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# Political Skill Dimensionality and Impression Management Choice and Effective Use

Robyn L. Brouer · Rebecca L. Badaway ·  
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## Abstract

*Purpose* The purpose of this study was to test a moderated mediation model of the dimensionality of political skill on influence tactic choice and performance ratings.

*Design/Mythology/Approach* Dyadic data were analyzed using a mixed-method approach to account for any leader-level effects, as well as bootstrapping methods to account for the modest sample size ( $n = 116$ ).

*Findings* Social astuteness best predicted positive impression management (IM) over negative IM. Apparent sincerity interacted with positive impression management tactics to predict higher performance ratings, whereas interpersonal influence did not.

*Implications* The findings support that socially astute individuals use more positive influence tactics in the workplace. This could impact the broader work environment, making it more pleasant than one with individuals using negative influence tactics. Thus, it might be the interest of organizations to train individuals to enhance their social astuteness. However, confirming prior research, performance evaluations made by managers are impacted by more than objective performance (e.g., political skill). Thus, organizations need to ensure the proper training of managers to lessen these types of biases.

*Originality/Value* This research empirically validates components of the metatheoretical framework of political skill (Ferris et al. *Journal of Management* 33:290–320, 2007) by examining the impact that dimensions of political skill have on interpersonal processes and outcomes in the workplace.

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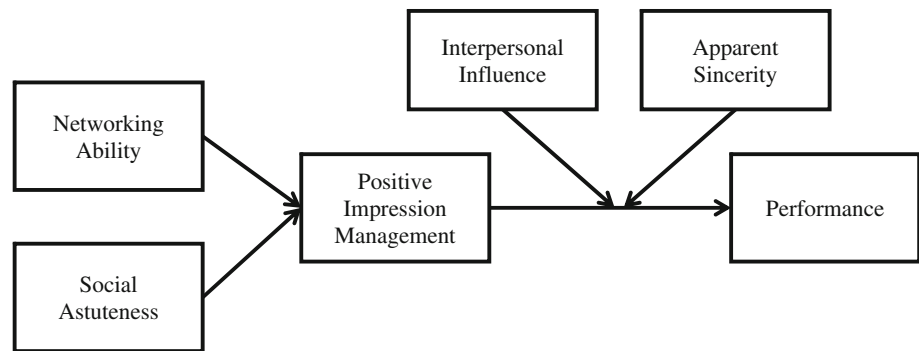
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dimensionality · Performance ratings

## Introduction

Political skill is an important individual difference described as the ability to understand the work environment and those acting within it, and to use that knowledge to influence others to achieve goals (Ferris et al. 2005b, 2007). This skill set, believed to be both innate as well as learned, has received significant attention in recent years (see Ferris et al. 2012, for a review). An important tenant of political skill is that those high in this skill set are capable of selecting and executing the most appropriate influence tactics to influence others at work (Ferris et al. 2007). However, we have failed to fully understand how

**Fig. 1** Theoretical model



politically skilled actors achieve success, with researchers urging investigation into the dimensionality of political skill (Ferris et al. 2012) to advance theory.

Specifically, most of the research studies in this area have examined either the direct effects of political skill on work outcomes, or the moderating effect of political skill on the influence–outcomes relationships (Harris et al. 2007; Treadway et al. 2007; Meurs et al. 2010). The purpose of our research is to examine the impact of the dimensions of political skill (social astuteness, networking ability, interpersonal influence, and apparent sincerity) on the use of positive impression management (IM), as well as the effectiveness of the positive IM tactics used. Specifically, we attempt to test and expand upon the framework purposed by Ferris et al. (2007). We accomplish this by examining the relationship between dimensions of political skill, frequency of positive IM use, and supervisors' ratings of performance, investigating the cognitive antecedents to the selection of more appropriate influence tactics, as well as the behavioral components, which are believed to moderate the relationship between IM and outcomes (see Fig. 1).

Social influence has been an important theoretical foundation in the organizational sciences for many years (Bolino et al. 2008; Ferris et al. 2002). It is defined as a broad category that encompasses formal, informal, intentional, and unintentional influence efforts including the concepts of IM as well as other influence taxonomies (e.g., Ferris and Mitchell 1987). The study of social influence primarily has concerned the methods and context of influence, as well as influencer characteristics (Ferris et al. 2002). Significantly less attention has been given to the execution or success of the influence attempts in garnering positive work outcomes (Ferris et al. 2002).

Using Liden and Mitchell's (1988) model of risk assessment, it is argued that socially astute and well-networked individuals will be more adept at engaging in risk assessment, and therefore will utilize positive IM tactics more frequently (ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification) rather than using the more negative IM tactics

(intimidation and supplication) (Bolino and Turnley 1999). We further argue that those with apparent sincerity and interpersonal influence will be better able to execute those tactics leading to more positive outcomes in the form of enhanced supervisor–performance ratings.

This investigation contributes to the literature in several ways. To our knowledge, this is the first comprehensive empirical examination of intra and interpersonal processes (effects of political skill on others) conceptualized within the cognitive, affective, and behavioral framework of political skill theorized by Ferris et al. (2007). We further refine political skill theory by testing how the dimensions affect the IM process differently. Initial support has demonstrated that the dimensions of political skill may affect outcomes differently. For example, researchers have examined the meditational role of the dimensions of political skill in the personality–performance relationship and the relative importance of the dimensions on managerial effectiveness (Shi et al. 2011; Snell et al. 2013). In joining this research, not only do we push theory forward, but we also answer calls of researchers to explore the dimensionality of political skill (e.g., Ferris et al. 2012), and how influence processes function as intermediaries between political skill and performance (e.g., Kapoutsis et al. 2011). We expand Shi et al.'s (2011) research by exploring not only the mediating impact of political skill, but also the moderating impact. In addition, we expand on Snell's research by indicating that the relative importance of political skill may be better explained by understanding the difference between the cognitive and behavioral components of political skill. Further, we investigate the nature of influence processes in the political skill–performance relationship.

Finally, we examine combinations of IM tactics, rather than individual tactics in isolation, as called for by Bolino et al. (2008). In their recent literature review of IM, they identified the need for examining potential and meaningful combinations of IM tactics. Given that previous research has focused primarily on individual tactics (e.g., ingratiation, Treadway et al. 2007), and sparingly in relation to

political skill, we highlight the effect of political skill on selecting and using a combination of tactics. IM use is likely built on the use of multiple tactics together, and investigating them in isolation does not give researchers an accurate understanding of IM use.

## Theory, Model, and Hypotheses

The proposed model and relationships in this investigation are built upon the tenets of social influence theory and Ferris et al.'s (2007) political skill framework. According to Geen (1991), IM or social influence has two motives: (1) manipulating audiences for some immediate social or material gain, and (2) constructing a desired self-concept. Moreover, it is argued that social influence is instigated by a fundamental need to belong and be evaluated positively (Baumeister and Leary 1995), and that a positive image helps individuals attain desired outcomes, such as friendship, approval, and power (Leary and Kowalski 1990). This need to belong manifests as goal-directed activities to influence the impressions formed by audiences (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Schlenker 2003). One category of goal-directed behaviors is IM, a specific type of social influence.

## Impression Management

IM involves tactics or strategies used to *exert* social influence, and thus can be considered a subset of influence tactics. That is, IM techniques attempt to manage one's image and project a desired identity to significant others (Bozeman and Kacmar 1997; Turnley and Bolino 2001), with the expectation that one's enhanced image will ultimately lead to desired outcomes. IM is goal directed and can be used strategically over a period of time to achieve enhanced performance ratings, increased compensation, and promotions (Wayne and Liden 1995). One widely used taxonomy of IM, the Bolino and Turnley (1999) measure, is based on the study of Jones and Pittman (1982). The dimensions of this measure are of particular interest to our research: ingratiation, exemplification, self-promotion, intimidation, and supplication.

Ingratiation involves taking an interest in others, praising others, and doing favors in an attempt to seem likable. Exemplification entails performing extra-role behaviors such as staying late (and making such acts visible) in an effort to be seen as hard-working. Self-promotion is accomplished by expressing achievements and abilities to appear competent (Bolino and Turnley 1999). These tactics form a cluster supported by Bolino and Turnley (2003) termed "positives." Positive IM tactics are used more frequently to enhance one's image and build relationships.

In support of this, Sosik et al. (2002) found that positive tactics (combination of ingratiation and exemplification) led to perceptions of charismatic leadership traits.

On the other hand, certain tactics are seen as negative. Two such tactics are intimidation and supplication. Intimidation is generally used to create an image of power or danger, whereas supplication is used to appear in need of assistance (Bolino and Turnley 2003). Research is generally supportive of the notion that frequent use of negative tactics results in poor outcomes. For example, more assertive behaviors were found to be associated with higher levels of stress among CEOs (Kipnis and Schmidt 1988). The use of pressure through demands, threats, or persistent reminders is likely to be met with resistance rather than commitment (Falbe and Yukl 1992), and assertiveness is negatively associated with LMX and satisfaction with one's supervisor (Deluga and Perry 1991). Research has shown that pairs of tactics have more favorable outcomes than single tactic alone (Case et al. 1988) but frequently combining two positive tactics is more effective than frequently using two negative tactics (Falbe and Yukl 1992).

Beyond examining actual tactic usage and effectiveness, social influence researchers have investigated the antecedents and dispositional tendencies of IM use. For instance, Mowday (1978) studied the need for power; Vecchio and Sussmann (1991) reported on outcomes of Machiavellianism; Bolino and Turnley (2003) analyzed self-monitoring and Machiavellianism; Cable and Judge (2003) reported on the Five-Factor Model; and Caldwell and Burger (1997) analyzed the five-factor model, desire for control, and self-monitoring (see Bolino et al. 2008 for review). However, these tendencies are precisely that—innate reactions to environmental or organizational cues to manage impressions.

Researchers have also explored the role of the target of the influence attempt (supervisor, subordinate, or peer). Fable and Yukl (1992) examined the effects of downward influence, suggesting that frequent uses of inspirational appeal and consultation were more likely to result in the commitment of the subordinate. Gordon (1996), in a meta-analysis on ingratiation, examined it toward all targets, finding support that the downward and lateral influence attempts were more successful, but that other enhancement was particularly useful in creating positive evaluations from upward targets. Further, Gordon (1996) argued that the transparency of the ingratiation attempt is a strong indicator of its success. This indicates that no matter the target, if the influence tactic is transparent and targets see it for what it is—an attempt to manipulate their perceptions—it is not likely to be successful. Thus, the questions remain: Who is more frequently prone to use positive combinations of tactics, rather than negative combinations. Who is more capable of executing these tactics in an authentic style and

manner that is more likely to achieve one's desired results (e.g., not transparent)?

## Political Skill

We argue that persons high in political skill will more frequently use positive IM and execute them in a successful manner. Political skill combines a cognitive understanding of one's environment (and those acting within it) with behavioral flexibility that results in behavior aimed at achieving personal or organizational goals (Ferris et al. 2007). It is comprised of four dimensions: social astuteness, networking ability, interpersonal influence, and apparent sincerity. Those high in social astuteness have a keen understanding of the work environment, those acting within it, and others' motivations (Ferris et al. 2005a). In addition to having self-awareness, socially astute individuals are sensitive to and able to identify with others (Ferris et al. 2012). Networking ability is the skill to understand organizational dynamics and position oneself advantageously in one's network to gain social capital, such as information (e.g., Brass 2001). Interpersonal influence imbues the politically skilled with a subtle style and behavioral flexibility (Ferris et al. 2005a). This dimension of political skill does not allow for understanding of the environment, but rather gives the individual an ability to use communication in a way that allows for subtle influence, putting the target at ease (Ferris et al. 2012). Finally, people with high levels of apparent sincerity are viewed as trustworthy and genuine (Ferris et al. 2005a). Apparent sincerity "is vital to the success of influence, allowing the politically skilled to mask any ulterior motives if they are present" and is considered a behavioral component of political skill (Ferris et al. 2012, p. 492).

In their theoretical review, Ferris et al. (2007) argued that political skill as a "cognitive-affective-behavioral comprehensive configuration of social competencies" (p. 299), which involves intrapsychic process in which politically skilled individuals activate goal-directed behavior and engage in interpersonal processes in an effort to achieve desired outcomes. Thus, political skill operates at two distinct levels: (1) at the cognitive, intrapsychic level; and (2) at the behavioral, interpersonal level. Although we do not know of other researchers categorizing the four dimensions of political skill using the Ferris et al. (2007) framework, our goal is to push political skill theory forward by doing exactly the same. Therefore, we argue that social astuteness and networking ability operate at the intrapsychic level, while interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity operate at the behavioral level. In the following, we explain our rationale for this categorization.

At the intrapsychic level, political skill enhances the ability to read and understand others to establish personal goals. As such, we argue that social astuteness is a dimension of political skill that pertains mostly to understanding oneself and one's environment, suggesting a cognitive component of political skill. Social astuteness will be vital in the establishment of personal goals, because it is this component of political skill that facilitates the understanding of the environment and the awareness that influence could be used to achieve a personal goal (e.g., higher performance evaluations). Social astuteness allows the politically skilled to see that changes can and/or should be made to the environment based on their assessment, thus creating a goal (e.g., to make a more positive impression). Further, the intrapsychic process results in the development of personal resources. While networking, the actual act of making connections is an interpersonal process, we argue that networking ability is an internal cognitive process that allows one to understand strategically how to build and place themselves in their network to receive the greatest benefit. The cognition must preclude the behavior. Essentially, networking ability involves understanding one's network, those likely to be influential or to provide helpful information in one's network, and is thus one way to enhance personal resources (e.g., Ferris et al. 2012; Brass 2001). People with networking ability are able "to determine how and where they will position themselves to both create and take advantage of opportunities" (Ferris et al. 2007, p. 306; Pfeffer 1992). Thus, this cognitive understanding or network awareness becomes a component of the intrapsychic process as described by Ferris et al. (2007).

Moving toward the interpersonal process of the meta-theoretical framework, Ferris et al. (2007) suggested that this is where we see effects on others, comprising the behavioral component of political skill. There are two dimensions of political skill that have clear behavioral implications: interpersonal influence, and apparent sincerity. Both these dimensions are only in use when there are others around. Interpersonal influence is defined as behavioral flexibility—allowing one to adjust his/her behavior subtly and to communicate easily with others. Therefore, interpersonal influence does not represent a cognitive component of political skill, but rather a behavioral component. This would indicate that its effects are interpersonal, not intrapsychic. Further, apparent sincerity also represents an interpersonal aspect of political skill. One attempts to appear trustworthy and sincere to others. This impacts the transparency of the influence attempt to others. As mentioned previously, apparent sincerity is a behavioral component that allows the politically skilled to mask any ulterior motives (if there are any). Thus, apparent



sincerity allows one to obscure possible ulterior motives, making the influence attempt seem genuine.

In short, we argue that the intrapsychic process, which includes social astuteness and networking ability are cognitive dimensions of political skill, which encourage the selection of positive IM tactics. These two dimensions of political skill can be and are used regardless of if there are other people present. That is, these two dimensions imply a cognitive dedication of resources that are used to help understand one's environment and network. Further, as suggested by Ferris et al. (2007), interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity are employed at the interpersonal level and are behavioral dimensions of political skill. These allow the actor to carry out the influence in a way that seems authentic. These two dimensions would only be used in the presence of others, as there is no need to appear sincere or change your behaviors to subtly influence people if there is no one around. These arguments are in line with the conceptualization of political skill as a cognitive-behavioral configuration of social competencies.

Based on the intrapsychic, cognitive, and interpersonal, behavioral processes, the outcomes of the Ferris et al. (2007) meta-theoretical framework are to change target impressions of the actor, select influence tactics and strategies, and improve self-evaluations. These ultimately influence actor reputation, target attitudes, and supervisors' evaluations of and decisions about the actor, as moderated by political skill. Therefore, the original Ferris et al. (2007) model indicates that political skill not only leads to tactic use, but that political skill also impacts the effectiveness of those tactics used (e.g., moderates) leading to enhanced target work behaviors and attitudes, enhanced actor reputation, and enhanced supervisor evaluations of the target (see Fig. p. 303). However, few, if any, studies have tested this full model. Therefore, it is our goal to test this theoretical model, and further refine and extend it by isolating the particular dimensions of political skill that can help in informing various parts of the model. That is, rather than having the entire construct of political skill, both moderate and mediate outcomes, we have isolated the cognitive components as antecedents and the behavioral components as moderators in the IM-performance relationship.

### **Political Skill and the Use of Positive Impression Management**

Liden and Mitchell's (1988) model of risk assessment is one theoretical lens that helps us illuminate the relationships between political skill and the use of positive IM. Risk assessment involves examining the cause for using IM, the perceived cost/benefit ratio, the perception of the target's receptiveness to ingratiation (or an IM attempt),

and an assessment of the conduciveness of the environment. Therefore, the processes suggested by risk assessment are cognitive in nature, representing intrapsychic processes. Hence, we argue that the cognitive dimensions of political skill will assist in the process of risk-assessment. Because risk assessment does not involve any outward behaviors, interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity, which are behavioral dimensions of political skill, will not assist in the process of choosing positive IM (Ferris et al. 2012).

Socially astute individuals are more capable of engaging in an intrapsychic process because they are self-aware and recognize the motivations of others, as well as the circumstances of the environment (Ferris et al. 2012). We argue that the socially astute persons, because of their keen understanding of the environment and those acting within it, are aware that positive tactics are more likely to lead to positive outcomes. They will understand that the target will be receptive of more positive IM tactics, rather than the harsher negative tactics. In addition, they understand the environment and will be more equipped to pick up on environmental cues indicating that the use of positive tactics is favored. Thus, their cost/benefit assessment, target and environmental analysis will provide them with cues such that that positive IM will be more likely to be effective. Indeed, Ferris et al. (2007), in their meta-theoretical framework, argued that social astuteness would be used to strategically select methods of influence.

Similarly, persons who are politically skilled are able to position themselves more favorably in their networks to gain the greatest benefit from these connections (Ferris et al. 2005b, 2007). That is, they have network awareness. Therefore, networking ability allows the politically skilled to efficiently glean social capital in the form of information from their network (Ferris et al. 2012; Ellen et al. 2013). They understand who is influential in the network, who can give them information (Ferris et al. 2007; Treadway 2010), and subsequently this network awareness gives them information about the environment, their supervisors, and the culture of the organization (Treadway 2010). This affords them many benefits, including the creation of opportunities allowing them to make better cost/benefit, target, and environmental assessments (Baron and Markman 2000) because of a wider scope of information sources. Pfeffer (1992) argued that networks help individuals to be well positioned to create and take advantage of opportunities. In addition, these advantageous positions have been related to the increased task-related knowledge (Sparrowe et al. 2001) and diverse information (e.g., Burt 2005; Brass 1995). It is our argument that because of network awareness, the politically skilled have information about the culture of the organization and the preferences and work-styles of their supervisors and co-workers.

For instance, a politically skilled individual might have a connection with his/her supervisor's mentor. This mentor will have valuable information about the types of influence tactics that the supervisor prefers or detests, thus giving the politically skilled individual information that would lead to a more accurate assessment of the cost/benefit ratio, as well as target susceptibility. Therefore, we argue that persons strong in networking ability are more likely to have information about the most appropriate types of IM tactics relative to a particular context or relationship. This knowledge is likely to lead to a better assessment of the cost/benefit ratio in the risk assessment process (Liden and Mitchell 1988). Thus, we hypothesize that both networking ability and social astuteness will be associated with more frequent use of positive IM tactics and less frequent use of negative IM tactics.

**Hypothesis 1** Actor's high in (a) networking ability and (b) social astuteness will more frequently engage in positive IM tactics and will less frequently engage in negative IM.

### Moderated Mediation

Research has not conclusively shown that all positive IM attempts are successful, suggesting moderators to the IM-outcomes relationship. For instance, numerous studies have found that flattery increases supervisors' liking of their subordinates (see Gordon 1996). Ingratiation has been shown to have a positive effect on perceived fit and recruiter hiring, and self-promotion has displayed a positive relationship with interviewer ratings of performance (Higgins et al. 2003). However, a negative relationship was observed between ingratiation and promotability (Thacker and Wayne 1995) as well as self-promotion and performance evaluations (Higgins et al. 2003). Research has shown nonsignificant results for ingratiation toward one's superiors (Yukl and Tracey 1992), and between exemplification-type behaviors and supervisor ratings of organizational citizenship (Bolino et al. 2006). Further, Gordon (1996) indicated that if a tactic is seen as transparent (e.g., as an attempt to get something from the target) rather than sincere, it was much less likely to be successful. Therefore, the way in which IM tactics are executed likely accounts for these differences.

Researchers have theorized that persons high in political skill will execute their influence in a manner that inspires trust and confidence in others (e.g., Ferris et al. 2005a; Ellen et al. 2013) and have found direct political skill-performance and political skill-reputation links (Liu et al. 2007). However, research has yet to isolate the specific mechanisms of how political skill operates to have these effects. Although Ferris et al. (2007) suggested that

interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity impact the effectiveness of influence tactics, few studies have examined these dimensions individually. Therefore, it is suggested that apparent sincerity and interpersonal influence—the two behavioral dimensions of political skill—will moderate the relationship between positive IM behaviors and performance ratings (our proxy for effectiveness).

In order that influence attempts are successful, one's intentions or motives must not be perceived as nefarious (Jones 1990). Therefore, individuals who are able to engage in IM, and who seem sincere (high apparent sincerity) will be more successful. If a manager perceives that their subordinates are just flattering them to increase their performance evaluation, then it is likely that these attempts will be transparent and seen as manipulative. However, if managers truly believe the flattery was genuine and sincere, this will increase the effectiveness of the tactics leading to higher levels of performance ratings. That is, individuals engaging in positive tactics will be more likely to impact their supervisor's information process, such that they will create favorable attributions, leading to more positive performance ratings (Wayne and Ferris 1990; Wayne and Liden 1995).

The interpersonal influence dimension of political skill will also impact the relationship between positive IM and work outcomes. Interpersonal influence is the ability to put others at ease, build rapport, and make most people feel comfortable, which represents behavioral flexibility (Ferris et al. 2005a). It is conceptualized as the ability to be adaptable social chameleons (Ferris et al. 2007). This suggests that when engaging in positive IM tactics, those high in interpersonal influence will be able to use those tactics with greater ease. This subtly will make others be comfortable around them, thus increasing the effectiveness of the tactics.

In preliminary support, political skill (all four dimensions combined) was found to enhance performance ratings for those engaging in IM (Harris et al. 2007), arguably by enhancing perceived sincerity of ingratiating behaviors (Treadway et al. 2007). Further, a recent meta-analysis found a significant positive relationship between political skill and task and contextual performance (Bing et al. 2011). Therefore, we believe that those with high levels of apparent sincerity and interpersonal influence will be better able to use positive IM tactics effectively. This should increase their performance ratings, as rated by the supervisors.

We argue these positive work outcomes are obtained *through* strategic IM use (using positive rather than negative IM). Politically skilled individuals are socially astute and have vast networks allowing them to properly assess the risk of particular IM tactics (as argued with Hypotheses 1a and 1b). These cognitive dimensions of political skill allow for an assessment of the environment that gives the

politically skilled important information about what types of tactics result in more favorable outcomes (i.e., positive IM). This knowledge allows them to understand that positive IM creates positive impressions. Therefore, they will shy away from using the more negative tactics, which are not thought to impact performance ratings.

However, once they have gleaned the information from the environment using social astuteness and networking ability, it is the two behavioral dimensions of political skill that enable the successful use of positive IM. That is, social astuteness and networking ability give individuals knowledge and understanding of the environment leading to choosing positive IM tactics. Once positive IM tactics are chosen, politically skilled individuals “employ their interpersonal influence attempts and their capacity for apparent sincerity to appear genuine and authentic in their behavior, with no ulterior motive,” making the positive IM tactics more successful (Ferris et al. 2007, p. 307). Therefore, we hypothesize that positive IM is an important mediator in the networking ability/social astuteness—outcomes relationship. Moreover, interpersonal influence/apparent sincerity will moderate the positive IM—outcomes relationship, creating stronger positive relationships with performance ratings. By suggesting this, we expand on and further explain how political skill works—the *how* and the *why*—bringing greater specificity to the political skill construct.

**Hypothesis 2** Networking ability will have a conditional indirect effect on performance ratings through the use of positive impression management, as moderated by (a) interpersonal influence and (b) apparent sincerity.

**Hypothesis 3** Social Astuteness will have a conditional indirect effect on performance ratings through the use of positive impression management, as moderated by (a) interpersonal influence and (b) apparent sincerity.

## Method

### Procedure and Participants

Paper questionnaires were administered to all 758 employees at an automotive group in the southeastern United States, distributed through interoffice mail in sealed envelopes addressed directly to the employee. To assure anonymity, completed questionnaires were hand collected by the principal investigator at regional offices that were within driving distance. A total of 369 employee responses were received, yielding a 48.6 % response rate. Requests were sent to 316 supervisors for employee performance ratings, with 64 returned. This yielded a total of 142 matched employee-supervisor survey responses. However,

complete data were available from 116 subordinate surveys (81 % Caucasian, 56 % female,  $M_{\text{age}} = 39.6$ ,  $M_{\text{tenure}} = 4.7$  years) representing 15 % of the employees, and 59 supervisor surveys (41.6 % Caucasian, 33 % female,  $M_{\text{age}} = 44.7$ ,  $M_{\text{tenure}} = 7.6$  years) representing 16 % of the supervisors, resulting in 116 usable dyads. Mean comparison of study variables for subordinates included in this analysis and those excluded because of supervisor’s non-response indicated that there were no significant differences between these two groups. Thus, though supervisor response rate is low, it is unlikely to impact the relationships proposed in this study.

### Measures

#### *Actor Political Skill*

Political skill was measured by political skill inventory (PSI) (Ferris et al. 2005b) using a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale includes four dimensions: six-item networking ability ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ; sample items: “I spend a lot of time and effort networking with others,” and “I am good at building relationships with influential people at work”); five-item social astuteness ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ; sample items: “I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others,” and “I have good intuition or savvy about how to present myself to others”); four-item interpersonal influence ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ; sample items: “I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me,” and “I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others”); and three-item apparent sincerity dimensions ( $\alpha = 0.73$ ; sample items: “When communicating with others, I try to be genuine in what I say and do,” and “It is important that people believe I am sincere in what I say and do”).

#### *Actor Impression Management*

Impression management (IM) was collected using Bolino and Turnley’s (1999) measure on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (indicating they “never behave this way”) to 7 (indicating they “often behave this way”). Positive IM tactics were measured by combining the ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification subscales ( $\alpha = 0.96$ ). Sample items include “Compliment my superiors so they will see you as likeable” and “Stay at work late so superiors will know you are hard working.” Negative IM tactics were measured by combining the intimidation and supplication subscales ( $\alpha = 0.87$ ). Sample items include “Deal strongly or aggressively with my superiors who interfere in my business,” and “Act like I know less than I do so my superior will help me out.”



## Performance

Managers overseeing the work of the employees were asked to rate their employee(s) based on their recall of the focal employee's most recent performance appraisal. This measure included six items (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” ( $\alpha = 0.92$ ).

## Control Variables

Gender and race have been theoretically thought and empirically shown to impact the development and use of political skill (e.g., Shaughnessy et al. 2011; Blass et al. 2007; Snell et al. 2013). For instance, Blass et al. (2007) found that gender and race impacted the results of mentoring on networking ability, rendering mentoring a less effective way to build networking ability in women and minorities. Thus, we intend using gender and race as control variables in our data.

## Data Analysis

Our data are multilevel in nature because some leaders rated more than one subordinate; thus, those ratings could have leader-level effects resulting in non-independence of individual scores (Bliese and Hanges 2004). Because we hypothesize individual-level relationships, we employed hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to account for leader-level effects by including additional variance terms (Bryk and Raudenbush 1988). All continuous variables were mean-centered (Aiken and West 1991; Muller et al. 2005) at the grand mean because all predictor variables were at level 1, based on 1-1-1 model drawn out by Krull and Mackinnon (2001) and Bauer et al. (2006).

Because we are suggesting moderated mediation, we expect there to be conditional indirect effects (Preacher et al. 2007). To test the moderated mediation models hypothesized using a multilevel framework, we adapted the steps recommended by Muller et al. (2005) using the “nlme” package in the statistical software R (Pinheiro et al. 2012). We examined the conditions that (1) the independent variable is related to the mediator; and (2) the interaction of the mediator and the moderator is related to the dependent variable. As a follow-up analysis, we used the SPSS macro designed by Preacher et al. (2007) to test for conditional indirect effects, employing bootstrap analysis to test for the direct and indirect effects at different levels of the moderator.

## Results

### Preliminary Analysis

#### Factor Structure

Because we have proposed using the political skill and IM measures in a manner different from how they have been traditionally utilized, we tested the viability of the proposed structure of these measures. First, we tested the structural integrity of examining the four political skill dimensions separately by conducting confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Next, we conducted exploratory factor analyses to confirm grouping of IM tactics into two groups.

**Political Skill** To support our claim of testing the political skill dimensions separately, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) using the SEM package for R. A CFA was chosen because numerous studies have supported the four factor structure of political skill (e.g., Ferris et al. 2005, 2008). Model fit and factor loadings (Kline 2011) were assessed to determine the viability of examining the dimensions of political skill rather than the overall construct. We compared three separate models: (1) one-factor model where every indicator loaded onto one overall political skill latent variable; (2) four-factor model where all items were loaded onto their respective subdimensions; and (3) a three-factor model where networking ability and apparent sincerity items loaded separately to their respective factors, but constrained interpersonal influence and social astuteness to a single factor. The third model was included because correlation between social astuteness and interpersonal influence ( $r = 0.74$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) is the strongest correlation among all political skill dimensions. The results from these analyses are reported in Table 1. The four-factor model fits the data significantly better than the three-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 112.95$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and the three-factor model fits the data significantly better than the single-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 297.75$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Although these results provide support for retaining four distinct subdimensions of political skill, lower than ideal model fit indices suggest the potential of fit improvement. Assessment of the CFA results revealed that the measurement model can be improved by adding parameter estimates between error variance terms of *within* dimension items (i.e., no parameters were estimated across factors; see Johnson and Creech 1983). In doing this, we were able to achieve higher model fit indices ( $\chi^2 = 385.22$ ,  $df = 112$ ; AIC = 503.22; CFI = 0.89; RMSEA = 0.09). This, coupled with prior research supporting the four-factor structure of political skill (e.g., Ferris et al. 2005, 2008), gives us confidence in the use of all four political skill factors.

**Table 1** Political skill CFA results

Model	1-Factor	3-Factor <sup>a</sup>	4-Factor	Modified 4-Factor
$\chi^2$	1053.90**	756.15**	643.20**	385.22**
df	135	132	129	112
$\chi^2/df$	7.81	5.73	4.99	3.44
$\Delta\chi^2$		297.75**	112.95**	257.98**
AIC	1125.90	843.15	727.20	503.22
CFI	0.66	0.76	0.81	0.89
RMSEA	0.15	0.12	0.11	0.09

$N = 326$ . Change in  $\chi^2$  is relative to the preceding model in the sequence

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$

*Grouping of Impression Management* In an effort to confirm our grouping of the IM tactics into positive versus negative tactics, we performed an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) because, although five separate dimensions of the IM measure have been validated, fewer studies have examined the groupings of positive versus negative IM. We used promax rotation because we expect the five IM tactics to be related, making them oblique (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007). The results indicated four factors; however, Eigenvalues for the first two components were significantly higher than the latter two ( $C1 = 6.82$ ,  $C2 = 3.31$ ,  $C3 = 1.17$  and  $C4 = 1.07$ ). In addition, results displayed multiple loadings ( $>0.40$ ) across components, suggesting that IM tactics likely fall into two categories. In line with the EFA results, we ran this analysis again while restricting the factors to two: Ingratiation, exemplification, and self-promotion clearly loaded under component 1; and supplication and intimidation loaded under component 2 (Table 2 summarizes these results). These results give indication for two emergent patterns: the first encompassing ingratiation, exemplification, and self-promotion (positive tactics); and the second encompassing supplication and intimidation (negative tactics). As such, we used these combinations for our analysis.

### Non-Independence

In order to gage the amount of individual-level variance explained by leader-level effects (Bliese 2000), interclass correlations 1 ( $ICC_1$ ) were calculated using the “multi-level” package in the statistical software R (Bliese 2012).  $ICC_1$  scores for Study 1 ( $ICC_1 = 0.67$ ) provide evidence for the nested nature of the data. Interestingly, results suggest more within-group variance than between-group variance ( $ICC_1 = -0.11$ ). However, according to our original data analysis plan, data were run in HLM and followed up by OLS regression for thoroughness.

**Table 2** EFA results on impression management tactics

	Component 1	Component 2
Eigenvalue	6.05	4.19
Ingratiation 1	<b>0.75</b>	0.00
Ingratiation 2	<b>0.61</b>	0.27
Ingratiation 3	<b>0.64</b>	0.01
Ingratiation 4	<b>0.60</b>	0.00
Exemplification 1	<b>0.77</b>	0.25
Exemplification 2	<b>0.70</b>	0.20
Exemplification 3	<b>0.80</b>	0.12
Exemplification 4	<b>0.55</b>	0.29
Self-Promotion 1	<b>0.55</b>	0.15
Self-Promotion 2	<b>0.64</b>	0.01
Self-Promotion 3	<b>0.64</b>	-0.04
Self-Promotion 4	<b>0.68</b>	0.13
Intimidation 1	-0.05	<b>0.45</b>
Intimidation 2	-0.10	<b>0.67</b>
Intimidation 3	-0.01	<b>0.62</b>
Intimidation 4	0.02	<b>0.63</b>
Intimidation 5	0.04	<b>0.76</b>
Supplication 1	0.27	<b>0.67</b>
Supplication 2	0.23	<b>0.56</b>
Supplication 3	0.30	<b>0.68</b>
Supplication 4	0.21	<b>0.78</b>
Supplication 5	0.24	<b>0.86</b>

Significant loadings are shown in bold

$N = 331$

### Common Method Variance

Political skill and IM were reported using a cross-sectional research design, and as such common method variance (CMV) needed to be statistically examined. We utilized the unmeasured latent method construct (ULMC) technique (Podsakoff et al. 2003; Richardson et al. 2009), which allows for partitioning of variance into three components: trait, method, and random error. According to Richardson et al. (2009), the ULMC procedure necessitates estimating four models. The first model, trait-only, tests the study’s measurement model consisting of 16 indicators pointing to positive IM latent variable (i.e., representing self-promotion, ingratiation, and exemplification factors), 18 indicators pointing to a political skill latent variable (i.e., representing social astuteness, apparent sincerity, networking ability, and interpersonal influence factors), and a null method factor. The second model, method-only model, allowed estimation of the paths from the method construct to all the manifest indicators in the model while trait constructs were null. The third model, trait/method, involved estimation of paths from both trait and method constructs (i.e., method latent variable) to the manifest

indicators and correlation among the trait constructs (i.e., IM latent variable was correlated with political skill latent variable). The fourth model, trait/method-R, was identical to the trait/method model, but covariances among the trait factors were constrained to the unstandardized values obtained from the trait-only mode. By constraining the covariance between trait factors, we are able to identify the level of variance explained *solely* from CMV when we compare the trait/method-R model to the trait/method model. Non-significantly different models suggest that CMV does not contribute to a significant portion of the variance in the latent variables.

The trait-only (two-factor) model fitted the data significantly better than did the method-only (single factor) model [ $\chi^2_{\text{difference}}(404,405) = 929.4, p < 0.01$ ]. Furthermore, there was no statistical difference between the fit of trait/method model and the trait/method-R model [ $\chi^2_{\text{difference}}(374,375) = 0.06, ns$ ]. Richardson et al. (2009) have asserted that bias due to CMV is present when the trait/method-R model fits the data significantly worse than the trait/method model, whereas our results indicate no bias. Taken together, results from this analysis provide evidence that CMV is unlikely to confound the interpretations of our findings.

### Hypothesis Tests

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the study variables. As expected, the political skill dimensions were significantly correlated with each other, ranging from  $r = 0.32$  to  $r = 0.74$  ( $p < 0.01$ ). However, the dimensions share a unique relationship with positive and negative IM tactics. For instance, positive IM is related to networking ability ( $r = 0.47, p < 0.01$ ), but not related to apparent sincerity ( $r = -0.10, ns$ ). These coefficients corroborate our theoretical stance on the importance of investigating the political skill dimensions separately. Interestingly, only gender out of our control variables was related to any of our study variables. Thus, for the remainder of the analyses, only gender was kept as a control variable.

The Hypotheses 1a and 1b were tested using correlation analyses. Social astuteness ( $r = 0.23, p < 0.05$ ) and networking ability ( $r = 0.47, p < 0.01$ ) were significantly and positively related to positive IM tactics (see Table 3). Social astuteness is nonsignificantly related to negative IM, though the relationship is negative. Networking ability and social astuteness have nonsignificant relationships with negative IM tactics. Further, we tested these relationships while controlling for all other dimensions of political skill and networking ability and social astuteness explain variance above and beyond apparent sincerity and interpersonal influence. Overall, this supports our Hypotheses 1a

and 1b in that those high in social astuteness and networking ability tend to choose more positive tactics and less frequently engage in negative IM.

### Tests of Moderated Mediation

Table 4 presents the results from the HLM analysis. The Hypotheses 2a and 2b consider the indirect effect of networking ability on performance ratings through the use of positive IM moderated by interpersonal influence (Hypothesis 2a) and apparent sincerity (Hypothesis 2b). Supporting the first condition of moderated mediation, networking ability was positively related to use of positive IM ( $\gamma = 0.39, t = 5.67, p < 0.01$ ). However, the second condition was not met as the interaction between positive IM and actor interpersonal influence on performance ratings ( $\gamma = -0.04, t = -0.33, ns$ ) was not significant. In addition, the relationships between positive IM and performance ratings ( $\gamma = -0.03, t = -0.16, ns$ ) was not significant. Results do not support moderated mediation or direct mediation for the relationships proposed in the Hypothesis 2a. The follow-up assessment using the Preacher et al. (2007) SPSS macro replicated these findings.

Because the Hypotheses 2a and 2b necessitate the same first condition, the first condition for the Hypothesis 2b is met. The second condition is also met since the interaction between the use of positive IM and actor apparent sincerity on performance ratings ( $\gamma = 0.23, t = 1.92, p < 0.05$ ) is significant, supporting the Hypothesis 2b. The follow-up assessments using Preacher et al.'s (2007) moderated mediation bootstrapping indicate that actor apparent sincerity does not moderate the indirect effect of networking ability on performance ratings through positive IM. Rather, actor apparent sincerity only moderates the direct effect of positive IM (i.e., mediator) on performance ratings. These results support the Hypothesis 2b.

The Hypotheses 3a and 3b propose that positive IM mediates the relationships between social astuteness and performance ratings as moderated by actor interpersonal influence (Hypothesis 3a) or actor apparent sincerity (Hypothesis 3b). The first condition of both the Hypotheses 3a and 3b were met—actor social astuteness is positively related to positive IM ( $\gamma = 0.18, t = 2.27, p < 0.05$ ). The second condition for the Hypothesis 3a was not met. The interaction of positive IM and actor interpersonal influence on performance ratings ( $\gamma = -0.00, t = -0.02, ns$ ) was not significant. The follow-up assessment using Preacher et al. (2007) bootstrapping test revealed the same results, indicating that the Hypothesis 3a was not supported. The second condition of the Hypothesis 3b was met; the interaction of positive IM tactics and actor apparent sincerity on performance ratings ( $\gamma = 0.28, t = 2.06,$

**Table 3** Means, standard deviation, and intercorrelations for the study variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Race	–	–									
Gender <sup>a</sup>	–	–	0.02								
Networking ability	4.73	1.05	0.02	0.13							
Social astuteness	5.20	0.99	0.04	0.45	0.62**						
Apparent sincerity	6.18	0.79	–0.04	–0.03	0.32**	0.44**					
Interpersonal influence	5.71	0.90	–0.03	0.10	0.51**	0.74**	0.42**				
Political skill	5.32	0.78	0.01	0.09	0.85**	0.89**	0.58**	0.82**			
Negative impression management	1.33	0.50	–0.10	0.19*	0.10	–0.05	–0.34**	–0.09	–0.05		
Positive impression management	2.47	0.87	–0.11	0.03	0.47**	0.23*	–0.10	0.19*	0.32**	0.38**	
Performance rating	5.58	1.00	0.11	–0.08	0.20*	0.06	0.12	0.07	0.15	–0.06	0.06

<sup>a</sup> Gender is coded 0 for males and 1 for female  $N = 115$

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

$p < 0.05$ ) was significant, supporting this hypothesis. Results from Preacher et al. (2007) show further support for the Hypothesis 3b. The conditional indirect effects of actor social astuteness on performance ratings through the use of positive IM was different from zero at high levels of actor apparent sincerity (0.06; 95 % bootstrap CI 0.004–0.173), indicating that apparent sincerity moderates the indirect effects.

#### Further Assessment of Moderation

The interactions of positive IM and actor interpersonal influence did not have a significant effect on performance ratings. However, the interaction of positive IM and apparent sincerity was significant on performance ratings and thus were plotted (Fig. 2). Simple slopes tests (Aiken and West 1991) as well as simple slopes difference tests (Dawson and Richter 2006) were conducted to test if the lines were statistically different from zero and from each other.

Simple slopes analysis revealed that when individuals were high in apparent sincerity, the relationships between positive IM and performance ratings ( $b = 0.31$ ,  $t = 2.00$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) were significant and positive. As seen in Fig. 2, individuals, who are low in apparent sincerity and who use higher levels of positive IM, have lower performance ratings, and those with high apparent sincerity using high levels of IM have higher ratings of performance. These results are confirmed by the simple slopes difference tests ( $\Delta b = 0.34$ ,  $t = 2.95$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

## Discussion

Ferris et al. (2007) argued that when examining organizational politics, “a serious omission has been the failure to evaluate the political skill of the influencer, leaving us ill

informed about why influence efforts are (or are not) successful” (p. 291). As the study of political skill has blossomed over the past few years, questions still remain as to how the dimensions of political skill operate within the context of influence to achieve success. Specifically, Ferris et al. (2012), in their review of the political skill literature, called for a more fine-grained analysis as regards how political skill operates in the IM process. Although political skill has been conceptualized as a four-dimensional construct, very little research has been done on the dimensionality of political skill, representing a “desperately” needed extension and clarification of theory (Ferris et al. 2012, p. 509).

Although there are some exceptions, researchers have primarily examined the relationship between mentoring and networking ability (e.g., Blass et al. 2007; Blickle et al. 2009). Another study on the dimensionality of political skill has either explored differential antecedents to the dimensions or the impact of these dimensions directly on work outcomes such as career satisfaction and income (see Ferris et al. 2012 for a review), albeit without regard for IM tactic usage. Hence, our research extends exploration of the dimensionality of political skill by testing not only for positive outcomes, but also testing for the dimensions that are *antecedents* to the use of positive IM, as well as the dimensions that are helpful in the successful *execution* of positive IM.

Specifically, we extend the theory of political skill by using the Ferris et al. (2007) framework to isolate the cognitive versus the behavioral components to help illustrate *why* and *how* persons high in political skill may be more effective at achieving their desired outcomes. As noted earlier, our hypotheses are predicated on the premise that social astuteness and networking ability represent of the cognitive components of political skill. Specifically, social astuteness allows individuals to understand the

**Table 4** Moderated mediation HLM results

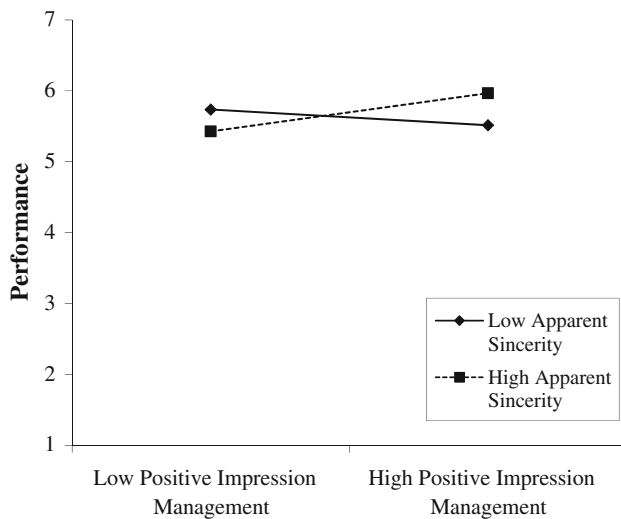
Predictor	Positive IM <sup>a</sup>		Performance rating	
	$\gamma$	$t$	$\gamma$	$T$
Step 1 <sup>b</sup>				
Networking ability	0.39	5.67**		
Social astuteness	0.18	2.27*		
Step 2				
Hypothesis 2a				
Networking ability			0.25	2.15*
Positive IM <sup>a</sup>			-0.03	-0.16
Interpersonal influence			-0.04	-0.31
Positive IM <sup>a</sup> X interpersonal influence			-0.04	-0.33
Hypothesis 2b				
Networking ability			0.19	1.71 <sup>†</sup>
Positive IM <sup>a</sup>			-0.05	-0.40
Apparent sincerity			-0.06	-0.42
Positive IM <sup>a</sup> X apparent sincerity			0.23	1.92*
Hypothesis 3a				
Social astuteness			0.00	0.05
Positive IM <sup>a</sup>			0.05	0.31
Interpersonal influence			0.07	0.46
Positive IM <sup>a</sup> X interpersonal influence			-0.00	-0.02
Hypothesis 3b				
Social astuteness			-0.02	-0.22
Positive IM <sup>a</sup>			0.07	0.64
Apparent sincerity			0.04	0.27
Positive IM <sup>a</sup> X apparent sincerity			0.28	2.06*

<sup>a</sup> Positive impression management

<sup>b</sup> Reports first condition results for all models

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ;

<sup>†</sup>  $p < 0.10$



**Fig. 2** Interaction plot of positive impression management and actor apparent sincerity on performance ratings

environment (cognitively) and networking ability represents the idea of knowing one's network and who will be most helpful (cognitively). These dimensions represent antecedents to determining the use of positive IM tactics.

On the other hand, interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity are conceptualized as behavioral manifestations, such that interpersonal influence is the behavioral flexibility (and the ability to make others feel at ease) and apparent sincerity is the style and manner of executing positive IM. Hence, these two dimensions are explored to see if they aid in the execution of positive IM, thus leading to enhanced outcomes in the form of improved supervisor performance ratings. Our final contribution is that we examine combinations of IM tactics, rather than tactics in isolation, as called for by Bolino et al. (2008), thus testing how dimensions of political skill may lead to a higher propensity for positive IM use.

As hypothesized, we found that social astuteness and networking ability were positively related to a greater propensity to utilize positive IM tactics, alluding to the fact that these individuals may be engaging in the risk assessment process more effectively (Liden and Mitchell 1988). Social astuteness and networking ability displayed non-significant results with use of negative IM. These results help highlight that persons high in social astuteness and networking ability generally operate in a manner that is consistent with the construct and theory (Ferris et al. 2007),



and they exhibit more frequent use of positive IM behaviors that historically have led to positive interpersonal relationships and enhanced success factors. In addition, we found that the direct effect of positive IM on performance was not significant, but that apparent sincerity assists in the delivery of positive IM tactics, highlighting the fact that one's style and manner of execution is important to success. Positive IM tactics alone will not necessarily lead to positive supervisor ratings, but rather they must be used in tandem with apparent sincerity. On the other hand, those using high levels of positive IM coupled with low apparent sincerity had the lowest evaluations of performance. In fact, as positive IM behaviors increased, performance ratings decreased for those low in apparent sincerity. This is in line with Jones (1990) and Gordon (1996) who suggested that influence and IM will only be successful when the behaviors are not seen as self-serving, but rather as genuine behaviors. Persons who are not skilled in the execution of IMs are perhaps better off by refraining from IMs altogether.

We expected interpersonal influence to have a similar moderating relationship, but our hypotheses were not supported. Although interpersonal influence is argued to be related to behavioral flexibility (to set others at ease and develop rapport with most people) (Ferris et al. 2007), in this case, interpersonal influence did not interact with positive IM tactics to result in higher performance ratings. Therefore, when executing positive IM tactics, it may be more important for individuals to appear trustworthy and sincere, rather than have a style and an ability to adjust their behaviors depending on the target. In fact, when considering a single target of positive IM (one's supervisor), this behavioral flexibility may be a negative trait, such that one's supervisor may see the actor as inconsistent and unpredictable. Furthermore, our measure of performance is limited in scope. Our measure focused on problem solving, working hard, and the potential for promotion, with only one item relating to cooperative behaviors. In fact, one item related to one's ability to work independently, which is counter to the skill set of interpersonal influence. In summary, we might conclude that with a single target, the actor's sincerity in positive IM usage is important, but behavioral agility is not, particularly when considering the performance measure utilized.

### Theoretical Implications

Our research extends the theoretical understanding of political skill, and provides a more complete picture of how political skill operates to achieve positive work outcomes. The dimensions of political skill impact the political skill-work outcome relationships differently. This will allow researchers in the future to continue to parse out the

cognitive dedication or intrapsychic processes of political skill from the behavioral components. Social astuteness and networking ability are important for cognitively assessing the situation and carefully picking the correct influence tactics for appropriate targets within one's network, while apparent sincerity allows for the successful behavioral execution use of the tactics. These results provide empirical exploration and support of how the intrapsychic (cognitive) and interpersonal (behavioral) dimensions of political skill combine to actualize the interpersonal process that is most widely demonstrated in political skill research. This will allow researchers to design and develop tests, interventions, and experiments with more precision—focusing on social astuteness and networking ability when the research interest is on the cognitive components of political skill, but on apparent sincerity when examining the behavioral components. Further, it may help one explain why certain dimensions have stronger impacts on certain outcomes (e.g., Snell et al. 2013). It may be because cognitive components of political skill impact certain outcomes more strongly than behavioral components or vice versa. For instance, Snell found that interpersonal influence had one of the strongest relationships with managerial effectiveness, as rated by supervisors. In understanding that interpersonal influence is a behavioral component, Snell's inference makes sense—managers would see their subordinates' behavioral flexibility as a positive and might rate their effectiveness more highly. On the other hand, managers cannot “see” social astuteness, and so this may not impact ratings of managerial effectiveness directly. More research on the subdimensions of political skill is needed to further refine our understanding.

### Implications for Practice

Although political skill is partially innate, it is thought to be trainable through the use of mentoring, behavior modeling, and role playing (Ferris et al. 2007; Blass et al. 2007). As such, these results have a number of practical implications. Our research helps us isolate particular dimensions of political skill that may require different forms of coaching and mentoring. First, it seems that the socially astute persons gravitate toward the use of positive IM tactics. From a cognitive standpoint, it may be useful for organizations to train (and socialize) individuals to enhance their social astuteness and networking ability. This would include exercises and opportunities to gain organizational awareness and become better observers of their surroundings, as well as the political dynamics and social networks. Self-awareness is key to these dimensions of political skill (Ferris et al. 2012), and, hence, skill development and coaching can help the mentees to more

correctly interpret the behaviors of others to more carefully select appropriate IMs for particular targets within their network. Sensitivity training would also help ne build one's social astuteness, given that sensitivity to others is believed to be a precursor to influence (Pfeffer 1992). Finally, actively listening to others is an important skill set (Ferris et al. 2005) that would likely require changes in one's cognition, as well as one's behavior.

With regard to apparent sincerity, this dimension of political skill is primarily behavioral in nature and would require yet another type of coaching or mentoring. By engaging in positive combinations of tactics, politically skilled individuals can enhance the quality of one's relationship with their supervisor, and thus can contribute to building a more desirable work environment. However, they must appear to be sincere. Specifically, programs aimed at increasing one's ability to show respect for other ways of thinking and display the appropriate nonverbal communication styles have been suggested to increase apparent sincerity (Ferris et al. 2005a). Coaches and mentors can assist mentees by being role models and illustrating behavioral techniques that can help them build trust and perceptions of sincerity.

Interestingly, from a leadership-development standpoint, supervisors may require skill development as well. Our results confirm that performance evaluation ratings may be erroneously impacted by IM tactics and personal characteristics (e.g., Harris et al. 2007). This illustrates that managers should be trained and made aware that non-job-related influence can impact their evaluations of subordinates. Training could make these managers aware of perceptual biases and tendencies to be swayed by positive IMs to help managers' focus on creating more objective performance ratings. Organizations should design performance appraisals to focus on actual behaviors and other objective factors to reduce subjectivity.

### Strengths and Limitations

This investigation is characterized by a number of strengths along with certain limitations that should also be noted when interpreting these results. First, we tested a comprehensive model of political skill in relation to influence tactics and performance. Contributing to overall generalizability of the findings, IM behaviors outside the commonly researched contexts of job interviews and performance appraisals were examined (Bolino et al. 2008) by tapping into actively employed individuals. Furthermore, we explored the self-report of political skill and positive IMs as well as other reports of performance within the workplace. Methodologically, we revisited the factor structure of the dimensions of political skill and utilized HLM to test our hypotheses.

A key limitation was the modest sample size in the study ( $N = 116$ ), which brings up two issues. First, small sample sizes can be viewed as a hindrance in detecting meaningful effects. However, this was overcome in part by employing various analytic approaches (i.e., bootstrapping, single-indicator analysis, etc.). Second, the small sample size is a function of the low supervisor response rate. Although meta-analyses have demonstrated that response rates are typically lower for individuals higher up in the organizational hierarchy (e.g., managers; Anseel et al. 2010), this could potentially influence results. However, tests indicated no mean differences for study variables for employees with responding supervisors and those without, suggesting that the data are missing at random and did not strongly impact the relationships suggested in the model. Finally, if interpersonal influence and behavioral flexibility is indeed a skill set of the politically skilled that can help one improve outcomes, then we must also explore the opinions of multiple and divergent other-reports (not just one target), and alternative measures of performance, to determine if one's chameleon-like behavior can transcend target specificity.

### Directions for Future Research

These results provide fruitful suggestions for future research. Initially, research should replicate this study using other influence tactics (beyond the IM tactics of Bolino and Turnley 1999). For instance, persons high in social astuteness should be more likely to avoid antisocial behaviors in the workplace, such as bullying and sabotage. Bromley (1993) suggested that those interested in building their own reputation (performance in our research) will not only need to repair reputation when mistakes are made, but may also utilize IM to protect and enhance the reputation of others who form a part of their extended self. This would require exploration of tactics such as ingratiation of others as well as one's superiors *in the presence of others*, promotion, and image enhancement of persons with referent power, and other strategic tactics such as coalition building that is predicated by networking ability.

To further our understanding of the complexity of political skill in the workplace, subsequent research should continue validating the linkages and relationships delineated by the multilevel framework in a systematic approach contributing to its potential revision. For example, would these relationships also hold true in the context of a work team? It may be that positive tactics can enhance performance when used in a team setting with peers. Similarly, interpersonal influence requires behavioral flexibility. Although chameleon-like behaviors do not help in improving ratings by one's supervisor, perhaps this skill set is more appropriate when navigating the dynamics of

diverse teams. Future research should examine the effects of political skill dimensionality and IM tactic choice on other targets (groups, individuals, subordinates, etc.) besides just supervisors, as well as with other dimensions or combinations of influence tactics. Finally, longitudinal research has shown that persons high in self monitoring (who are sensitive to social cues and exhibit behavioral flexibility) are more likely to exhibit other-directed OCBs rather than OCBs directed at the institution (Blakely et al. 2005). However, in order to truly test flexibility, we must measure the degree to which politically skilled individuals exhibit patterns of behavior over time (within-person variance) as well as their patterns of behavior depending upon the target (between-person variance). Truly skilled individuals should be expected to vary their IM behaviors based on the power, status, and importance of the target.

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