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James A. Meurs

Vickie C. Gallagher

Cleveland State University, v.c.gallagher@csuohio.edu

Pamela L. Perrewé

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The role of political skill in the stressor–outcome relationship: Differential predictions for self- and other-reports of political skill

James A. Meurs^{a,*}, Vickie Coleman Gallagher^b, Pamela L. Perrewé^c

^a School of Business Administration, University of Mississippi, University, MS 38677, USA

^b Haile/US Bank College of Business, Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY 41099, USA

^c 821 Academic Way, The College of Business, Florida State University, P.O. Box 3061110, Tallahassee, FL 32306, USA

1. Introduction

A large body of research has identified psychosocial demands as important stressors in the workplace. Social stressors are a common source of job-related stress and strain for many individuals (Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Harvey, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2007). Social stressors are defined as incidents that promote strain and are social in nature (Dormann & Zapf, 2004), meaning that interpersonal interactions, as opposed to task difficulty, for example, serve as the stressful stimulus. Conflicts with, and unfair treatment by, coworkers, supervisors, and subordinates have been deemed social stressors in past research (e.g., Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2006; Dormann & Zapf, 2004; Heinisch & Jex, 1997). Social stressors, such as incompatible expectations, are psychologically uncomfortable, generating negative emotional reactions (Schaubroeck, Cotton, & Jennings, 1989).

Conflict is an interpersonal phenomenon that affects organizations at all levels and processes (Barki & Hartwick, 2001). Employees generally view conflict as harmful because it breeds hostility and mistrust among members, interferes with organizational functioning, and, in extreme cases, causes breakdowns (Ohbuchi & Suzuki, 2003). Moreover, workplace conflict

* Corresponding author. Address: School of Business Administration, University of Mississippi, MS 38655, USA.
E-mail address: jmeurs@bus.olemiss.edu (J.A. Meurs).

has been empirically linked to important organizational outcomes, such as job tension (Spector & Jex, 1998), job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Frone, 2000).

Because interpersonal and role conflicts are often unavoidable, it is important for researchers to consider moderators of the conflict-strain and performance relationships. For example, role conflict has been shown to exhibit a moderately strong correlation with emotional burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Further, emotional burnout has been argued to be the primary component of burnout (e.g., Giebels & Janssen, 2005), and, because of the deleterious effects of burnout on organizations and individuals, it is important that researchers consider how burnout can be reduced (Zellars & Perrewé, 2001).

The present two-study investigation examines the moderating effect of an emerging social effectiveness construct, political skill, in the conflict-strain and conflict-performance relationships. Political skill is the ability to understand others at work and subsequently enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives through effective influence skills (Ferris et al., 2005). It gives individuals a sense of control over their work environment, thus neutralizing the negative effects of workplace stressors on strain reactions (Ferris et al., 2007). Social competencies, such as political skill, have been shown to mitigate stress (Harvey et al., 2007) and enhance performance evaluations (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007). The role of political skill is believed to enhance outcomes because relationship management is not simply a matter of using impression management tactics, but using them *successfully* (Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007). Previous research has not examined the potential differential moderating effects between self- and other-reported political skill on important individual and work outcomes, particularly in the context of workplace conflict.

1.1. Role and interpersonal conflict at work

1.1.1. Role conflict

Conflict at work, particularly role conflict, has received a substantial amount of attention from organizational stress researchers. Role conflict has been characterized as the experience of incompatible demands at work (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964), such as conflicting policies and guidelines (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970), and it is often categorized as one of three important role stressors (i.e., role conflict, role overload, and role ambiguity). Both theoretically and empirically, role conflict has been negatively related to performance (e.g., Fried, Shirom, Gilboa, & Cooper, 2008). As noted by Fried and colleagues, role conflict, and role stressors in general, have been argued to affect job performance in many ways, including diverting efforts away from performance and on the stressors (Gilboa, Shirom, Fried, & Cooper, 2008), creating negative physiological reactions (Cohen, 1980), and narrowing a person's perceptions such that they ignore job performance-related information. Recently, role conflict has been demonstrated to affect emotional exhaustion through emotion focused coping (i.e., Boyd, Lewin, & Sager, 2009).

1.1.2. Interpersonal conflict

Until just over ten years ago, little research had examined interpersonal conflict at work (Spector & Jex, 1998). However, as noted by Kern and Grandey (2009), the major recent trends identified in job stress research (i.e., increasing racial diversity, the rise of the service industry, and incivil workplace social interactions) all suggest the importance of social stressors. Spector and Jex reported that prior research demonstrated interpersonal conflict to have a negative relationship with job satisfaction and positive relationships with turnover intentions, depression, and somatic symptoms. Within the past 10 years, a number of other studies also have examined interpersonal conflict (e.g., Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2006; Dormann & Zapf, 2002; Dormann & Zapf, 2004), and they have found similarly detrimental outcomes.

Further, Kasl (1998) distinguished between conflict with supervisors and conflict with coworkers and empirical measures have been utilized for each (see Frone, 2000). As argued by Frone (2000), the hierarchical relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate means that conflict with a supervisor is likely to influence the subordinates' thoughts and feelings concerning the job. However, we argue that not only would conflict with one's supervisor impact job and organizational outcomes (Frone, 2000), but it also would influence personal work-related outcomes (e.g., emotional burnout). Thus, we believe the findings concerning both role and interpersonal conflict support our research design of considering role conflict's and interpersonal conflict's relationship with strain-related outcomes (i.e., job performance and emotional burnout), when in the presence of an interpersonal moderator (i.e., political skill).

1.2. The moderation of role conflict and interpersonal conflict

We argue that political skill will moderate relationships that role and interpersonal conflict have with their respective strain-related outcomes. Two recent meta-analyses (i.e., Ortqvist & Wincent, 2006) have found a slight, negative relationship between role conflict and job performance, potentially suggesting the presence of moderators in the relations between role conflict and job performance. Although not operationalized as a moderator, one study (i.e., Bravo, Peiro, Rodriguez, & Whitely, 2003) found that behavioral techniques developed by recent hires to an organization enabled them to cope with role conflict. Ortqvist and Wincent (2006) also argued that future research should focus on moderating variables between role stressors and their consequences. Tidd and Friedman (2002) went further to assert that the literature has lacked a focus on specific behavioral responses for employees to practice that can assist in coping with role conflict. The results from their study suggest that, when experiencing role conflict, those who take a more active conflict manage-

ment style have reduced uncertainty in their jobs. We argue that these results compel researchers examining the role conflict-job performance relationship to consider moderators that might be neutralizing the main (negative) effect of role conflict on performance.

The Job-Demands-Control (JD-C) model of workplace stress argues that control is a vital construct in the determination of whether occupational stressors are translated into job strain (Karasek & Theorell, 1990). In line with the JD-C model of stress, we argue that experiencing role or interpersonal conflict at work increases one's uncertainty, which has been argued to be important instigators of the stress response (Quick, Quick, Nelson, & Hurrell, 1997). Interpersonal conflict also is likely to decrease an individual's self-esteem (see De Dreu, Van Dierendonck, & De Best-Waldhober, 2002), thereby enhancing one's response to stressful situations. Under the theoretical umbrella of the JD-C model, political skill could be conceptualized as a form of control or support (Perrewé et al., 2004) that moderates the interpersonal conflict-emotional exhaustion and role conflict-job performance relationships.

1.3. Political skill

Organizations are inherently political arenas (Mintzberg, 1983), indicating that success within the workplace is not simply the result of performance alone. Based on the political characterizations of organizations by Pfeffer (1981) and Mintzberg (1983), Ferris et al. (2005) proposed that some individuals (i.e., the politically skilled) are better at understanding fellow employees and adjusting their behavior to situational demands. Persons who are high on political skill use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that promote personal and/or organizational goals.

With this self-confidence in their abilities to interact with others and achieve objectives, politically skilled individuals are able to reduce the amount of felt strain at work. Research supports this characterization by demonstrating negative correlations between political skill and cognitive anxiety and somatic anxiety (e.g., Perrewé et al., 2004). In addition, research found that political skill moderated the relationships between role conflict and psychological anxiety, somatic complaints, and blood pressure (Perrewé et al., 2004), and that political skill moderated the relationships between role overload and job tension, job satisfaction, and anxiety (Perrewé et al., 2005). The findings of another study (Harvey et al., 2007) demonstrated that political skill buffered the negative effects of social stressors on job and career satisfaction, and the authors argued that future research should consider political skill as a moderator of other stressor-outcome relationships. Other research (e.g., Brouer, Ferris, Hochwarter, Laird, & Gilmore, 2006) has demonstrated that political skill has a neutralizing effect on organizational politics as a workplace stressor.

Political skill also has been found to affect perceptions that others have of the political actor. One study (Treadway et al., 2007) found that subordinates high on political skill who engaged in ingratiation were not perceived by their supervisors as using manipulation for personal gain. Others (e.g., Blass & Ferris, 2007; Liu et al., 2007) have found that political skill is related to one's reputation in the eyes of others.

Ferris et al. (2007) suggested that these findings are due to the beneficial effect that political skill has on the audience's impression of the actor, and the positive impact it has on the social identity of the actor. However, almost all past studies have used only self-reports of political skill as a moderator, and researchers have noted the importance of using other-reports of political skill (Ferris et al., 2007; Perrewé et al., 2004). Further, despite the fact that political skill has been shown to demonstrate effects on both the self and others, no known research to date has examined whether self- and other-reports of political skill exhibit differential moderating effects.

1.4. Self- vs. other-reports in OB and HR research

Although a number of research literatures (e.g., evaluations of job performance) have debated the accuracy, reliability, and agreement of self- and other-reports, few have considered whether self- and other-reports constitute different pieces of the same construct. However, an examination of the actual differences between the two has merit, as supported by the suggestion by some (e.g., Fried et al., 2008) that supervisor- and self-reported performance represents different aspects of actual job performance. Fried and colleagues argued that future research should examine these reports of performance as complimentary to one another, and that the causes for obtaining different results should be explored because they could be methodological, substantive, or both. We argue that an examination of the basis for differences in self- and other-reports of a political skill suggests that at least some of these differences are substantive and should be examined by scholars.

A lengthy discussion of the comparison of self- and other-ratings has taken place within the job performance and personality literatures, and we believe some of this research supports our contention that self- and other-reports of political skill represent different aspects of the same construct. Atkins and Wood (2002) noted that it has been argued that low performers have less self-awareness than high performers, and the results of their research supported this argument. Also, Lane and Herriot (1990) argued that self-ratings and supervisor-ratings of performance might predict different variance in performance, because self-ratings reflect self-efficacy or motivation, but supervisor-rated performance addresses the target's abilities and achievements. We contend that the same differentiation could be made for self- and supervisor-rated political skill.

Another area of research that can inform how self- and other-reports of political skill might exhibit differential moderating effects is suggested by the findings from a study by Hayes and Dunning (1997). These authors considered the influence

of trait ambiguity on self-peer agreement in personality judgment. Their results indicated that agreement between self and other-ratings for unambiguous traits was high, but, for ambiguous traits, agreement was low. Given the nature of political skill as a construct that is part social and part cognitive, and its not easily observable dimensionality (Ferris et al., 2007), it is quite likely an ambiguous characteristic that allows individuals the freedom to create their own interpretations of and emphases on its various components. This also could potentially produce disagreement between self- and other-reports of political skill that still reflect its true nature.

1.5. Self- vs. other-reports of political skill

We believe that the implications from the political skill literature support these assertions. Ferris et al. (2007) have published an explanation of the theoretical underpinnings of political skill. They stated that the politically skilled have both a social astuteness and an ability to adjust behavior to the demands of the situation. Also, they suggested that the link between politically skilled individuals' beliefs in their control over the environment and the effectiveness of political skill is the self-confidence that is expressed *both to self and others*. Moreover, in the meta-theoretical framework of political skill the authors separated *Intra-psychic* (i.e., Effects on Self) from *Interpersonal* (i.e., Effects on Others) and *Group-level* (i.e., Effects on Groups and Organizations) processes (Ferris et al., 2007). In addition, Jawahar, Stone, and Kisamore (2007) suggested that the politically skilled gain both self-confidence and actual control over resources.

We contend that this conceptualization of political skill supports our characterization of it as a construct that contains both self-relevant and other-relevant characteristics. We suggest that the self-relevant aspects are best captured via self-reports of political skill, and the other-relevant aspects via other-reports. Political skill, when measured via self-report, is akin to perceived control, self-confidence, or a self-efficacy of social effectiveness. Whereas, when others report on a focal individual's political skill, it is reflective of actual resource control, interpersonal shrewdness, or reputation. We argue that these differences between self- and other-reports of political skill are substantive, in that they each reflect a different aspect of the construct of political skill.

Also, as could be inferred from the above discussions of self-awareness, and trait ambiguity, one's evaluation of personal political skill can deviate from the evaluation by others. Although prior research has found moderate, significant correlations between self- and other-reports of political skill (e.g., Semadar, 2004), there remained a substantial area of non-overlap. In addition, the confirmatory factor analysis results found in one study (i.e., Ferris et al., 2008) support our contention of substantive, though moderate, overlap between ratings of political skill by self and others. Potentially, the differences between these two reports of the same construct could be due in part to methodological or bias issues. However, we believe that the suggestions by others (Fried et al., 2008) that differences between the self- and other-reports of job performance could be substantive also can be applied to the political skill construct, and we argue that our above review of the political skill literature suggests there are substantive differences.

Consequently, this allows for the testing of hypotheses of differential moderation between self- and other-reports. In other words, individuals could self-report that they have a high degree of political skill, and such self-beliefs could be useful in managing interpersonally stressful situations at work. However, those self-beliefs may or may not reflect the observations of others, who could be the keepers of that person's reputation or the evaluators of that individual's job performance. The qualitatively opposite evaluations also could be the case, where a person has low self-beliefs, but others have much higher evaluations of the focal individual's political skill.

We test our arguments by examining the relationships that both self- and other-reported political skill have between conflict and a self-relevant and an other-relevant construct. Specifically, we argue that self-reported political skill will moderate the relationship between self-reported interpersonal conflict with one's supervisor and a self-reported strain-related outcome that is central to the individual (i.e., emotional burnout), but that supervisor-rated political skill will not moderate this relationship. However, supervisor-rated political skill will moderate the relationship that self-reported role conflict has with a strain-related outcome salient to the supervisor and the organization (i.e., job performance), but self-reported political skill will not moderate this relationship.

Hypothesis 1. Self-reported political skill moderates the relationship between self-reported stressors and self-reported strain, such that increases in self-reported political skill will buffer against increases in emotional burnout when experiencing increased interpersonal conflict with one's supervisor.

Hypothesis 2. Supervisor-reported political skill moderates the relationship between self-reported stressors and supervisor-reported performance, such that increases in supervisor-reported political skill will buffer against decreases in job performance ratings when experiencing increased role conflict.

1.6. Present research

We tested the hypothesized relationships using two samples. **Hypothesis 1** was tested using the sample in Study 1. Study 2 tested Hypothesis 2. To most appropriately test our hypotheses both self- and supervisor-rated political skill were collected in each sample.

2. Study 1: Methods

2.1. Samples

A questionnaire survey was used to collect data from the non-academic staff employees of a large university located in the southeastern United States. 3272 persons were requested via e-mail to participate in a voluntary survey, and 839 responded by completing the survey. 73.4% of the respondents were female, and the average age was 42.08 years with an average tenure with the organization of 7 years and 6 months. Employees voluntarily provided the name of their supervisor in the survey. Four hundred and ninety-five e-mail requests were sent to supervisors to complete a survey about their subordinate, and 315 supervisor surveys were received. Following the completion of each survey, it was stored in a password-protected database only accessible to one of the authors. As an incentive to participate in the study, all participants were entered into a cash, lottery drawing.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Interpersonal conflict with supervisor

We measured interpersonal conflict with one's supervisor using a form of the Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale (Spector & Jex, 1998) adapted by Frone (2000). It is a four-item measure of interpersonal conflict with a supervisor, and sample items include, "How often do you get into arguments with your supervisor?" and "How often is your supervisor rude to you at work?". Response choices ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*).

2.2.2. Political skill

Political skill was measured by the *Political Skill Inventory (PSI)* (Ferris et al., 2005) using a 7-point Likert-type scale. Sample items include "I always seem to instinctively know the right things to say and do to influence others", and "I am good at building relationships with influential people at work". When gathering supervisor-reports, supervisors were asked how much they agreed with these statements concerning a particular subordinate (e.g., "S/he knows a lot of important people and is well connected at work"). Seven response choices were given, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

2.2.3. Emotional burnout

Emotional burnout is characterized by feeling emotionally overwhelmed and having one's energy depleted. It has been argued to be an important consequence from extended stressful experiences (Quick et al., 1997). Although it was one of the three components of burnout in the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, 1982), studies suggest that emotional burnout, instead, is the main aspect of burnout (e.g., Bakker, Schaufeli, Sixma, Boxveld, & Van Dierendonck, 2000). We measured emotional burnout using the three-item emotional exhaustion measure in the Shirom–Melamed Burnout Measure (Shirom & Melamed, 2006), which was developed based upon COR theory (Melamed, Shirom, Toker, Berliner, & Shapira, 2006a) and has been validated in prior research (Melamed, Shirom, Toker, & Shapira, 2006b). A sample item is "I feel I am not capable of investing emotionally in coworkers and customers". Five response options were provided, ranging from 1 (*never or almost never*) to 7 (*always or almost always*).

2.2.4. Control variables

Although researchers (e.g., Spector, Zapf, Chen, & Frese, 2000) suggest that negative affectivity (NA) is not necessarily a nuisance variable in every stress-related analysis, some scholars have suggested that NA biases relationships between self-reported stressors and self-reported strains (Burke, Brief, & George, 1993). Thus, in our analysis of the moderation by political skill of the relationship between interpersonal conflict with one's supervisor and emotional burnout, we control for the effects of NA. We measured NA using the PANAS scales developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988). The measure is a five-point scale ranging from *very slightly* to *extremely*, and respondents indicated the degree to which they generally felt the way the item indicated. Responses to the 10 items were averaged into a composite with higher scores indicating higher levels of NA. We also controlled for the effects of age and gender in our analyses.

3. Study 1: Results

Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and alpha reliabilities are shown in Table 1. Because some of the analyses of this study (see below) used supervisor-rated political skill, which had a smaller sample than the self-reported data, pairwise correlations and sample sizes are reported for each correlation in this study. As given in Table 1, NA demonstrated a significant and positive relationship with emotional burnout ($r = .34, p < .01$) and with reports of interpersonal conflict with one's supervisor ($r = .13, p < .01$). Gender had significant correlations with supervisor-rated political skill ($r = .12, p < .05$) and emotional burnout ($r = -.09, p < .05$), and age was found to have negative relationships with negative affectivity ($r = -.12, p < .05$) and emotional burnout ($r = -.11, p < .05$). It is also noteworthy that as found in prior research (i.e., Semadar, 2004), self- and supervisor-rated political skill demonstrated a moderate association with one another ($r = .30, p < .01$).

Table 1

Correlations, means, standard deviations, and coefficient alpha reliabilities of study.

Variable	Mean	Std. dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	1.73	.44	–						
2. Age	42.07	12.23	–.07 676	–					
3. Negative affectivity	1.63	.52	.01 685	–.12** 664	(.86)				
4. Interpersonal conflict with supervisor	1.29	.57	.01 699	.03 675	.13** 738	(.87)			
5. Political skill (self-reported)	5.32	.82	.06 680	–.05 658	–.20** 719	–.05 730	(.93)		
6. Political skill (supervisor-reported)	5.40	.97	.12* 303	–.04 296	–.06 301	–.15** 305	.30** 297	(.96)	
7. Emotional burnout	2.08	1.16	–.09* 692	–.11** 669	.34** 732	.16** 744	–.33** 727	–.13* 303	(.90)

Notes: Reliabilities are reported on the diagonal; pairwise N listed below each correlation; Gender: 1 = Male, 2 = Female.

* $p < .05$.** $p < .01$.

Hierarchical moderated multiple regression analyses (Cohen & Cohen, 1983) were used to examine Hypothesis 1. The control variables of age, gender, and NA were entered in the first step. Main effects were added in the second step, and the interaction term was added in the third step. The main effect variables were centered prior to creating the interaction term to mitigate issues arising from multicollinearity. Two separate regression analyses were conducted, one using self-reported political skill and the other utilizing supervisor-rated political skill. An interaction is indicated by a significant change in R^2 in the third step of the regression analysis.

The results of the regressions are reported in Table 2. Supporting its use as a control variable, NA demonstrated significant and positive relationships with emotional burnout in step 1 in both the self- ($\beta = .24, p < .01$) and supervisor-reported ($\beta = .32, p < .01$) political skill analyses. Gender and age also demonstrated significant (negative) effects on emotional burnout for three of their four possible relationships. The main effects of interpersonal conflict with supervisor and political skill both had significant relationships when using self-reported political skill ($\beta = .12, p < .01$; $\beta = -.28, p < .01$, respectively), but were non-significant on emotional burnout when examining supervisor-reported political skill. This is likely at least partially due to the decreased power to detect effects (i.e., fewer degrees of freedom) as the result of a smaller sample of supervisor-rated political skill than self-rated political skill, particularly for interpersonal conflict with supervisor which demonstrated similar β 's (i.e., $\beta = .12, .10$) in both equations.

Keeping in mind the degrees of freedom limitations, the main (negative) effects of self-reported political skill on emotional burnout were stronger for self- (i.e., $\beta = -.28, p < .01$) than for supervisor-reported (i.e., non-significant) political skill.

Table 2

Results of regression analyses for Study 1; dependent variable – emotional burnout.

Step/variable	Self-rated PSI β	Supervisor-rated PSI β
<i>Step 1:</i>		
Gender	–.09*	–.12*
Age	–.10**	–.09
Negative affectivity	.24**	.32**
ΔR^2	.12**	.16**
<i>Step 2:</i>		
Interpersonal conflict with supervisor	.12**	.10
Self-rated political skill	–.28**	
Supervisor-rated political skill		–.07
ΔR^2	.09**	.03*
<i>Step 3:</i>		
Self-rated political skill \times conflict	–.07*	
Supervisor-rated political skill \times conflict		–.14*
ΔR^2	.01*	.02*
N	634	286

* $p < .05$.** $p < .01$.

Finally, the interactive term of political skill by interpersonal conflict with supervisor was significant when using both self-rated ($\beta = -.07$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$, $p < .05$) and supervisor-rated ($\beta = -.14$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p < .05$) political skill in prediction of emotional burnout, in partial support of *Hypothesis 1*. Although not hypothesized, the interaction of supervisor-reported political skill with interpersonal conflict could be interpreted as validation of the self-report findings using political skill, and this is elaborated upon in the Section 6. These effect sizes (ΔR^2) are consistent with those found for interactions in field research (Champoux & Peters, 1987; Chaplin, 1991).

To interpret these interactions, we graphed both of them in *Figs. 1 and 2*, and plotted the prediction of emotional burnout at the mean and ± 1 standard deviation from the mean of self- and supervisor-rated political skill (Stone & Hollenbeck, 1989). *Fig. 1* plots the interaction of self-reported political skill and interpersonal conflict. As illustrated, those reporting high political skill did not increase in emotional burnout as interpersonal conflict increased. However, for those self-reporting low political skill, emotional burnout increased with increases in interpersonal conflict. In support of this depiction, a simple slopes analysis determined that the slopes for the mean ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$) and low ($\beta = .12$, $p < .01$) levels of political skill were significantly different from zero, while the slope for high political skill was not. This suggests that high self-reported political skill was a buffer against emotional burnout for those experiencing interpersonal conflict at work.

Similarly, *Fig. 2* indicates that supervisor-ratings of subordinate's political skill serve as a buffer against emotional burnout when experiencing interpersonal conflict with that supervisor. Those with supervisors who reported the subordinate had a high degree of political skill did not experience increases in emotional burnout when reporting greater interpersonal conflict with that supervisor. The simple slopes analysis indicated that the slope of low levels of political skill was different from zero ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$) and the slope of mean levels of political skill approached significance ($\beta = .10$, $p < .09$). Given the similar beta weights to the simple slopes analysis using self-rated political skill, the significance level of mean political skill could be due to the fewer number of cases available for this analysis. The slope for those high in political skill was not significantly different from zero, supporting the interpretation of a high degree of political skill functioning as a defense against emotional burnout when experiencing interpersonal conflict with one's supervisor.

4. Study 2: Methods

4.1. Samples

Two questionnaires were administered, one to employees and the other to supervisors, at an automotive group in the southeastern United States. For the employee version of the survey, 758 paper questionnaires were distributed through interoffice mail in sealed envelopes addressed directly to the employee. Of the 369 employee responses received, 316 provided the name of their supervisor, indicating that most employees were comfortable with providing the name of their immediate supervisor. The sample of employees was 56% female, with an average age of 39 years old.

A second mailing was sent through US mail, return postage paid, to all supervisors. A total of 142 employee-supervisor matched responses were received. Most of the supervisors reporting on their employees' performance were males (75%) and

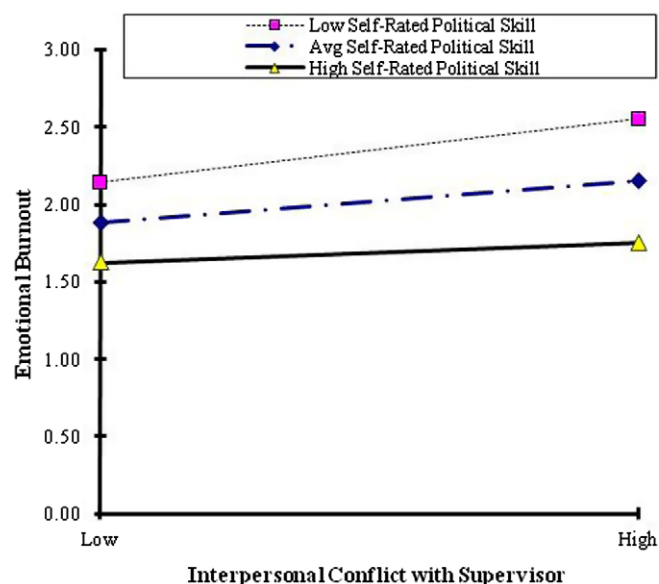


Fig. 1. Interactive effects of self-rated political skill and interpersonal conflict with supervisor on emotional burnout. Note: both the avg (mean) and low self-rated political skill slopes are significantly different from zero ($p < .01$).

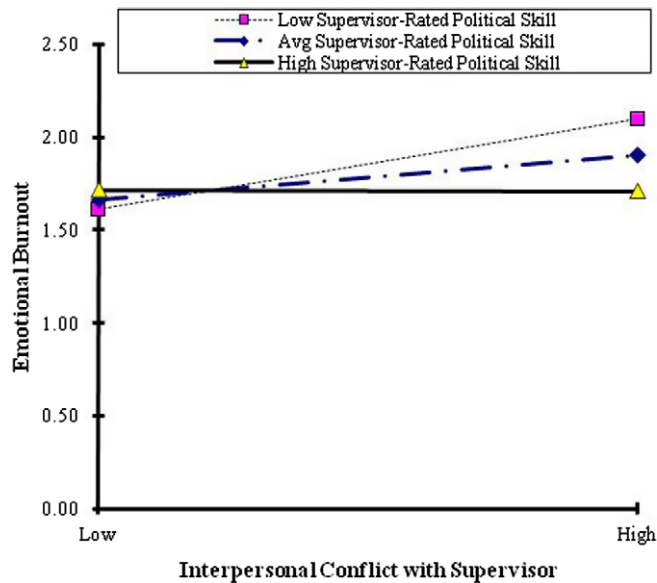


Fig. 2. Interactive effects of supervisor-rated political skill and interpersonal conflict with supervisor on emotional burnout. Note: the low supervisor-rated political skill slope is significantly different from zero ($p < .01$) and the avg (mean) supervisor-rated political skill slope approached significance ($p < .09$).

the average age of the supervisor was 45 years old. Employees and supervisors were employed in a wide variety of departments, such as sales, accounting, advertising, marketing, and auto credit.

4.2. Measures

4.2.1. Role conflict

Role conflict was measured using an eight-item measure (Rizzo et al., 1970) with sample items including “I receive incompatible requests from two or more people” and “I receive assignments without adequate resources and materials to execute them”. Seven response choices were given, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

4.2.2. Political skill

Just as in Study 1, political skill was measured by the *Political Skill Inventory (PSI)* (Ferris et al., 2005) using a seven-point Likert-type scale. Sample items include “I always seem to instinctively know the right things to say and do to influence others”, and “I am good at building relationships with influential people at work”. Supervisors were asked how much they agreed with these statements concerning a particular subordinate (e.g., “S/he knows a lot of important people and is well connected at work”).

4.2.3. Job performance

Managers overseeing the work of the employees were asked to rate their employee(s) using the six item measure by Kipnis and Schmidt (1988) on a 1–7 scale, with 1 representing that the employee was recently rated “very poor” on that item and 7 representing that the employee was recently rated “outstanding” on that item. Sample items include “ability to work independently”, “ability to solve problems” and “overall performance”. When completing this measure, supervisors were asked to base the performance rating on their recall of their employee’s most recent performance appraisal.

4.2.4. Control variables

In an effort to make our studies as similar to each other as possible, we included the same control variables in Study 2 as in Study 1 (i.e., age, gender, NA). As in Study 1, NA was measured using the PANAS scale (Watson et al., 1988).

5. Study 2: Results

Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and alpha reliabilities are shown in Table 3. Age demonstrated significant relationships with both NA ($r = -.24, p < .01$) and self-rated political skill ($r = -.23, p < .05$). Role conflict demonstrated significant negative bivariate correlations with both supervisor-reported constructs (i.e., political skill and job performance). Like Study 1, self- and supervisor-reported political skill had a relationship with one another ($r = .20, p < .05$), despite the smaller number of correlations (i.e., 120) in this study. Supervisor-rated political skill also was associated with supervisor-rated job performance ($r = .72, p < .01$).

Table 3

Correlations, means, standard deviations, and coefficient alpha reliabilities of Study 2 variables.

Variable	Mean	Std. dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender	1.54	.50	–						
2. Age	39.98	11.65	–.11	–					
3. Negative affectivity	1.48	.48	.10	–.24**	(.83)				
4. Role conflict	2.74	1.17	–.12	–.15	.30**	(.88)			
5. Political skill (self-reported)	5.38	.78	–.04	–.23*	–.08	.02	(.90)		
6. Political skill (Supervisor-Reported)	5.18	.83	–.05	.04	–.05	–.20*	.20*	(.94)	
7. Job Performance (supervisor-rated)	5.61	.96	.03	–.02	–.12	–.20*	.14	.72**	(.93)

N = 120; Note: Reliabilities are reported on the diagonal; Gender: 1 = Male, 2 = Female.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

In the same manner as Study 1, we conducted a moderated multiple regression analysis. The results of the regressions are reported in Table 4. None of the control variables (i.e., age, gender, negative affectivity) demonstrated significant effects on our dependent variables. For the analysis using self-reported political skill, role conflict ($\beta = -.21, p < .05$) demonstrated significant main effects on job performance, and in the analysis using supervisor-rated political skill, main effects were only significant for political skill ($\beta = .72, p < .01$). Supervisor-rated political skill had a significant interaction ($\beta = .15, \Delta R^2 = .02, p < .05$) with role conflict on job performance, but self-reported political skill did not interact with role conflict to predict performance, in support of Hypothesis 2. The similar strength of this significant interaction to that of Study 1 is noteworthy, because, despite the small sample size, we detected interactive effects.

We plotted the significant interaction in Fig. 3, displaying the interactive prediction of job performance at the mean and ± 1 standard deviation from the mean of supervisor-rated political skill. The figure displays that those rated by their supervisor as being high on political skill did not experience decreased job performance ratings as role conflict increased, whereas those low on political skill did. Though falling short of confirmation, simple slopes analysis suggest support of these interpretations as the slope for those low in political skill was the only one of the three (i.e., low, mean, and high) levels of supervisor-rated political skill that approached significance ($\beta = -.17, p < .07$).

6. Discussion

Stressor–strain relationships have received substantial attention in the organizational sciences. However, only a few have studied interpersonal moderators of these relationships in the presence of workplace stressors (e.g., Harvey et al., 2007; Jawahar et al., 2007). Further, our understanding of how the perceptions of the self and relevant others (e.g., manager report) would differentially moderate these relationships is underdeveloped. Political skill was argued to demonstrate a buffering effect against both interpersonal conflict and role conflict with one's supervisor on important work outcomes (i.e., emotional burnout and job performance, respectively). Our findings generally supported our hypotheses, namely that self-reported political skill would moderate the relationship between a stressor and a self-reported strain (i.e., emotional burnout) and

Table 4

Results of regression analyses for Study 2 dependent variable – job performance.

Step/variable	Self-rated PSI β	Supervisor-rated PSI β
<i>Step 1:</i>		
Gender	.01	.05
Age	–.07	–.05
Negative affectivity	–.13	–.10
ΔR^2	.05	.02
<i>Step 2:</i>		
Role conflict	–.21*	–.02
Self-rated political skill	.12	
Supervisor-rated political skill		.72**
ΔR^2	.05*	.55**
<i>Step 3:</i>		
Self-rated political skill \times conflict	.03	
Supervisor-rated political skill \times conflict		.15*
ΔR^2	.00	.02*
<i>N</i>	129	125

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

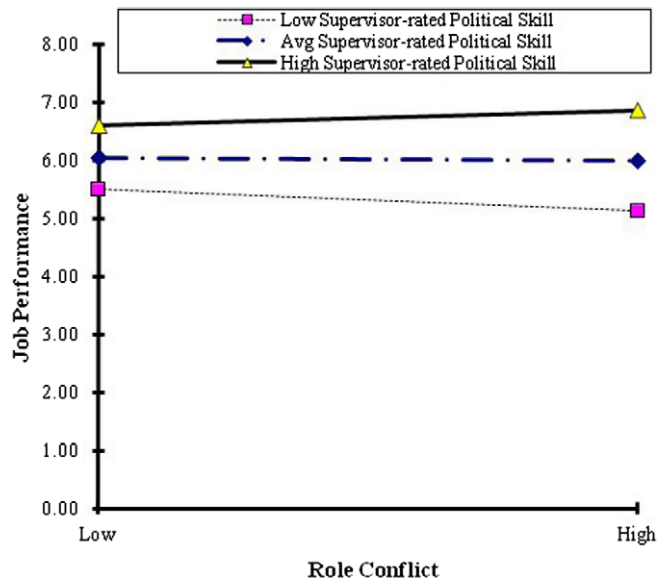


Fig. 3. Interactive effects of supervisor-rated political skill and role conflict on job performance. Note: the low self-rated political skill slope approached significance ($p < .07$).

that supervisor-reported political skill would moderate the relationship between a stressor and a supervisor-rated outcome (i.e., job performance). The contributions of this research, strengths, and limitations, directions for future research, and practical implications are discussed in the next sections.

6.1. Contributions of the research

First, in support of *Hypothesis 1*, Study 1 found that the self-reported political skill of a subordinate had a significant moderating relationship with interpersonal conflict with one's supervisor on emotional burnout. This finding supports the intra-psychic notion that politically skilled individuals "perceive and interpret stressful environmental stimuli in ways that neutralize their detrimental effects" (Ferris et al., 2007: 302). Persons high in political skill may indeed view these conflict situations as opportunities rather than barriers (Perrewé, Ferris, Frink, & Anthony, 2000). In addition, this result demonstrated results beyond that of Frone (2000) that conflict with one's supervisor can impact personal outcomes, yet this effect can be neutralized for those who believe they are politically skilled. This is a meaningful finding, given how detrimental emotional burnout can be to individuals as well as organizations (Zellars & Perrewé, 2001).

In addition, although not hypothesized, we found (in Study 1) that supervisor-reported political skill of the subordinate also had a significant moderating relationship with interpersonal conflict on emotional burnout. Based on the depictions in Figs. 1 and 2, it appears that self- and supervisor-reports of the subordinate's political skill operate in a similar manner in order to buffer against the negative affects of interpersonal conflict with one's supervisor on self-reported strain. This could be in part due to the nature of the measure of conflict, because interpersonal conflict is an experience shared by both parties. Thus, subordinates not only feel a greater sense of control over the situation (e.g., intra-psychic) when self-reporting higher levels of political skill, but also the subordinate's relationship with one's supervisor is actually enhanced through the interpersonal processes (Ferris et al., 2007). Our research supports the notion that self-perceptions of political skill provide individuals with favorable evaluations of the self that, over time, can lead to more confidence and ultimately more successful interpersonal encounters (Ferris et al., 2007), even when interpersonal conflict is present.

Second, in support of *Hypothesis 2*, Study 2 demonstrated that supervisor-rated political skill had an interactive relationship with role conflict on job performance. As noted earlier, role conflict is argued to redirect the employee's efforts from job performance to the stressor and to alter one's perceptions of job-demands. However, despite these conflicting demands at work, persons viewed by the managers as high in political skill are rated as high performers. This finding supports the notion of interpersonal influence processes such that persons high in political skill are effective at using influence tactics and strategies (Ferris et al., 2007) and are capable of masking intentionality (Treadway et al., 2007). In other words, even when employees are managing conflict demands at work, they continue to receive high performance reviews when their managers view them as politically skilled. Persons high in political skill may be able to effectively portray a sense of control over the situation (Perrewé et al., 2004) and buffer the potential harm that such stressors may have on their performance review.

On the other hand, self-reported political skill did not have an effect on the role conflict – performance relationship in Study 2. Under high conflict situations, one's own confidence in political skill is not enough to mitigate the negative effect

of these conflicting demands on job performance. When managers evaluate performance, a subordinate's self-perception may not be reflective of expressed or actual political skill. Those who are not politically skilled in the eyes of others can rate themselves as high in political skill because of their own personal beliefs about their abilities. Under conditions of role conflict, self-reported political skill does not appear to necessarily translate into expressed political capabilities. However, other-rated political skill enhances performance outcomes, perhaps through successful impression management tactics (Ferris et al., 2007). Furthermore, as Lane and Herriot (1990) noted, self-ratings could reflect self-efficacy or motivation whereas supervisor-ratings may indicate the target's abilities and achievements. We are not suggesting that self- and other-ratings of political skill reflect different constructs, but, instead, that they measure different, and somewhat overlapping (Ferris et al., 2008; Semadar, 2004) facets of the same construct.

In summary, our findings suggest substantive differences between self- and other-report of political skill. It appears that self-reported political skill and other-reported political skill operate in the same manner under workplace stressful conditions, buffering against the negative effects of these interpersonal and role stressors on outcomes important to both the self (e.g., emotional burnout) and to the organization (e.g., job performance). However, outcomes that are internal in nature (e.g., self-reported strain) are buffered when the individual (and others) believe they are high in political skill, highlighting the mechanisms of political skill that are both intra-psycho and interpersonal in nature. On the other hand, only other-reported political skill is relevant when outcomes are external in nature (e.g., other-rated job performance). In other words, the expressed political skill of the subordinate, as rated by others, is most relevant to outcomes evaluated by supervisors or others in the workplace.

6.2. Strengths of the research

Our research has a number of strengths that are worth noting. First, we included both self- and supervisor-reports of political skill, as well as supervisor-reported performance. This methodological consideration fills an important gap in the political skill literature and adds confidence to our findings. Furthermore, as noted earlier, interpersonal moderators (e.g., political skill) in the stressor-strain relationship have not been explored within the framework of the JD-C model. Two forms of conflict were investigated and the outcomes of emotional burnout and supervisor-reported performance are important outcomes not yet studied within this framework. In addition, despite having a moderate to small sample for supervisor-rated performance in Study 2, we detected a significant interactive relationship. This likely speaks to the strength of the significant relationships found.

Finally, as noted by Hochwarter, Witt, Treadway, and Ferris (2006), using a sample, as we did in Study 2, from the sales/service industry is particularly relevant to the modern workplace as industries are becoming increasingly service-oriented. Although our sample included those in the corporate headquarters who were in administrative roles, it also included persons in sales roles, and, the tone of the organization is sales/service in nature. In fact, these service-oriented institutions are likely to put great value on the political skill of employees, particularly in customer relationships.

6.3. Limitations and directions for future research

Although our research included self- and other-reports of important moderating and outcome variables, our stressors are both related to conflict. Future research should examine the moderation effect of political skill with other types of workplace stressors (e.g., quantitative demands) on self- and other-reported strain. Furthermore, our results represent a snapshot in time for both Study 1 and Study 2. One possibility is that longitudinally, a lack of conflict or positive relations with one's supervisor could lead to greater mentoring and thus improved political skill. Research has found that good relations with one's superiors has an effect on short-term and intermediate career-enhancing strategies (Bravo et al., 2003). Other research has conjectured that mentoring is an important method for improving political skill (Blass & Ferris, 2007; Ferris et al., 2007). Future research could examine the longitudinal relationship between political skill development, the relationship with one's supervisor, and the experience of workplace stressors. Similarly, the tenure an employee has with his or her supervisor might be an important variable for future studies concerning these relationships. Also, a limitation of Study 2 is that our moderator and dependent variables (i.e. political skill and job performance, respectively) were gathered from the same source (i.e., the supervisor). This might have caused a common source bias, which could explain our stronger than expected bivariate correlation between the two (i.e., $r = .72$).

It is possible that narcissistic persons score high on self-reported political skill. Funder and West (1993) stated that narcissists' self-evaluations could disagree with the collective agreement of others because they believe their own performance to be better than how it appears to others. Thus, one possible avenue for future research is to test the variables used in our research in the presence of narcissism. This could be particularly important for relationships between self-reported political skill and behavioral outcomes, as some evidence suggests that self-reported narcissism is negatively associated with other-rated work behaviors (Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006). Similarly, testing these variables controlling for self-monitoring and social desirability might be advantageous to future research. Self-monitoring has been shown to have a modest and positive correlation with political skill (Ferris et al., 2005), and some research (i.e., Mersman & Donaldson, 2000) has shown that those high on self-monitoring (i.e., other-directedness) and social desirability underestimate their contextual performance.

On the other hand, Church (1997) found that managers reporting higher self-monitoring had greater agreement with their raters in evaluations of their performance. Thus, current research is equivocal regarding the relationships that self-monitoring and social desirability have with political skill and other-ratings of performance. However, the influence of these two constructs provide other possible explanations for our finding that self-reported political skill did not moderate the stressor–performance relationship, and future research could investigate these possibilities.

6.4. Implications for practice

Clearly interpersonal and role conflict stressors can have deleterious effects on employees and the organization as a whole, and management should make efforts to minimize these types of stressors through training, development, and more structured organizational processes. However, as organizations become flatter and more ambiguous in their organizational structure and design, and as employees increasingly find themselves in service related industries rather than manufacturing organizations, interpersonal and role-related conflict situations are inevitable. Furthermore, measurements of success are increasingly more subjective and employees must rely on the perceptions of their managers and team leaders when being evaluated on their performance. For this reason, among others, political skill is an important and emerging construct that helps predict career success and buffers against inherent workplace stressors.

Although political skill clearly contains elements of social skill that are relevant to success within the workplace, political skill differs in that it includes the ability to influence interpersonal relationships in order to achieve success (Ferris et al., 2007). This point is particularly relevant to our research in that in conflict situations, a manager's perceptions of an employee's political skill can lead to diminished burnout and enhanced performance evaluation. On the other hand, self-reports of political skill can lead to diminished burnout but do not have an effect on performance under conflict situations. When important workplace outcomes are being measured by others, employees must consider that political skill is in the eye of the beholder. Therefore, employees may require assistance when gauging and developing their own political skill. Dynamic environments require monitoring for cues as to the most appropriate behaviors (Blass & Ferris, 2007). Political skill concerns competencies that are manifested in work-relevant situations, which reflect both dispositional antecedents, as well as situational variability. Whereas, the variance due to dispositions is more stable, the variance attributable to situations can be affected through training, practice, and experience.

7. Conclusion

This study examines the differential moderating effects of self- vs. other-rated political skill in the conflict-emotional burnout and performance relationships. Political skill is an important social construct in the organizational sciences, with the potential to affect a number of important workplace behaviors and attitudes. Significant advancements in the evolution of the political skill construct, differential impacts of self- vs. other-rated political skill, and how it operates in the workplace, are contingent upon sound empirical work to appropriately test specific aspects of the political skill construct and its operationalization.

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