
1 The roles of political skill and political will in job performance prediction: a moderated nonlinear perspective

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INTRODUCTION

Organizational politics are ubiquitous in organizations. Because organizational politics and political behavior represent inescapable realities in organizational settings, it is important to identify the individuals who are motivated to engage in such behavior, and the consequences of such behavior. It is also important to understand why certain individuals successfully execute their political agendas, while others achieve no such success, or, worse, experience social backlash that has strategically counterproductive consequences. Political behavior can be conceptualized as how “individuals strategically invest themselves in ways that risk their social capital in efforts to influence others and attain personal objectives” (Treadway, 2012, p. 529). These behaviors can be either self-serving or other-serving in nature (Hochwarter, 2012; Treadway, 2012), but the primary goal is to attain one’s own strategic objectives. Political skill and political will are two key factors that contribute to individuals’ desire to engage in these behaviors, and to those individuals’ potential for success and effectiveness in their execution of political behavior.

Political skill and political will are two key constructs within the power, politics and influence realm of the organizational sciences (e.g. Ferris et al., 2007; Ferris et al., 2005; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981; Treadway, 2012). Together, political skill and will serve to predict and explain which individuals are most likely to engage in political behavior, and what the ultimate outcome of that behavior will be (e.g. Treadway et al., 2005b). Political theory in this area, with particular reference to the motivational bases of political behavior in such contexts (e.g. Vigoda, 2003), would suggest that political skill and will are likely to be inextricably intertwined (Mintzberg, 1983). Yet, to date, very little scholarly investigation has been conducted to explore the precise nature of their connection. However, there does exist some theoretical foundation for why the interaction

between these two constructs should explain work outcomes beyond what the two constructs explain independently.

Perceptions of organizational politics, political behavior and political skill have frequently been examined as important antecedents of employee performance in a variety of contexts (e.g. Ferris and Treadway, 2012; Vigoda-Gadot and Drory, 2006). Perceptions of organizational politics have normally been associated with a host of negative organizational outcomes such as stress (Ferris et al., 1996), as well as job performance (Treadway et al., 2005a). Indeed, perceptions of organizational politics have been construed as potentially good or bad for self as well as others, contributing to “good/constructive” and “bad/destructive” perspectives on politics in organizations (e.g. Drory and Vigoda-Gadot, 2010). One potential triggering mechanism here that determines its positive or negative nature is the extent to which politics is perceived as a threat or an opportunity, or to be personally advantageous or personally detrimental (e.g. Ferris et al., 1989; Ferris et al., 2002).

Although perceptions of politics may cause negative outcomes, the enactment of political behavior has been shown to pay dividends for the actor (Hochwarter et al., 2007). This enactment of political behavior has been shown to be particularly advantageous for those who have political skill. Recently, Munyon et al. (2015) used meta-analytic techniques to show that political skill predicted both task performance and contextual performance. Unlike political skill, to date, no study exists that has examined political will’s impact on job performance, though the potential for a relationship has been implied (Kapoutsis et al., in press).

Like many organizational constructs, the relationships among political skill, political will, the interaction between the two, and work outcomes typically and traditionally have been conceived as positive and linear. More political skill leads to more success in political behavior and positive outcomes (e.g. Munyon et al., 2015), more political will should lead to greater involvement in political behavior through the use of influence behaviors (Kapoutsis et al., in press; Treadway et al., 2005a) and, in general, more positive (i.e. and less detrimental) outcomes. The interaction between the two should also lead to more involvement and success, reflecting both the skill to successfully behave politically and the willingness to engage in those political behaviors, particularly for those individuals high in both political will and political skill. However, this linear relationship may not be as simple or as accurate as it has appeared.

Consistent with prior studies in the organizational politics field (Breaux et al., 2009; Hochwarter et al., 2010; Kolodinsky et al., 2004), scholars should account for the potential nonlinearity of the relationship between different political constructs and work outcomes, or what has become

known as “the too-much-of-a-good-thing effect” (TMGT; Grant and Schwartz, 2011; Pierce and Aguinis, 2013). This effect attempts to describe the frequently perplexing and paradoxical outcomes found when examining certain constructs in which the presumably positive, linear relationship between the construct and its outcomes changes slope and becomes negative at high levels.

It is possible that the constructs of political skill and political will, in addition to the interaction between the two, also assume nonlinear forms when their impact on job performance is considered. If this is the case, then it would be a particularly valuable discovery for these two related and relatively young streams of literature to incorporate and consider any potentially nonlinear relationships in the future. This would provide both a more accurate and solid foundation for future work in these areas, as well as a better understanding of how political skill, political will and political behavior operate within organizations.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore theoretically the concepts of political will, political skill and the potential nonlinear outcomes associated with these two concepts as their level rises through the conceptual lens of the TMGT effect (Pierce and Aguinis, 2013), in the prediction of job performance. We propose that political will assumes a nonlinear form, with positive outcomes tapering off and potentially becoming negative as political will becomes higher and higher. On the other hand, political skill’s effects on job performance tend to be consistently positive and linear in nature, due to their theoretically derived foundations and self-regulatory character.

The following sections briefly review the existing literature on the constructs of political will and political skill, followed by the proposed theoretical development of their interaction, and their implications for nonlinear relationship forms. Propositions are presented for how the nonlinear interaction (i.e. moderated nonlinearity) of political skill and political will relate to job performance. We propose a theoretical model in which the interaction between political skill and political will produces a positive, linear relationship with job performance at high levels of political skill, but demonstrates an inverted-U-shaped relationship with job performance when political skill is low. The negative impact of the TMGT effect on political will and its interaction with political skill is neutralized when the political skill of an individual is high. However, when the political skill of an individual is low, excessive political will and engagement in political behaviors will have a detrimental effect on job performance, resulting in an inverted-U-shaped relationship. The chapter then concludes with a brief discussion, recommendations for future directions and the theoretical implications of these propositions.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Political Skill

Political skill has been defined as “the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and/or organizational objectives” (Ferris et al., 2005, p. 127). This means that individuals high in political skill can read and understand their social environments and the people in them, and then utilize that information to strategically influence the people and groups around them. Because individuals high in political skill have the capacity to effectively navigate a broad range of social environments and maintain positive impressions with a diverse set of observers or constituents, they can procure their desired social outcomes without seeming manipulative or coercive.

Political skill is a construct consisting of four dimensions: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability and apparent sincerity (Ferris et al., 2012). Social astuteness measures an actor’s ability to diagnose and adapt to a variety of social situations. Interpersonal influence is the ability to appropriately select and utilize a wide variety of tactics that impact the cognitions and behaviors of others. Those high in networking ability can develop, maintain and leverage the resources associated with having a strategically constructed social network. Finally, apparent sincerity is the ability to monitor and conduct social behavior that minimally appears to others to be genuine and without ulterior motive, although this does not preclude those who truly have these pure intentions. These four dimensions together make political skill “a comprehensive pattern of social competencies, with cognitive, affective, and behavioral manifestations” (Ferris et al., 2007, p. 291).

Political skill has also been frequently associated with valuable organizational outcomes such as ratings of job performance (i.e. task performance and contextual performance), with individuals high in political skill typically rated as higher performers (e.g. Jawahar et al., 2008; Kolodinsky et al., 2007, Munyon et al., 2015). This, among other findings (see Ferris et al., 2012), suggests that political skill is a rather valuable construct in the organizational politics literature, and is one that should be fully explored so that the field can fully understand its differential effects on the lexicon of organizationally relevant outcomes.

Political skill’s relation to higher performance, among other outcomes, positions it to be considered a part of the growing body of literature surrounding “positive” organizational politics. More traditional notions of organizational politics typically describe politics as inherently negative

(Hochwarter, 2012) or unethical, but, in reality, organizational politics is a much more ethically complicated phenomenon (Provis, 2006). Political skill and political will research, along with examinations into other constructs like leader political support (Ellen et al., 2013), are helping to further our understanding of how organizational politics and political behavior, in some instances, can benefit individuals and organizations beyond the self-focused or toxic stigma that politics in organizations has experienced.

Political Will

Since its conceptualization three decades ago (Mintzberg, 1983), political will has received relatively little scholarly attention, particularly when compared to its twin, political skill. However, work in this area is growing. Although not the first to do so (e.g. Brinkerhoff, 2000; Post et al., 2010; Treadway et al., 2005b), Treadway (2012) provided the most modern definition of political will: “the motivation to engage in strategic, goal-directed behavior that advances the personal agenda and objectives of the actor that inherently involves the risk of relational or reputational capital” (p. 533) This is the motivation component of organizational politics and political behavior. Without political will, no actor would have the internal desire to engage in the politics in the workplace.

Initially, political will was described as a construct consisting of five dimensions: instrumental, relational, concern for the self, concern for others and risk (Treadway, 2012). These dimensions were believed to further reduce to the nature of the desired outcome (i.e. relational, instrumental), focus of concern (i.e. concern for the self, concern for others) and risk. It was initially believed that risk was a defining feature of political will because of the inherent risk associated with political behavior (i.e. the risk of social and reputational capital). If there were no risk associated with engaging in political behavior, then no one would ever need to assess the value of doing so. Nothing would have to be ventured to reap the potential rewards of the political behavior.

However, recent research (Kapoutsis et al., in press) has expanded on this earlier work on political will (Treadway, 2012), and developed and validated a measure inspired by the original conceptualization. In their multi-study investigation, Kapoutsis et al. provide the theoretical underpinnings of political will and develop an eight-item psychometric measure called the “Political Will Scale” (PWS), which broke out into two distinct factors; self-serving and benevolent.

Self-serving political will is the motivation to behave politically in order to secure resources and personal benefit for the self (Kapoutsis et al.,

in press). The organizational politics literature and popular press are littered with practical examples and anecdotes of backstabbing, brown-nosing, behind-the-scenes negotiations, and other unsavory behaviors that are meant to promote the self. What is largely absent from the literature is the discussion of benevolent political behavior, inspired by benevolent political will, which is the motivation to behave politically for the benefit of other individuals, groups or the organization. These behaviors could include helping others learn the unwritten but practically important norms and reward mechanisms within the organization, sponsoring a co-worker for promotion or a rise, or politicking with upper management to secure more resources for subordinates (Ellen et al., 2013).

Both self-serving and benevolent political will can be used as distinct predictors of political behavior and other organizational behaviors, and also in tandem as one political will construct. Additionally, though it is no longer a core dimension of the construct, risk is still an integral part of political behavior and our definition and understanding of political will (Kapoutsis et al., in press; Treadway, 2012). Overall, the recent development of the PWS provides greater opportunity for scholars to empirically investigate the relationships of political will with other constructs of interest in the organizational sciences.

Questioning the Exclusive Linearity of Organizational Phenomena

There have been growing calls in the field to break away from the traditional, implicit assumptions in organizational research that relationships between phenomena are exclusively linear in nature and form (e.g. Ferris et al., 2006). Failing to account for the potential of nonlinear relationships between constructs has probably caused potentially promising research to remain in the file drawer because the results were not consistent with the prevailing assumptions of linearity tested by general linear model statistical techniques. Many relationships, including those related to organizational politics, may be more complicated than simple linearity would convey, and as such, it is important to consider the possibility or role of nonlinear relationships.

Recent research into the presence of nonlinear relationships in the organizational politics literature has primarily focused on perceptions of politics, and finding an inverted-U-shaped relationship between perceptions of politics and job satisfaction, and between perceptions of politics and job tension (Hochwarter et al., 2010). This is indicative of the value that exploring nonlinear relationships may have, as previous conceptualizations tended to describe perceptions of politics as linearly related to its various demonstrated outcomes.

In the case of many positive phenomena, these nonlinear relationships may be a product of taking the positivity to the extreme. Although it may seem counterintuitive to suggest that higher and higher levels of a positive thing do not produce increasingly greater outcomes, consider the classic warning of taking everything in moderation: too much of anything, even if it is good, can end up being bad (or at least less good). Grant and Schwartz (2011) described this very situation in which “positive phenomena reach inflection points at which their effects turn negative” (p. 61). By drawing on the classic Aristotelian virtues, they describe the ways in which, at the extremes, those things that seem unendingly positive (e.g. wisdom, courage, love) can actually serve to sabotage one’s well-being.

This phenomenon has become known as the too-much-of-a-good-thing effect (TMGT effect; Pierce and Aguinis, 2013). The TMGT effect serves as a meta-theory in the management literature, providing some explanation for what were previously deemed befuddling results given the assumption of linearity of relationships. Although difficult to capture (i.e. given the necessity for a range of responses on any particular measure that stretches adequately to the extremes for the TMGT effect to be visible), this principle has been employed to better explore phenomena and relationships in a variety of areas where previously the assumptions of linearity held strong, freeing and expanding our understanding.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT

Political Skill × Political Will Interaction

Political will and political skill are very much theoretically intertwined in terms of their relationships with outcomes of political behavior. Mintzberg (1983, 1985) described political skill and political will as the two components individuals need in order to operate effectively in organizations, which are inherently political arenas. Although these components were articulated decades ago, little has been done empirically to examine the interaction and relationship between political will and political skill (Treadway et al., 2005b). This is probably due in no small part to the lack of adequate measures for these constructs for many years. However, with the new Political Will Scale (Kapoutsis et al., in press) joining the “political skill inventory” (Ferris et al., 2007), the foundation has been laid for new work in this area.

Previous research has described two concepts that effectively parallel political skill and political will, and also lead to performance: ability and

motivation (Kanfer and Ackerman, 1989; Locke et al., 1978). Kanfer and Ackerman (1989) described how the various cognitive abilities individuals possess serve as strong predictors of individual job performance, and can help explain the differences in job performance between individuals. They also noted the research founded in the more motivational perspective, in which the various motivations of an individual (e.g. goals, incentives) also influence job performance (Bandura, 1986), and other outcomes. Vigoda (2003) has discussed the motivational bases of political behavior consistent with political perspectives on organizations. Although they have been found to be effective predictors of performance independently, it is also important to consider the combination, or interaction, of ability and motivation in terms of its capacity to predict or explain job performance.

Without any ability, no amount of motivation will lead to the achievement of one's desired goals. Without motivation, an individual's ability lies dormant and is wasted because not enacted. Individuals with low motivation, regardless of their level of ability, are likely to perform similarly to one another at a low level. Without the driving force of motivation, skilled individuals with high ability are not likely to want to engage in activities and behaviors that tap their abilities. Individuals with high motivation, however, demonstrate a greater variability in performance because, while work activity is high at all levels of ability, those who have more ability are more efficient in their work, and thus are more effective. These two essential characteristics must work in tandem in order to produce results (Vroom, 1964).

The above description parallels the constructs of interest in this chapter: political skill (i.e. ability) and political will (i.e. motivation). The interaction between the two (i.e. political skill \times political will) also logically parallels the interaction between ability and motivation described by Vroom (1964). Like ability, political skill amounts to little if the politically skilled individual never has the motivation, or political will, to use it. This leads to relatively stable, low instances of exhibited, or effective, political behavior in organizations from individuals with low political will, regardless of their level of political skill.

Conversely, individuals with higher levels of political will (i.e. motivation) will be much more likely to engage in political behavior, but now their level of political skill becomes much more relevant. Those individuals with no political skill (i.e. ability) will have a nearly impossible time successfully engaging in political behavior, although they will have the motivation to engage in those behaviors. Because of the exposure of social resources inherent in any political behavior, these highly motivated but poorly equipped political actors are likely to see their efforts backfire and cause counterproductive outcomes. On the other hand, individuals high in

both political skill and political will are likely to both engage in political behavior and be effective in doing so. Both political skill and political will are necessary for success and effective engagement in political behavior in organizations.

Nonlinearity of Organizational Politics Constructs

Much of our field has assumed the linearity of organizational phenomena (Ferris et al., 2006). The too-much-of-a-good-thing effect (TMGT effect) is a meta-theoretical (i.e. not restricted to a particular sub-field in management) principle intended to help explain “paradoxical” outcomes in which presumably beneficial and established, positive antecedents, when carried to the extreme, end up leading to negative outcomes. Essentially, this position argues that job performance antecedents, many of which were originally conceived as having a linear association with job performance, are actually nonlinear at their more extreme scores.

The Aristotelian teachings that Grant and Schwartz (2011) invoke when describing the TMGT effect describe, as Aristotle did, that success lies somewhere between total deficiency and total excess. The TMGT effect appears when the success that would normally be experienced with an otherwise positive construct diminishes as the construct becomes excessive in number or nature. The virtues, as Aristotle described them, existed in these areas of balance between deficiency and excess (Aristotle, trans. 1953). For example, in the area of fear, the virtue of courage exists between deficiency (i.e. cowardice) and excess (i.e. recklessness). Similarly, nearly all things can be, or are, tempered with the recommendation of moderation. Some amount is good, but too much has the potential to be detrimental. This is the inverted U of the TMGT effect. Good things are not always good at their extreme levels.

However, what causes the change? Both Grant and Schwartz (2011) and Pierce and Aguinis (2013) described an inflection point, a threshold at which the relationship between a construct and its associated outcome goes from positive to negative. Pierce and Aguinis noted that this inflection point is context-specific because what constitutes excessive levels of a construct in one context may not be considered excessive in another. Because of the context-specific nature of these inflection points, they must be assessed for each individual situation in which the TMGT effect is considered. Both sets of authors recognize their existence, but conclude that there is no general rule for what the inflection points should be, as they will necessarily vary across different situations and different construct–outcome relationships.

The consideration of the TMGT effect, and the potential nonlinear

function of many established constructs, necessitates that the field more carefully examine the assumed linearity of constructs of interest in organizational outcomes. As the level of a construct increases, the quality of an outcome does not necessarily increase or decrease in lock step with the changes in level of the construct. The TMGT effect has been demonstrated in a variety of contexts (Pierce and Aguinis, 2013): leadership (e.g. Harris and Kacmar, 2006), conscientiousness (e.g. Whetzel et al., 2010), applicant experience in personnel selection (e.g. Sturman, 2003), firm growth rate (e.g. Whetten, 1987), and organizational diversification strategies (e.g. Lang and Stulz, 1994), among others. Outside organizations, other constructs related to the positive psychology movement have also been demonstrated to be impacted by the TMGT effect (Grant and Schwartz, 2011).

These are the types of “paradoxical outcomes” that the TMGT effect suggests will occur at extreme levels of a construct. At some point, returns start diminishing before potentially evening out or, worse, inverting such that very high levels of an otherwise assumed positive construct actually begin producing increasingly negative results compared to lower levels of the construct. It is important to note that Pierce and Aguinis (2013) asserted that all constructs are susceptible to the TMGT effect at some point or in some context. However, in theory, one construct should not succumb to this effect: political skill (Ferris et al., 2007).

Too much political skill

Based on the well-established definition and dimensionality of political skill, it would appear that, theoretically, increasing levels of political skill should be linear and not subject to the TMGT effect (e.g. Ferris et al., 2012; Ferris et al., 2007). Logically, if you consider political skill as the “ability” portion of political behavior, it stands to reason that one could not have too much ability in a particular domain, and have that as the sole reason success or effectiveness suffers at high levels. The ability alone does not seem as if it could ever be too great in isolation, because it is really the how, when and why of the ability’s use that determine its repercussions, either positive or negative. The simple possession of political skill, or other abilities and skills, does not impact one’s well-being or organizational success; it just provides potential skills and resources that can be used or not. It is the willingness to act or use the ability that truly leads to the outcomes. All the ability or resources in the world mean little if one is unwilling ever to put them into action.

Political skill involves reading and understanding situations, and selecting the most appropriate behaviors for those situations (e.g. Ferris et al., 2012; Munyon et al., 2015). Further, it involves executing those behaviors in ways that are effectively calibrated to the situation at hand. In this way,

those individuals with high or extreme levels of political skill can know what to do in a given situation and act appropriately. This ensures that they never “go too far” in their political behavior, as they can tailor and control their political behavior to suit the context at hand. This allows individuals with high political skill to avoid the negative outcomes that might otherwise be experienced from “going too far”.

Also, the dimensionality of political skill may play a role in its relation to the TMGT effect. Immunity to the TMGT effect may be a product of the apparent sincerity dimension, the key dimension in terms of effectively delivering or acting with political skill (Ferris et al., 2007). Because appearing sincere is a key component of having high political skill, it stands to reason that the higher individuals’ political skill is, the more likely they are to appear particularly sincere and, thus, believable. If the argument is made that political skill is effectively “caught” at high levels, then, by definition, such skill is not particularly high. Getting caught would be symptomatic of low or ineffective apparent sincerity, and one could not claim to have high political skill while missing this key component.

Despite this, there has been some evidence that political skill also suffers from the TMGT effect (Zettler and Lang, 2013). It is important to address and articulate why, theoretically, political skill should maintain positive outcomes as it increases, and not experience the nonlinear effects related to TMGT, thus dealing with the concerns and arguments of Zettler and Lang. If political skill is theoretically immune to the TMGT effect, that is, if one cannot have too much political skill, then what other explanation is there for these contrary findings? The answer may lie in the interaction and connection between political skill and political will, which is theoretically more susceptible to the TMGT effect.

Too much political will

Viewed in a positive light, political will should allow an individual to strive for personal goals and gain, risking their existing reputation, relations and resources in the hopes of improving the quality of those same resources by successfully engaging in political behavior. This clearly can have positive, linear outcomes at lower and moderate levels of political will, but there is probably danger at the higher levels.

This danger appears to be built into the definition of political will in a similar way that political skill’s defense against the TMGT effect is built into the dimension of apparent sincerity. The inherent risk associated with political will (Treadway, 2012) is key. Individuals particularly high in political will might push too hard, risking too much, and seeing little or no return for it. Given that every political act adds an element of risk, highly politically willed individuals could be particularly prone to potentially

gambling away what they have by participating in organizational politics, the consequence of which could include loss of personal reputation, social status or even employment.

Further, extreme levels of willingness to participate in political behavior can cause individuals in an organization to become distracted from their task (e.g. Hochwarter et al., 2006), focusing more on engaging in the political aspect of an organization than on their actual task requirements. Hochwarter and colleagues (2006) demonstrated a link between politics perceptions and understanding of organizational politics that, consistently over three studies, found job performance to be lowest for those individuals who both perceived high levels of politics in their organizations and possessed high understanding of an organization.

Hochwarter and colleagues (2006) posited and found evidence for the distraction hypothesis in which those individuals who understood how things in their organization worked at a political level would be able to know when politics-related stimuli were present that might be threatening and need attention. “Unfortunately, efforts to attend to (i.e. understand) stimuli perceived as political may serve to distract workers from job tasks, potentially resulting in reduced job performance” (Hochwarter et al., 2006, p. 275). Although not discussed explicitly in terms of political will, this distraction hypothesis would also probably impact those individuals with extremely high levels of political will, with increased involvement in political behavior drawing them away from their tasks and resulting in a decrease in performance.

Theoretically, political will appears to be very susceptible to the inverted-U-shaped form of the TMGT effect, which comes as no surprise (Treadway, 2012). Extreme levels of political will can lead to dysfunctional behaviors such as making risky decisions with one’s reputational and political capital in the organization, or simply engaging in political behavior to such an extent that actual performance of one’s job task suffers due to the distraction of organizational politics.

Nature of the political skill × political will interaction

As discussed previously, the too-much-of-a-good-thing effect (TMGT; Pierce and Aguinis, 2013) is a principle that describes the curvilinear, or inverted-U-shaped, pattern that generally positive constructs can experience as their levels or values become increasingly large or extreme. If this principle holds true for individual constructs, then logically it will also impact the interactions of those individual constructs, such as the interaction between political skill and political will. That said, the TMGT does not necessarily affect the constructs in the interaction symmetrically. One construct could be more susceptible to the curvilinear effects of the TMGT

principle (i.e. political will), while the other may be immune (i.e. political skill). This reflects the theoretical assumptions on which we base our following arguments.

In this case, political will is the construct susceptible to the TMGT effect, with higher and higher levels actually producing lower and lower returns following the particular inflection point for the construct. On the other hand, political skill seems theoretically immune to this curvilinear effect, with more skill not only failing to produce negative results, but actually demonstrating increasingly positive results with regard to effective political behavior as the political skill of an individual rises. Thus, in the interaction between the two, political will contributes the portion of the interaction that is subject to the TMGT effect, whereas political skill does not. However, because of the nature of the interaction between the constructs, it can appear that political skill is also subject to the TMGT effect.

Proposed Model

Following from the theory and literature reviewed above, a model of political will, political skill and the TMGT effect begins to take shape, and the model we propose is presented in Figure 1.1. Although links have previously been made between political skill, political will and job performance, and these predictors could be seen as generally exhibiting linear and positive relationships with organizational outcomes, the examination of the constructs through the lens of the TMGT effect precludes any simple assumptions of linearity. When considering the TMGT effect, all constructs and interactions must be examined more carefully.

We propose a theoretical model suggesting that the interaction between political skill and political will produces a positive, linear relationship with job performance at high levels of political skill but an inverted-U-shaped relationship with job performance when political skill is low. The negative impact of the TMGT effect on political will and its interaction with political skill is neutralized when the political skill of an individual

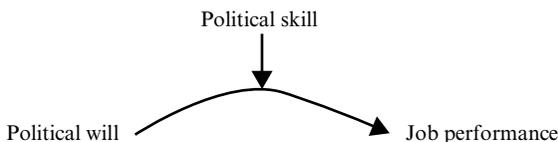


Figure 1.1 Moderated nonlinear relationship of political will, political skill and job performance

is high. However, when the political skill of an individual is low, excessive political will and engagement in political behavior will exhibit a detrimental effect on job performance, resulting in an inverted-U-shaped relationship.

Political skill may be a rare construct to avoid the impact of the TMGT effect. According to Pierce and Aguinis (2013), all constructs break down eventually, yielding to a contextual inflection point that turns positive relationships negative at extreme values. Theoretically, though, this is not plausible, as, by definition, political skill cannot be bad at high levels simply because of its high level. The four dimensions of political skill (social astuteness, networking ability, interpersonal influence, apparent sincerity) can each only improve as political skill in general improves. As this is the ability portion of political behavior, it seems reasonable to suppose that it cannot be too great on its own; only in how it is used could it begin to bring about negative outcomes as the TMGT effect suggests. Political skill should not be subject to the TMGT effect, resulting in a linear, rather than an inverted-U-shaped, relationship, because its social astuteness positions it never to go too far with situational behavior. It is from this logic that the first proposition is drawn.

Proposition 1 Higher levels of political skill will correspond to increasingly high levels of a measured outcome variable (e.g. job performance), resulting in a positive linear relationship.

Political will is not immune to the TMGT effect in the same fashion as political skill. From its definition and description in the literature (Treadway, 2012), it can be concluded that it is indeed possible for one to have excessive levels of political will, which will lead to a curvilinear relationship as described by the principle of the TMGT effect. The inherent risk associated with political behavior indicates this much. If every instance of political behavior carries some risk to the individual participating in it, then increased willingness to participate in political behavior will be associated with greater risk. Additionally, at extremely high levels of political will, it is possible for the intense willingness to participate in political behavior to potentially overshadow the job tasks and responsibilities of an individual to the point where engagement in political behavior causes other aspects of one's job to suffer. Thus political will functions consistently with the TMGT effect, resulting in an inverted-U-shaped distribution at high levels.

Proposition 2 As political will increases, it will be positively related to organizational outcomes (e.g. job performance) until it reaches a

contextually grounded inflection point at which increasingly higher levels of political will result in negative performance effects.

The interaction between the two constructs is also critically important, as noted by Mintzberg (1983). Together, political skill and political will represent the two key components of the ability \times motivation interaction with regard to political behavior in organizations. Political skill (i.e. the ability portion) and political will (i.e. the motivation) interact to predict and explain valuable organizational outcomes above and beyond what the two constructs can explain independently, similar to the performance of ability and motivation in other research contexts (Kanfer and Ackerman, 1989; Vroom, 1964). Without political will, or motivation, political behavior is not enacted, and thus the effect of an individual's political skill is not manifested, and consequently demonstrates no impact on their job performance. Alternatively, without political skill, political will might be used ineffectively, or even disastrously, with individuals engaging in political behavior but unable to operate or navigate those situations effectively.

Proposition 3 The interaction of political will and political skill will explain variance in valuable organizational outcomes (e.g. job performance) beyond the two constructs independently.

The results of this interaction will be similar to those described by Vroom (1964) and explained earlier in this chapter: low political will results in low levels of outcomes regardless of the political skill of individuals because such individuals do not have the motivation or desire to use such skill. Individuals with low political will demonstrate lower levels of organizational outcomes regardless of their political skill. High political will creates a context in which the political skill of the individual becomes much more important. Those individuals high in political will are likely to engage in political behavior regardless of their political skill (i.e. their ability to participate in politics effectively). As such, the outcomes of that political behavior will probably be different for individuals high in political will and political skill as compared to those high in political will but low in political skill. For individuals with high political will, those with high levels of political skill will experience relatively higher levels of positive organizational outcomes, whereas those with low levels of political skill will experience relatively lower levels of organizational outcomes.

This interaction, although not an individual construct, is also subject to the TMGT effect in which an inverted-U-shaped relationship suggests

that excessively high levels of a construct are associated with increasingly negative outcomes past a particular inflection point. The TMGT effect introduces nonlinearity into the interaction, producing a moderated, non-linear effect. Drawing from the previous propositions, the political skill \times political will interaction can reach excessively high levels as political will reaches excessively high levels.

Political will is the key construct that is impacted by the TMGT effect, not political skill, although it can appear as though political skill is also influenced by the TMGT effect through the interaction between political will and political skill. Again, theoretically, it is not possible for someone to have too much political skill. Individuals with high political skill can avoid the pitfalls of excessively high political will (e.g. too much risk, too focused on political behavior) because of the increased social astuteness associated with high political skill. Furthermore, those high in political skill have the self-control to prevent excessive political behavior, so even if political will is high, they understand that extreme levels of political behavior are counterproductive to their goals. The role of political skill in the curvilinear relationship between the interaction of political skill and political will and organizational outcomes is negligible or nonexistent, as political skill is not influenced by the TMGT effect in the same way that political will is. For ease of interpretation, an approximation of the effect proposed here is shown in Figure 1.2.

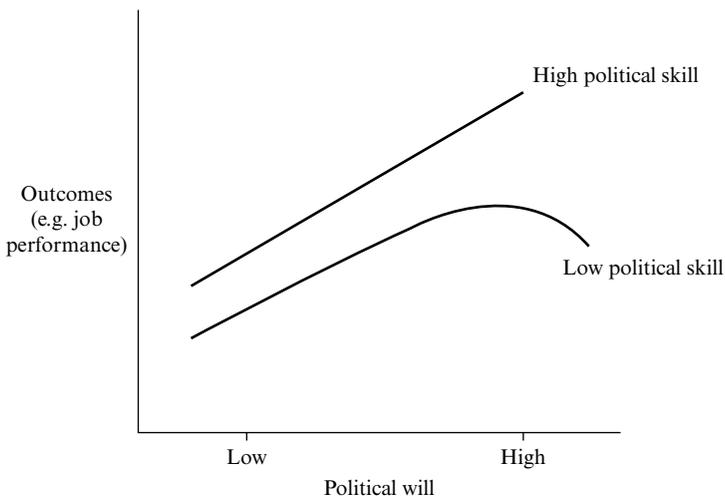


Figure 1.2 Depiction of proposition 4: the nonlinear interaction of political will and political skill on job outcomes

Proposition 4 The political will \times political skill interaction on organizational outcomes (e.g. job performance) will reflect the form of a moderated nonlinear relationship. For individuals high in political skill, increases in political will are associated with increases in job performance, reflecting a positive, linear relationship. For individuals low in political skill, increases in political will are associated with increases in job performance up to a point beyond which increased political will is associated with decreases in job performance, reflecting an inverted-U-shaped, nonlinear relationship.

Controlling for political will when examining the relationship between political skill and outcomes like job performance should eliminate any traces of the TMGT effect, and allow the relationship between political skill and outcomes to continue in a linear fashion as theoretically described, and empirically found to do. This unaccounted-for relationship between political skill and political will could serve to explain the results reported by Zettler and Lang (2013), which indicated that political skill was influenced by the TMGT effect. Because political will was not controlled for in their analysis, further work on these phenomena is needed in order to clarify these findings, and thus preclude premature conclusions regarding the form of such relationships.

Based on these theoretically and logically grounded propositions, it appears that the interaction between political skill and political will is a valuable one, with great potential to further explain and predict valuable organizational outcomes (e.g. job performance). However, understanding how these constructs operate independently and interactively is not enough when one considers the principle of the TMGT effect, which has recently permeated the organization sciences literature. Extreme levels of a variable may demonstrate nonlinear and adverse consequences on those same organizational outcomes, causing them to reduce rather than increase.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Contributions

This chapter extends the recently articulated TMGT effect into the areas of political will and political skill. Theoretical and empirical development of political will has recently been published by Kapoutsis and colleagues (in press). Because of this, a better understanding of how the TMGT effect might impact political will may aid in the further development of this construct. Also, some empirical work has been done with political skill

and the TMGT effect, but explanations grounded in a stronger theoretical position drawn from the existing political skill literature and incorporating the growing understanding of political will may serve to better explain the empirical results, or at least provide a rationale for continued exploration in this research area.

This chapter is one of the first to examine the relationship and potential interaction between political skill and political will as originally described by Mintzberg (1983) in any context. This is probably because political skill is still a relatively new area of research, and the research regarding political will is only now coming into its own. It is hoped that the propositions and theory presented here will provide a foundation for continuing work in the areas of political skill and political will.

This chapter continues the conversation started by Zettler and Lang (2013). Although their results may have indicated that political skill is another construct that suffers from the inverted-U-shaped relationship of the TMGT effect, this does not preclude other explanations. Based on the theoretical arguments presented here, it is possible that there is more at work in the relationship discussed by Zettler and Lang, and perhaps political will represents a new, revealing component. The inverted-U-shaped results they found may, in fact, be a product of the impact of the TMGT effect on political will, and the relationship and interaction that political will has with political skill. The role political will may play in how the TMGT effect influences political skill remains an unanswered question, and one that warrants further theoretical and empirical exploration.

A final important theoretical contribution made by this chapter is the discussion of possible exceptions to the principle of the TMGT effect presented by Pierce and Aguinis (2013), who suggested that, “due to the TMGT effect, all seemingly monotonic positive relations reach context-specific inflection points after which the relations turn asymptotic and often negative” (p. 313). Presented here is a theoretical case for at least one construct (i.e. political skill) that does not, in theory, conform to this expectation. Although not all constructs function in exactly the same way, the theory and propositions presented here suggest, to some extent, that when ability (e.g. political skill) and motivation (e.g. political will) are distinct and separated from one another, then, perhaps, the motivation construct is subject to the TMGT effect, but not the ability construct.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The development of the Political Will Scale (Kapoutsis et al., in press) has enabled the empirical exploration of the potentially expansive nomological

network of political will. Certainly, testing the propositions posited in this investigation should be of the utmost priority for future investigations because of the predictive potential of a political will and political skill interaction, and because of the importance of job performance as an outcome in organizations. Although political skill has a sizeable body of research linking it to job performance (Munyon et al., 2015), there has been very little work explicitly examining political will and its related organizational outcomes, including performance (Treadway, 2012). Again, with the advent of a new measure of political will, now is an ideal time to expand our understanding of political will and its association with other constructs, especially political skill. It should also be determined if a meaningful interaction between the two constructs exists in terms of their predictive utility regarding job performance and other outcome variables.

This is not to imply that the relationship between political will and political skill should be constant, linear and stable. In fact, the opposite may be true. Political skill and political will are likely to be associated in some way, but the relationship between ability and motivation is not necessarily positive, strong and linear. Particularly when using cross-sectional methods for data collection, political will and political skill, to an extent, could show evidence of being independent of one another. Other factors (e.g. past success in political behavior) may help to determine the relationship between the constructs in particular contexts. Furthermore, it has been theorized that political skill is the product of inborn traits, and can be trained or improved upon, although few have ever speculated or investigated how this process might occur (Ferris et al., 2005). Consistent with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), improving the underlying dimensions of political skill (i.e. social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability and apparent sincerity) would require the motivation to engage in political behavior as practice. Thus it is possible that, over time, political will could prove to play an integral role in developing an individual's political skill.

In regard to these propositions and the TMGT effect on political skill and political will, future research should examine what contextual factors may lead to an inflection point in political will. As noted by Pierce and Aguinis (2013), these inflection points are unique to each particular context, but a more general understanding of contextual factors that may contribute to the inversion of the relationship or what levels, in general, of political will might be too high and result in negative outcomes also would be beneficial. The linearity of the relationship between the constructs, the interaction and the organizational outcomes should be examined, in order to determine if the TMGT effect has differential effects on the two constructs or operates through the interaction.

When examining this model, or considering the potential inflection points at which the positive relationship between political skill, political will and performance becomes negative, it will be important to clearly articulate the time-frames in which performance or other outcomes are considered, as this may influence the subjective experience of such work outcomes. The engagement in political behavior consistently over time (e.g. as one might demonstrate in order to establish trust or attain a significant promotion) might impact the nonlinearity of the political skill, political will and job performance relationships. In the case of successful long-term political behavior, politically skilled individuals will probably be able to temper their willingness to engage in political behavior in the short term through their greater self-monitoring and self-control, such that it is not so frequent as to be perceived as a problem.

This restraint of political behavior by those skilled in it presents a potential issue for empirical investigation. The TMGT effect, by its nature, is only truly visible at the context-dependent extremes of phenomena. In the case of political skill, the already-inherent difficulty in locating nonlinear effects is further complicated by the fact that those individuals high in political skill may be able to restrain their political will and political behavior in the short term in order to gain longer-term political objectives. As such, it is likely that longitudinal data collections will be warranted in future empirical research into this interaction, as cross-sectional examinations will be less likely to capture the nonlinear relationship. Although it may be difficult, researchers should attempt to explore the possibility of these nonlinear relationships (e.g. Hochwarter et al., 2010; Kolodinsky et al., 2004), not just continue the tradition of assuming that constructs in the organizational sciences are only related in a linear fashion.

Future research should also continue to examine the potential nonlinear effects of established constructs in the organizational sciences and the impact of the TMGT effect. Other individual difference variables relating to ability, such as political skill (e.g. emotional intelligence) also may be more resistant or immune to the TMGT effect in a manner similar to that of political skill. These ability constructs warrant further exploration. Conversely, other motivation-related constructs (e.g. need for achievement) should also be examined to determine if they play a role similar to that of political will. The interaction between motivation-related constructs and ability-related constructs would be a further avenue for valuable future research.

Further, continued theoretical and empirical development of political will is warranted. As it stands, very little evidence or theory is available to suggest whether or to what extent political will is a stable quality of an individual or a state that is influenced by environmental factors. It stands

to reason that individual differences exist between actors who are differentially motivated and willing to take the risks associated with stepping outside the boundaries of sanctioned and formal organizational channels in order to enact their desired outcomes. These individual differences may combine or interact with different situational variables that inspire political will. For example, Ambrose's (2012) review of the politics and justice literatures suggests that situations of perceived injustice might catalyze political behavior. It is very possible that political will mediates the relationship between justice and political behavior, and is not a direct effect of perceived injustice on political behavior.

Similarly, the proposed model and ideas discussed in this chapter might fruitfully extend the work of Treadway et al. (2005a), as it may be the case that political behavior is a mediating variable between the nonlinear interaction of political will and political skill on job performance. Political will may interact with political skill to predict not only political behavior, but also the appropriate type and level of political behavior given the specific context. Certainly, job performance is not the only outcome variable of interest in the organizational sciences, and the principles discussed in this chapter could be applied to a host of other outcomes such as stress, organizational commitment, trust or job satisfaction. Furthermore, political will may also demonstrate similar effects above the individual level of analysis, as group- or team-level political will may predict different higher-level outcomes such as team performance, team coordination or leader-member exchange.

Other future research may wish to investigate the political skill and political will of leaders, and how this may impact their teams. Previous research has demonstrated a link between leader political skill and team performance (Ahearn et al., 2004) and leader and follower effectiveness though improved leader-follower relationship quality (Brouer et al., 2013), but political will was not incorporated into these investigations. As it has been demonstrated that the political behavior of leaders has an impact on those around them (e.g. Ellen et al., 2013), it is important, and now possible with the available measures, to better establish how political skill and political will impact those leaders' political behaviors and relationships, and determine the outcomes of those behaviors and relationships. This is all the more important given that, in certain contexts, political behavior may not be appropriate, leading to less positive outcomes that are not just detrimental to an individual, but, in the case of the leader, potentially detrimental to that leader's followers as well.

Consideration should be given to the different dimensions of political will, as self-serving and benevolent political will are probably aroused by different cognitive and situational mechanisms, and thus have differential

impacts on the type of the resulting outcomes. Indeed, Kapoutsis et al. (in press) found that both self-serving and benevolent political will were associated with certain constructs (i.e. voice behavior), whereas other constructs were associated only with the individual dimensions by themselves (i.e. political skill associated with self-serving political will, but not with benevolent political will). Furthermore, there are probably boundary conditions that govern the impact of these different dimensions of political will on the ultimate organizational or personal outcome of interest.

Although political will is conceived as an intangible motivation or personal quality, it is likely that others will make assessments about the political will of others, perhaps through voice or political behaviors. Certainly, the impassioned public speeches of leaders like Dr Martin Luther King Jr displayed his willingness and drive to oppose injustice, and this perception of his political will had substantial but differing effects on millions of people. In organizations, the perceptions of others' political will may affect judgments of variables such as reputation or work-drive, which may have an impact on staffing decisions and performance evaluations. Perceptions of political will have the potential also to represent a contagious construct, as this may codify norms of behavior in an organization, or activate burgeoning but dormant political motivation in others. A host of boundary conditions also probably governs people's perceptions and responses to political will, as it could be perceived as a person's insatiable drive to get the job done regardless of the challenges, or as individuals' unscrupulous selfishness to get their own way. Consistent with the theme of this chapter, perceptions of political will are probably susceptible to the TMGT effect, as too little political will may be viewed as apathetic, while too much may be seen as maniacal.

CONCLUSION

Political skill and political will continue to grow as key concepts in the organizational politics literature. As research in these areas grows, it becomes increasingly important to understand how these constructs operate and relate to outcomes, both alone and together. This chapter proposes how these two constructs may interact and relate to job performance for individuals through the meta-theoretical perspective of the TMGT effect, contributing to a more complete understanding of political dynamics in organizations (e.g. Vigoda, 2003; Vigoda-Gadot and Drory, 2006). Political skill is proposed always to demonstrate a positive, linear relationship with work outcomes. Alternatively, political will, the motivation to engage in organizational politics, is proposed to be influenced

by the TMGT effect. Political will's relation to positive work outcomes should turn negative at high levels.

In the interaction between these two constructs, individuals high in political skill demonstrate a positive, linear relationship with work outcomes as political will increases. Conversely, individuals low in political skill demonstrate the curvilinear, inverted-U-shaped distribution predicted by the TMGT effect: individuals low in political skill, after reaching a context-specific inflection point, see increasingly negative outcomes as political will increases. These propositions provide the foundation for continued work in both of these constructs, particularly in relation to their empirical testing. They also contribute to the theory surrounding political skill, political will, the ability \times motivation relationship and the TMGT effect.

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