

Does political skills affect career success?: An evidence-based literature review

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Abstract. A systematic literature review of previous studies has shown an increasing focus on the influence of political skills in enhancing career success in recent years, which is expected to continue. This paper aims to provide in-depth insight and analyze the influence of political skills in enhancing career success, identify what research topics have been addressed, and identify opportunities for other topics that can be carried out in future research. This paper applies a systematic literature review methodology design. Presenting a structured overview obtained from 12 leading international journal articles indexed in the Scopus database. Political skills play a crucial role in career success, influencing both objective and subjective outcomes. The effectiveness of these skills can be moderated by organizational support, cultural context, and the presence of mentoring relationships. Understanding and developing political skills can provide a significant advantage in career advancement. This literature study contributes to analyzing the influence of political skills in enhancing career success by presenting an applicable theoretical framework, identifying the methodological framework that has been used, and identifying additional research topics and opportunities to link other variables in future research.

Keywords: political skills, career success, literature review

Introduction

Political skills are the ability of individuals to understand others and use the knowledge they have to act according to their wishes for personal and organizational interests (Ferris et al. 2007). This confirms that individuals who have the strength of political skills are needed in organizations, because companies will face dynamic work environment conditions (Campbell & Philip, 2013). Political skills are the potential of individuals who have good interpersonal skills in utilizing positions and networks (Ferris et al. 2005). Employees must help other employees demonstrate, transmit, and impress themselves within the organization.

Political skills have been introduced as one of the competencies needed to be able to make an organization effective (Ferris et al. 2007), and recently have been shown as predictors of supportive work outcomes, one of which is career success. Political skills have a significant positive impact on career success. This includes both objective measures (e.g. hierarchical position, income) and subjective measures (e.g. career satisfaction) (Luo, 2019; Chen et al., 2022; Blickle et al. 2011). Political skills are more predictive of subjective career success (e.g. job satisfaction, perceived career success) than objective career success (Luo, 2019).

For Individuals, developing political skills can significantly enhance career prospects. Engaging in networking, seeking mentoring relationships, and building a positive reputation are practical steps to leverage political skills for career success. For Organizations, recognizing the importance of political skills and providing support through mentoring programs and fair organizational practices can help employees achieve career success, thereby benefiting the organization as a whole.

This paper offers a systematic examination and analysis of the studies on political skills in influencing one's career success, as published in reputable international journals. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the theoretical background used to support the relationship?

RQ2. How have political skills issues in management, business and accounting research fields developed recently?

The main purpose is to conduct a review of the existing literature on political skills to determine the areas of research that have been explored and identify potential studies for future investigation. This study will enrich the existing literature in the following ways. First, it presents a widely used theoretical framework to examine the influence of political skills and career success. Second, it examines the methodological framework used in studying the influence of political skills and career success. Finally, this work helps researchers explore what research topics have been studied and where additional new opportunities may arise to relate other variables in future research.

Methods

This research article presents an in-depth and systematic literature review to identify and categorize the existing body of literature on political skills variables in supporting career success in the scope of business, management and accounting. In addition, this article attempts to analyze potential topics for further research in the future. The research methodology used refers to research by Hohenstein [14]. The literature review approach of this research is based on six stages of the process and examines the problem based on time horizon, database selection, journal selection, article selection, article classification, and article analysis. This research method was chosen because it has proven to be a reliable method that can be carried out in literature review studies that have previously been published in reputable international journals.

Time horizon for selection of papers

For the purpose of the review and evaluation process, the publication date range of reputable journal articles ranges from 2010 to the end of 2023. Based on this, the review analysis covers a time span of 13 years.

Selection of databases

The Scopus database was chosen as the primary source for the literature review because of its consistent standards for articles. Scopus is a reputable international journal indexing database. This search methodology is well known and has been used in previous literature reviews [16]. The decision to use the Scopus database was driven by its broad coverage and precise search capabilities [17].

Journal selection

This study specifically selects journals listed in the Scopus database that are relevant to the scope of business, management and accounting. Finally, 12 reputable international journals were selected for the database search: Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences; Central European Management Journal; Technology Analysis and Strategic Management; International Journal of Cross Cultural Management; International Journal of Business Excellence; European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology; Career Development International; European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology; Journal of Management Studies; Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies; Journal of Vocational Behavior; and International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management.

Article selection

First, the title, abstract, and keywords were set as the screening criteria for searching articles in reputable international journals in online databases. Utilizing the search criteria (Title-Abs-Key ("political skills") AND Title-Abs-Key ("career success")) on the title/abstract/keywords contained in the journal articles in the online databases above and included in the entire text. Then, each document from 2010 to 2023 was taken into account. Based on this, a total of 29 documents were found. The presentation of the article selection process flow can be seen in Figure 1.

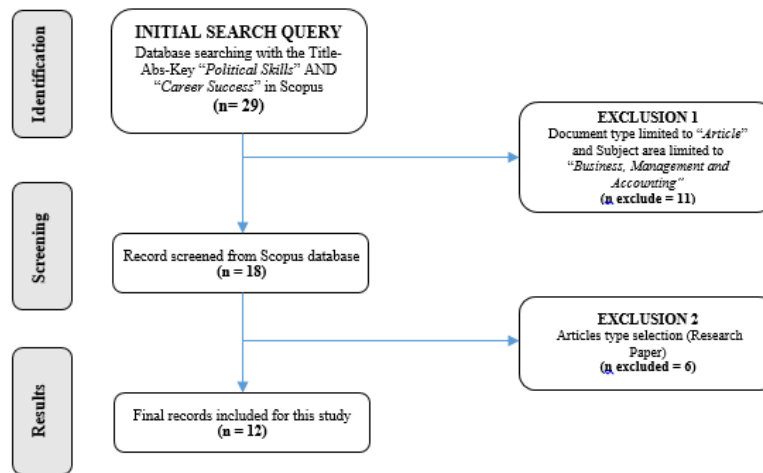


Figure 1. Summary of article selection process

Next, abstracts were examined to be able to carry out the process of assessing the relevance of documents related to the variable of political skills in influencing career success. In an effort to ensure consistent focus and reduce bias, articles identified as not relevant to this study were removed. In addition, to prevent double counting of articles in our analysis, any duplicate articles were removed [22]. In the filter menu, we applied the document type option to limit the findings to publications classified as articles, not conference papers or reviews as well as articles of the empirical research type, not literature studies. Based on the description of the process that has been carried out, a total of 12 articles can be analyzed which have been selected based on considerations of originality, clearly stated objectives and relevance.

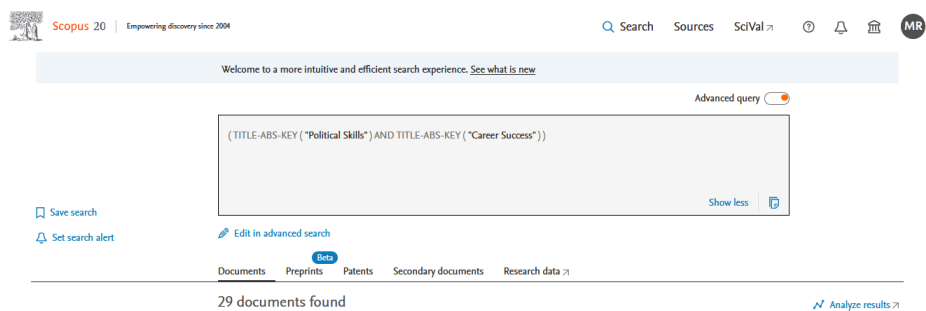


Figure 2. Number of documents in the Scopus database

Based on Figure 2, the evidence breakdown for the number of documents is shown. Since there are only a few research articles that consider the role of political skills in influencing career success, the records are fewer. Nevertheless, given the many recommendations of previous research, we consider it important to review this important topic and area. The next stage involves formulating a classification of articles.

Article classifications

The final sample consisted of 12 journal articles, which were then subjected to in-depth analysis and individual categorization based on the characteristics shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Key review of selected journal articles

Author	Review
Usman et al. (2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CB-SEM with AMOS 20. • A total of 212 hotel staff operating in Wuhan, People's Republic of China. • Theory of personal control.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political skill was measured by using the 18-item political skill inventory (Ferris et al., 2005). • Political skill is a positive predictor of subjective career success, and a negative predictor of emotional exhaustion..
Demirbağ et al. (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CB-SEM with AMOS. • A total of 457 sales executives from 13 different sectors in the cities of Istanbul, Kocaeli and Bursa in Türkiye. • Theory of political influence. • Political skill was measured by using the 18-item political skill inventory (Ferris et al., 2005). • Political skills training can help individuals manage their personal reputations in the workplace, thereby benefiting their careers.
Lee et al. (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLS-SEM with Smart PLS 3. • Total 252 R&D personnel in 60 major companies in Korea. • Social exchange theory. • Political skill was measured by using the 7-item (Ferris et al., 2005). • The importance of political skills to advance personal career.
Hayek et al. (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PLS-SEM with Smart PLS 3. • A total of 856 respondents from large financial services companies in Ecuador. • Social identity theory. • Political skill was measured by using the 18-item political skill inventory (Ferris et al., 2005). • Political skills are more strongly related to career satisfaction than to performance evaluations..
Chaturvedi et al. (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFA with AMOS 4. • A total of 352 middle level managers from 4 iron and steel companies in Raipur and Chhattisgarh in India. • Social influence theory. • Political skill was measured by using the 18-item political skill inventory (Ferris et al., 2005). • Politically skilled individuals are likely to gain more career success
Dietl et al. (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEM with Mplus 7.3 • Total 128 respondents across various sectors/industries in Germany. • Socio-analytic theory. • Political skill was measured by using the 18-item political skill inventory (Ferris et al., 2005). • Increased political skills strengthen the relationship between explicit achievement orientation and reputation.
Blickle et al. (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hierarchical moderated multiple regression analyses with SPSS 23. • Total 141 former BBA or MBA students in Germany. • Socio-analytic theory. • Political skill was measured by using the 18-item political skill inventory (Ferris et al., 2005). • Political skill positively moderates the relationship between employee modesty and career success (position achieved, career satisfaction) after 3 years.
Laird et al. (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEM-PLS with Smart PLS 3. • Total 145 employees from a factory in the United States. • Social/political influence theory • Political skill was measured by using the 18-item political skill inventory (Ferris et al., 2005). • Political skills show both direct and indirect effects on personal reputation development.
Wei et al. (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFA with AMOS 4. • A total of 281 supervisor-subordinate pairs from six electronics companies in China. • Behavioural theory. • Political skill was measured by using the 18-item political skill inventory (Ferris et al., 2005). • The potential for career growth is stronger for employees with higher (compared to lower) levels of political skill.
Martinez et al. (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hierarchical Regression Analyses with SPSS 23. • Total 347 respondents across various sectors/industries in the United States. • Attribution theory. • Political skill was measured by using the 18-item political skill inventory (Ferris et al., 2005). • In the case of political skills it seems important to attribute work successes and failures to internal or external causes.
Blickle et al. (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hierarchical multiple regression analyses with SPSS 23. • A total of 558 works council members in German companies. • Holland's theory. • Political skill was measured by using the 18-item political skill inventory (Ferris et al., 2005). • The stronger the political skills of a worker council member, the more successful he or she will be in his or her career.
Kim & Chang (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CB-SEM with AMOS 5. • A total of 163 and 96 female managers from financial institution companies in Korea and the US, respectively. • Career theory. • Political skill was measured with 6-items developed by Wayne and Ferris (1990). • Political skill had no significant impact on Korean women's career satisfaction, but had a significant positive impact for American women at a marginal level.

Analysis of classification

In the final stage, the categorized journal articles underwent a rigorous process of comparison, differentiation, and assessment. To facilitate the organization and understanding of the findings from the available scientific materials, we directed our attention to establishing significant groupings of political skill variables in influencing career success. Furthermore, during the critical examination and discourse, we identified potential areas for future research.

Result and Discussion

Many researchers argue that the theoretical framework of the theory of personal control model, theory of political influence, social exchange theory, social identity theory, social influence theory, socio-analytic theory, socio-analytic theory, social/political influence theory, behavioral theory, attribution theory, holland's theory, and career theory underlines the importance of political skill variables in the domain of one's career success.

In data analysis techniques, 7 articles used SEM analysis, either PLS-SEM or CB-SEM; 3 articles used hierarchical multiple regression; and 2 articles used confirmatory factor analysis. The use of SEM analysis with the help of AMOS, Smart-PLS and Mplus software. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis with the help of SPSS software. While the confirmatory factor analysis analysis uses AMOS.

Based on the geographical distribution of the study, the study was conducted in China as many as 2 studies, Turkey, Korea as many as 2 studies, Ecuador, India, Germany as many as 3 studies, the United States as many as 3 studies. When viewed from the continental element, it can be seen that 3 countries are in the Asian continent (China, Korea and India). A total of 2 countries are in the American continent (Ecuador and the US). The remaining 1 country, namely Germany, is in the European continent. This shows that no one has studied the topic of political skills on career success in African and Oceanian countries.

How do political skills influence career success?

Ferris et al., (2005: 127) define political skill 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". As such, politically skilled individuals combine social astuteness with the capacity to adjust their behavior to different and changing situational demands in a manner that appears to be sincere, inspires support and trust, and effectively influences and controls the responses of others. The four key dimensions of political skill measurement are as follows. Social astuteness, individuals possessing political skill are astute observers of others and are keenly attuned to diverse social situations. Interpersonal influence, politically skilled individuals have a subtle and convincing personal style that exerts a powerful influence on those around them. Networking ability, individuals with strong political skill are adept at developing and using diverse networks of people. Apparent sincerity, politically skilled individuals appear to others as possessing high levels of integrity, authenticity, sincerity, and genuineness (Ferris et al., 2005: 129).

Political skills play an important role in supporting one's career success. Political skills have been shown to predict hierarchical position, income, and career satisfaction. These relationships are mediated by employee reputation at work (Blickle et al. 2011). Political skill has a significant correlation with career success, both objectively (e.g., salary) and subjectively (e.g., career satisfaction). The predictive effect of political skill is stronger on subjective career success compared to objective career success (Chen et al. 2022; Hayek et al. 2018). Political skill enhances one's network resources, which in turn enhances career performance and outcomes. It also strengthens the relationship between network resources and career outcomes (Wei et al. 2012). Political skill is more influential in certain cultural contexts. For example, in Eastern cultures, political skill has a higher predictive effect on career success than in Western cultures (Chen et al. 2022; Hayek et al. 2018). Of the various dimensions of political skill, networking ability has a dominant influence on various career outcomes, including total compensation, promotions, and career satisfaction (Todd et al. 2009). Overall, political skill helps individuals to more effectively recognize and exploit opportunities in the work environment, which ultimately supports the achievement of their career goals (McAllister et al. 2014).

Conclusion

Political skills play a crucial role in career success, influencing both objective and subjective outcomes. The effectiveness of these skills can be moderated by organizational support, cultural context, and the presence of mentoring relationships. Understanding and developing political skills can provide a significant advantage in career advancement.

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