported higher levels of political skill ($t(558) = -3.15, p < .05$).

A total of 150 persons took part in the second wave of the study resulting in a 41.32% return rate. Ninety-six participants were male (64%), 54 were female (36%). The mean age of the sample was 46.6 years at time 1 ($SD = 6.8$ years), and 48.8 years at time 2 ($SD = 7.0$ years). We compared those works council members who did not participate ($n = 222$) with

those who participated ($n = 150$) in the second wave of the survey. χ^2 -tests were conducted for gender ($\chi^2(1) = .01, p > .05$) and union-membership ($\chi^2(1) = 1.28, p > .05$), and t-tests were conducted for the other variables (age ($t(370) = 1.95, p > .05$), position in works council in wave 1 ($t(370) = -1.81, p > .05$), time involvement in works council in wave 1 ($t(370) = .461, p > .05$), and political skill ($t(370) = .61, p > .05$) and its facets in wave 1. In sum, no significant differences were found between the two groups. Moreover, the study combines a large sample with an acceptable return rate and minimal selection effects.

Measures

Political skill. The German version (Blickle et al., 2008) of the Political Skill Inventory (PSI) with 18 items was used to assess self-reported political skill (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005) at both waves. The PSI uses a 7-point Likert-type scale that ranges between 1 = *don't agree at all* and 7 = *agree very much*. It consists of four dimensions, namely *Networking ability* (sample item: “*I spend a lot of time and effort at work networking with others*”), *Interpersonal influence* (sample item: “*I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others*”), *Social astuteness* (sample item: “*I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others*”), and *Apparent sincerity* (sample item: “*When communicating with others, I try to be genuine in what I say and do*”). In a validation study, political skill was a second order factor composed of four correlated first order factors (Ferris et al., 2008). Cronbach's alpha of the political skill was $\alpha = .87$ in wave 1 and $\alpha = .91$ in wave 2. Cronbach's alpha of the networking ability scale was $\alpha = .86$ in both waves.

Position in works council. Study participants had been asked in the first wave of the study which position they occupy in their works council. In the first wave of the present study, 64 participants were chairperson of the works council, 28 were deputy-chairperson, 19 were members of the works committee of the works council, and 39 were regular members of the works council. The positions in the works council were coded in the following way:

Chairperson = 4 points, deputy-chairperson = 3 points, member of the works committee = 2 points, regular member of the works council = 1 point.

Formal involvement in works council. Works council members are differentially involved in their board. Some members get an official exemption from their work duties, so they can focus only on their job in the works council. Others still have to fulfil their normal work tasks (halftime or completely) and only work additionally for the works council. Exemptions are legally regulated and depend on the size of the company, with large companies having more exemptions than small companies. In smaller companies even the chairperson of the works council is not exempted from her or his regular work.

Participants were asked in the first wave whether they were fully or partially exempted from her or his other work duties. In the first wave of this study 53 works council members were completely exempted from their ordinary job duties and were fully involved in the works council's job, 17 were partially exempted from their ordinary job duties, while 80 were not exempted from their ordinary job duties, having to do the job on the works council in addition to their regular job. Involvement in works council's job was coded in the following way: Entire exemption = 3 points, part-time exemption = 2 points, and no exemption = 1 point.

Moderator variable. We asked participants to report their age.

Control variables. Because previous research has demonstrated sex to be related to career success and job performance, this variable was controlled in the data analyses (Bowen, Swim, and Jacobs, 2000; Ng et al., 2005). We additionally controlled for union membership, because this is a proxy for social capital at the workplace (i.e., quantity and quality of relationships with others; Ng et al., 2005).

Results

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, coefficient alpha reliability estimates, and correlations among the study variables. As expected, the difference in political skill between time 2 *minus* time 1 ($\Delta PS T2-T1$) was positively associated with hierarchical position in the works council ($r = .17, p < .05$) and formal time involvement ($r = .22, p < .05$). Thus, the higher the position in the works council and the more formal time involvement at wave 1, the bigger the difference in political skill between wave 2 and wave 1. This indicates that position and time involvement in wave 1 impact absolute change in political skill from wave 1 to wave 2. Table 1 shows that even higher correlations were found for the difference in networking ability in time 2 *minus* time 1 ($\Delta NA T2 - T1$) for hierarchical position in works council ($r = .24, p < .05$) and formal time involvement ($r = .28, p < .05$). We also tested the other facets of political skill, to determine if the changes from wave 1 to wave 2 correlated with hierarchical position or formal time involvement. Only change in social astuteness positively associated with time involvement ($r = .18, p < .05$). As expected, all other change scores did not associate with hierarchical position and time involvement.

*** Insert Table 1 about here ***

Test of Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1 states that the higher the position of the employee in a political job in wave 1, the more their networking ability and therefore the overall composite score of political skill will have improved in wave 2. As can be seen in Table 2, position in works council predicts change in networking ability ($\beta = .24, p < .05$). This also is true for column of political skill in Table 2 in Step 3. Position in works council predicts change in political skill ($\beta = .24, p < .05$). However, when change in political skill is predicted while controlling for networking ability in wave 2, position in works council no longer predicts change in political skill ($\beta = .07, p > .05$). These findings support Hypothesis 1. Hierarchical position of the employee in a political job in wave 1 predicts change in networking ability and therefore the overall composite score of in wave 2. However, when

networking ability in the second wave is controlled for, no change based on hierarchical position is associated with political skill.

*** Insert Table 2 about here ***

Test of Hypothesis 2. We postulated that the more extensive the formal time involvement of the employee in a political job in wave 1, the more their networking ability and therefore the overall composite score of political skill will improve in wave 2. The data also support this hypothesis (see Table 2). Formal time involvement showed a positive effect on change in the relative position in political skill ($\beta = .20, p < .05$) in wave 2, thereby explaining 3.3% of incremental variance in the dependent variable. Nominally, even higher beta weights ($\beta = .21, p < .05$) and incremental variance explanation (3.6%) can be found for networking ability as dependent variable (second column). The last column shows networking ability to be the driver of change in political skill, since the significant effect on political skill in wave 2 disappears when additionally entering networking ability in wave 2 into the equation ($\beta = .03, p > .05$). These findings strongly support Hypothesis 2. Formal time involvement predicts change in networking ability and thus increases in the composite score of political skill. If networking ability in wave 2 is controlled for, the effects of position and time involvement disappear.

Test of Hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 3 states that employees' age moderates the relationship between position of the employee in a political job in wave 1 and increase in networking ability (and therefore the overall composite score of political skill) in wave 2. With increasing age, the relationship between position and increase in networking ability (political skill) should become more positive. As can be seen from Step 5a in Table 2, the present data support this hypothesis both for political skill and networking ability. For networking ability in wave 2, we find a significant positive interaction of position in the works council and age ($\beta = .12, p < .05$). When networking ability in wave 2 is controlled for,

with change in political skill the formerly significant effect of the interaction term disappears ($\beta = .05, p > .05$). The plot in Figure 1 shows the interaction. We only present the interaction of networking ability as dependent variable, since both plots show the same shape. For works councillors with higher age ($\text{Mean}_{Age} + 1 \text{SD}_{Age} = 55.75$ years), hierarchical position in the works council positively relates to networking ability ($b = .19, p < .05$); for younger works councillors ($\text{Mean}_{Age} - 1 \text{SD}_{Age} = 42.11$), there was not a significant relationship ($b = .01, p > .05$).

insert Figure 1 about here

Test of Hypothesis 4. Hypothesis 4 states that employees' age moderates the relationship between formal time involvement of the employee in a political job in wave 1 and increase in networking ability (and therefore the overall composite score of political skill) in wave 2. With increasing age, the relationship between formal time involvement and increases in networking ability (and the overall composite score of political skill) should become more positive. As can be seen from Step 5b in Table 2, the present data also support this hypothesis both for political skill and networking ability. For networking ability in wave 2, we found a significant positive interaction of position in works council and age ($\beta = .12, p < .05$). When networking ability in wave 2 is controlled, for with change in political skill, the formerly significant effect of the interaction term disappears ($\beta = .02, p > .05$). The plot in Figure 2 shows the exact relationship. We only present the interaction of networking ability as dependent variable, since both plots show the same shape. For works councillors with higher age ($\text{Mean}_{Age} + 1 \text{SD}_{Age} = 55.75$ years), formal time involvement in the works council is positively related to networking ability ($b = .24, p < .05$); for younger works councillors ($\text{Mean}_{Age} - 1 \text{SD}_{Age} = 42.11$) there was no significant relationship between formal time involvement and change in networking ability ($b = .05, p > .05$).

insert Figure 2 about here

Discussion

Interpersonal skills are necessary in order to function and thrive in organizational life (Ferris et al., 2007; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 2010) especially in jobs which involve influencing and leading others. We endeavored in this study to determine if individuals in the workplace develop political skill (i.e., interpersonal skills in the workplace), as a result of contextual factors, which promote the personal learning and development of political skill, with particular focus on the networking dimension. Prior research was equivocal regarding political skill development (i.e., do individuals only develop political skill via direct training or can they develop political skill autonomously?), and the current findings support the position that political skill (i.e., specifically the networking dimension) can be increased autonomously.

A major tenet of the Ferris et al. (2007) theory of political skill is that it can be developed through training and socialization. However, only one study has investigated this important tenet (i.e., Ferris et al., 2008), which only examined mentoring. Thus, the investigation of autonomous factors (i.e., those outside formal training and mentoring) provide important extensions of the Ferris et al. (2007) theoretical framework by providing more evidence that political skill is developmental. Further, Mayer (2005) argued that personality is socially adaptive, and includes social skills, role knowledge, and emotionally preferred expressions. However, Mayer's theoretical arguments have not been empirically examined in the present context—specifically the situations where individuals develop social skills. The results of this study provide evidence that political skill, specifically the networking ability dimension, can be changed absolutely and relative to others, and situational factors in one's work can predict these changes. The situational factors of hierarchical position in the works council and formal time involvement differentially predict political skill changes across works council members. Specifically, works council members

increase their political skill (i.e., specifically the networking dimension) when they hold a higher position and have more (formal) time involvement. Thus, context (i.e., situational factors) can shape political skill (Johns, 2006; Rousseau and Fried, 2001).

Additionally, we hypothesized and found that age moderated these relationships. Prior research has not found a direct relationship with political skill and age (Ferris et al., 2005). It is interesting that age was a moderator in the development of political skill. Works councillors in their mid to late 50's developed political skill at a higher rate than works councillors at the end of their 40's across position and formal time involvement. However, with works councillors at the beginning of their 40's, position and formal time involvement did not related to networking ability. Age has been found to be highly correlated with organizational tenure, and tenure is related to social capital (Ng and Feldman, 2010); so it is not surprising that older works councillors develop their networking ability. Older employees typically have more experience and are placed in a myriad of situations, which demand a wider range of influence as well as the ability to develop and leverage their social capital.

Strengths and Limitations

Given the complexity of individuals, as well as many contextual and structural factors (e.g., employees nested within groups, which are nested in organizations), we expect a plethora of factors to impact political skill development. We have endeavoured to identify factors that predict political skill development; however, we recognize this potential convolution, and sought not to overstate the conclusions derived from the results. All participants were works council members, which potentially limits the generalizability of the study's findings. However, with a homogenous sample, we were able to minimize the effects of extraneous variables by holding them constant. Another limitation is that self-reports were utilized for information about the position in works council as well as the formal time involvement. However, prior research has demonstrated that self-reports of objective data can

be very accurate in that they correlate strongly with archival company records in other studies (e.g., Blickle, Wendel, and Ferris, 2010; Judge, Cable, Boudreau, and Bretz, 1995; Turban and Dougherty, 1994). As the position in works council and formal time involvement are very salient for the participating works council members (i.e., they can easily recall their positions and exemptions), it is safe to assume that they accurately reported their positions and exemptions. However, future research should assess change in political skill based on other-ratings of political skill.

The study's strengths include the panel design covering a time range of two years, thereby providing a clear temporal ordering of the predictor and dependent variables. In addition, time 1 ratings of the dependent variables were controlled. Furthermore, two years separated the participants' ratings of political skill and networking ability, which attenuates concerns for a consistency bias. Second, the sample stems from one single job context, making it possible to control for some unknown third variables by holding them constant. Further, sex and union membership were statistically controlled, which excludes these variables from the causal space. Fourth, a large sample size promotes higher statistical power (i.e., a higher probability to effectively confirm the true alternative hypotheses).

Directions for Future Research

As this study supports the idea that employees informally can and do develop interpersonal competencies on the job, the next step is to further our search for the mediating processes. More recent research on political skill has called for the need to examine intermediate linkages of political skill and work outcomes (e.g., Ferris, Kane, Summers, and Munyon, 2011). Further, as our findings of political skill development centered on the networking ability dimension, future research needs to elucidate the factors specifically associated with the development of the other dimensions, namely social astuteness, apparent sincerity, and interpersonal influence beyond position, time involvement, and age. Therefore,

another step is to further our search for other predictive factors. For example, does political skill development vary across occupations, or even organization types (e.g., organic versus mechanistic). Mentoring has been found to positively impact political skill development (Ferris et al., 2008), but there are potentially many more predictors of political skill development. For example, individual differences (e.g., proactive personality; openness to experience) also may be viable predictors.

Implications for Practice

The present findings add a new perspective, namely certain job demands can change a job incumbent's social skills, with particular emphasis on networking ability, over time and make her or him more capable of doing well. These developmental opportunities are situations that require the individual to create change, manage across organizational boundaries, build relationships with diverse people, high level, high latitude responsibilities, along with high time involvement. Thus, it is not always necessary to have available relevant social skills for a new job, as these relevant skills can developed within the context of the new job (Roberts, 2006). This is an important point especially for those employees who are tossed in jobs with complex social demands without sufficient training and irrespective of the level of their social skill (Reich and Hershcovis, 2011). However, in highly political jobs, we find that the experience that is associated with age, and likely organizational tenure, positions older workers to take more advantage of these developmental opportunities (Ng and Feldman, 2010).

Another perspective lies in person-job fit, which has received significant attention over the years, and assessing it is a major component of the selection process. Recent research has supported this line of thinking with regards to political skill (Blickle et al., 2009; 2012). Enterprising job demands are characterized by tasks that place a premium on verbal facility used to direct or persuade other people (Holland, 1973). 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 underlying motives of others is critical.

Conclusion

This study attempted to determine whether or not contextual factors within one's work could differentially predict the development of political skill. We found predictive support for the position and formal time involvement of the works council members, which further supports the developmental component of the political skill construct. We hope that this study spurs additional research in this area.

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Table 1 Means, Standard Deviations, Cronbach's Alphas, and Correlations of the Study Variable

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.	19.	20.
1. Sex	.64	.48																				
2. Age	48.9	6.82	.03																			
3. Union Membership	.88	.33	-.02	.06																		
4. Position in T1	2.78	1.25	.09	.26*	-.03																	
5. Time involvement in T1	2.18	.93	.07	.14	.09	.42*																
6. Political Skill - T1	5.59	.63	-.05	.07	-.00	.20*	.14	(.87)														
7. Political Skill - T2	5.42	.68	-.08	.11	-.00	.34*	.33*	.57*	(.91)													
8. Δ Political Skill -T2 – T1	-0.17	.60	-.04	.05	.00	.17*	.22*	-.42*	.50*	(.73)												
9. Networking Ability -T1	5.38	.91	.07	.09	.06	.13	.12	.83*	.52*	-.30*	(.86)											
10. Networking Ability -T2	5.24	.87	.06	.13	.03	.33*	.35*	.58*	.87*	.35*	.69*	(.86)										
11. Δ Networking Ability -T2 – T1	-.14	.70	-.02	.04	-.04	.24*	.28*	-.37*	.39*	.82*	-.45*	.35*	(.65)									
12. Social Astuteness -T1	5.41	.78	-.11	.10	.01	.22*	.14	.84*	.51*	-.32*	.56*	.40*	-.23*	(.72)								
13. Social Astuteness -T2	5.20	.83	-.14	.10	.02	.28*	.30*	.46*	.87*	.48*	.35*	.61*	.30*	.54*	(.81)							
14. Δ Social Astuteness -T2–T1	-.21	.77	-.04	.01	.01	.08	.18*	-.35*	.42*	.83*	-.19*	.26*	.56*	-.42*	.53*	(.68)						
15. Interpers. Influence -T1	5.70	.71	-.06	-.03	-.11	.17*	.04	.69*	.37*	-.32*	.40*	.27*	-.19*	.51*	.30*	-.19*	(.61)					
16. Interpers. Influence -T2	5.46	.71	-.14	-.02	-.05	.23*	.16*	.42*	.79*	.43*	.26*	.56*	.35*	.40*	.62*	.27*	.46*	(.78)				
17. Δ Interpers. Influence -T2–T1	-.24	.74	-.08	.01	.06	.06	.12	-.26*	.40*	.72*	-.14	.28*	.52*	-.10	.31*	.44*	-.51*	.52*	(.59)			
18. Apparent Sincerity -T1	6.21	.90	-.16	.03	-.04	.09	.12	.57*	.21*	-.37*	.24*	.16*	-.11	.41*	.11	-.30*	.31*	.18*	-.12	(.76)		
19. Apparent Sincerity -T2	6.10	.73	-.17*	.12	-.05	.24*	.20*	.32*	.69*	.43*	.19*	.44*	.29*	.29*	.57*	.32*	.22*	.48*	.26*	.31*	(.77)	
20. Δ Apparent Sincerity -T2 – T1	-.11	.97	.02	.06	.00	.10	.04	-.29*	.32*	.67*	-.08	.18*	.33*	-.16*	.32*	.51*	-.12	.19*	.31*	-.70*	.47*	(.71)

Note. $N = 150$; $\Delta T = T2 - T1 = 2$ years; Gender: 0 = female, 1 = male; Union membership: 1 = member, 0 = no member, Position = position in works council (high scores equal high position); Time involvement = time involvement in works council (high scores equal high time involvement); * $p < .05$.

Table 2

Hierarchical Regression Analyses

Criterion at T2 =	Political Skill				Networking ability				Political Skill controlling for Networking Ability at T2			
	β	SE	ΔR^2	R ²	β	SE	ΔR^2	R ²	β	SE	ΔR^2	R ²
1st Step			.020				.021				.020	
Sex	-.09	.11			.06	.15			-.09	.11		
Age	.11	.01			.13	.01			.11	.01		
Union Membership	-.01	.17			.02	.22			-.01	.17		
2nd Step			.315*	.335*			.455*	.476*			.756*	.776*
Sex	-.06	.09			.01	.11			-.13*	.05		
Age	.07	.01			.07	.01			.00	.00		
Union Membership	-.01	.14			-.02	.16			-.03	.08		
Criterion Score T1	.56*	.07			.68**	.06			.09	.05		
Networking Ability in T2									.82*	.04		
3rd Step			.052*	.387*			.054*	.531*			.005	.780*
Sex	-.09	.09			-.01	.10			-.14*	.05		
Age	.01	.01			.01	.01			-.01	.00		
Union Membership	.01	.13			.00	.15			-.02	.08		
Criterion Score T1	.52*	.07			.66*	.06			.09	.05		
Networking Ability in T2									.80**	.04		
Position in works council	.24*	.04			.24*	.04			.07	.02		
4th Step			.033*	.420*			.036*	.567*			.001	.781*
Sex	-.09	.09			-.02	.10			-.14*	.05		
Age	.01	.01			.00	.01			-.02	.00		
Union Membership	-.02	.13			-.02	.15			-.03	.08		
Criterion Score T1	.51*	.07			.64**	.05			.09	.05		
Networking Ability in T2									.79*	.04		
Position in works council	.16*	.04			.16*	.04			.06	.02		
Time involvement in works council	.20*	.05			.21*	.06			.03	.03		

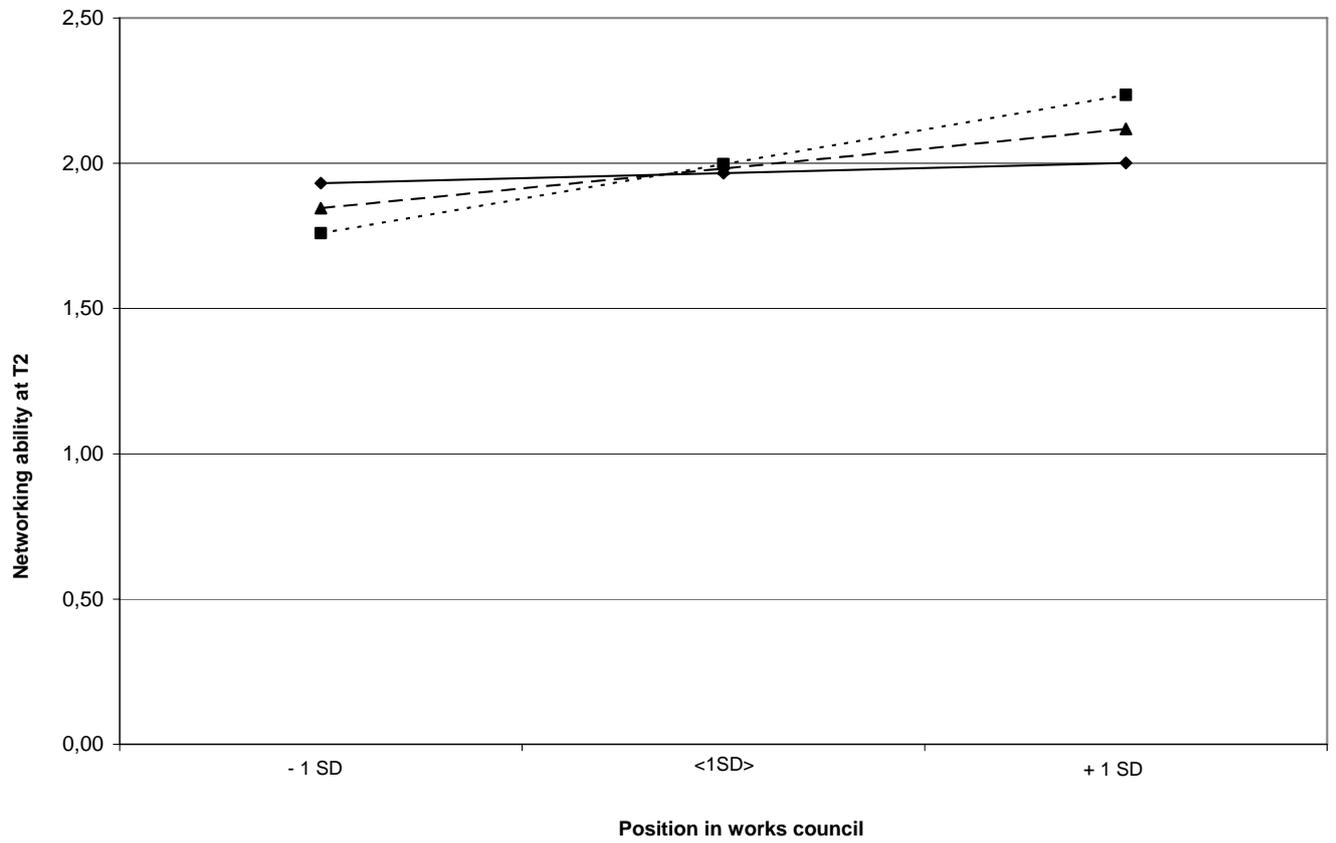
Table 2 to be continued on next page

Criterion at T2 =	Political Skill				Networking Ability				Political Skill controlling for Networking Ability at T2				Table 2 (continued)
	β	SE	ΔR^2	R^2	β	SE	ΔR^2	R^2	β	SE	ΔR^2	R^2	
5th Step a)			.020*	.439*			.014*	.581*			.002	.783*	
Sex	-.09	.09			-.02	.10			-.14*	.05			
Age	.02	.01			.02	.01			.01	.00			
Union Membership	-.01	.13			-.02	.15			-.02	.08			
Criterion Score T1	.50*	.07			.64*	.05			.10	.05			
Networking Ability in T2									.78**	.04			
Position in works council	.16*	.04			.16*	.04			.06	.02			
Time involvement inworks council	.21*	.05			.22*	.06			.04	.03			
Position x Age	.14*	.01			.12*	.01			.05	.00			
5th Step b)			.018*	.457*			.013*	.594*			.00	.781*	
Sex	-.08	.09			-.01	.10			-.14*	.06			
Age	.00	.01			.00	.01			-.02	.00			
Union Membership	-.01	.13			-.02	.15			-.03	.08			
Criterion Score T1	.51*	.07			.64*	.05			.10	.05			
Networking Ability in T2									.79*	.04			
Position in works council	.17*	.04			.16*	.04			.07	.02			
Time involvement inworks council	.21*	.05			.22*	.06			.03	.03			
Time involvement x Age	.14*	.01			.12*	.01			.02	.00			

Note. $N = 150$; $\Delta T = T2 - T1 = 2$ years; Gender: 0 = female, 1 = male; Union membership: 1 = member, 0 = no member, Position = position in works council (high scores equal high position); Time involvement = time involvement in works council (high scores equal high time involvement); * $p < .05$.

Figure 1

Position in Works Council (T1) and Networking Ability (T2) Moderated by Age

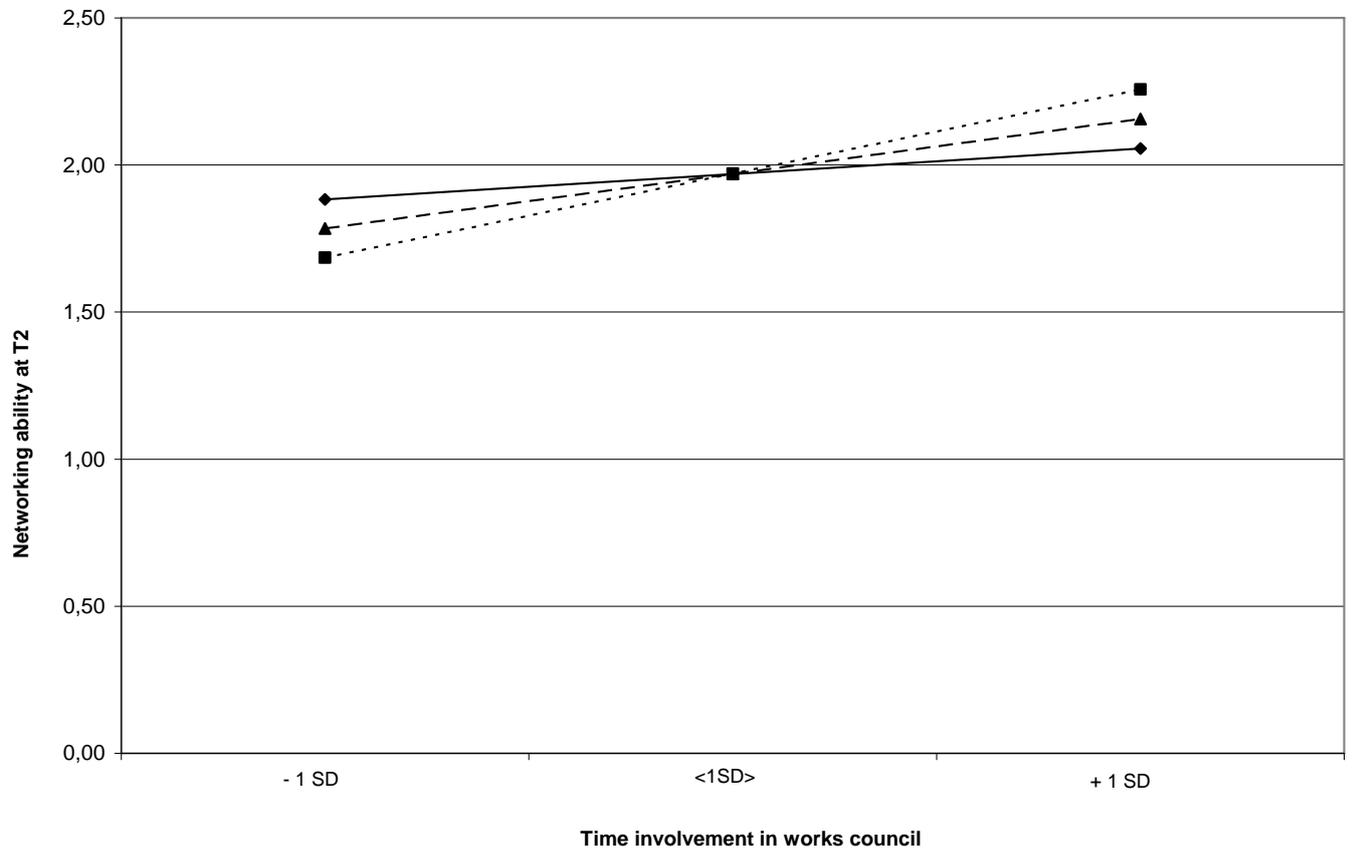


Note. $N = 150$, Moderator is age,

- Age = 55.76 years, slope $*p < .05$,
- ▲ Age = 48.93 years, slope $*p < .05$,
- ◆ Age = 42.11 years.

Figure 2

Time Involvement in Works Council (T1) and Networking Ability (T2) Moderated by Age



Note. $N = 150$, Moderator is age,
 ■ Age = 55.76 years, slope $*p < .05$,
 ▲ Age = 48.93 years, slope $*p < .05$,
 ◆ Age = 42.11 years.