

Political Skill and Manager Performance: Exponential and Asymptotic Relationships due to
Differing Levels of Enterprising Job Demands

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Abstract

Political skill, a social competence that enables individuals to achieve goals due to their understanding of and influence upon others at work, can play an important role in manager performance. We argue that the political skill – manager performance relationship varies as a nonlinear function of differing levels of enterprising job demands (i.e., working with and through people). A large number of occupations have some enterprising features, but, across occupations, management roles typically contain even greater enterprising expectations. However, relatively few studies have examined the enterprising work context (e.g., enterprising demands) of managers. Specifically, under conditions of high enterprising job demands, we argue and find that, as political skill increases, there is an associated exponential increase in enterprising performance, with growth beyond the mean of political skill resulting in outsized performance gains. Whereas, under conditions of low (relative to other managers) enterprising job demands, political skill will have an asymptotic relationship with enterprising job performance, such that the relationship is positive, but becomes weaker as political skill increases, such that increases beyond the mean in political skill will result in minimal performance improvements. Our hypotheses are generally supported, and these findings have important implications for the performance increases in managerial roles as a joint function of manager political skill and enterprising job demands.

Keywords: Political Skill, Enterprising Job Demands, Manager Performance, nonlinear relationships

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Given the abundance of studies on *employee* job performance, it could lead the reader to question the value of managerial performance. However, a long history of organizational research has emphasized the importance of managers to organizations. Thompson (1967) described the (natural) managerial level as the conduit between the (open) organizational/strategic policy formulation and the (rational) technical value creation activities of the firm. Managers were viewed as vital to keeping a balance between the institutional and the technical aspects of the organization, allowing it to maintain flexibility. However, since managers are the intermediaries in the organization, their roles are ambiguous and their job demands are innately challenging.

Contemporary scholars also have highlighted the value of (middle) manager performance to both organization strategy (e.g., strategy formation; Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008) and employee outcomes (e.g., work group achievement and service quality; Huy, 2002). However, despite the clear value of managers to organizations, there is a relative dearth of literature on *manager* performance. We believe that both the demands confronting managers and manager individual differences should be considered when examining their performance.

Managerial demands can emerge through work environments. Holland (1997) associated work environments with vocation-related personal characteristics, such that work performance would be enhanced by matching individual attributes to job characteristics. Holland (1997) suggested six RIASEC occupational work types, including realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. However, these work interests are not only meaningful to vocation choices, but to a variety of important outcomes, such as

job performance and employee turnover (Van Iddekinge, Roth, Putka, & Lanivich, 2011), and 10-year later work, relationship, and health outcomes (Stoll et al., 2017).

Of the six Holland (1985) types, enterprising work demands (e.g., leading a group at work, negotiating, and persuading others; Holland, 1997) are uniquely related to manager performance. Although a variety of jobs have at least some enterprising features (Huang & Pearce, 2013), enterprising is exemplified in positions such as sales, marketing, and management (Holland, 1997). Further, managers primary strategic roles within organizations constitute enterprising activities, including conforming subordinate behaviors to the organization's strategy (i.e., implementation), interpreting information for use by superiors (i.e., synthesizing), influencing organizational leaders (i.e., championing), and encouraging and assisting both peers and subordinates (i.e., facilitating, Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). Also, managers need to engage in the enterprising behaviors of promoting downward strategic change, and constructing and renovating relationships across and outside of organizations (Wooldridge et al., 2008).

Empirically, managerial enterprising demands and their relationships with performance can be seen in various research findings. For examples, Radaelli and Sitton-Kent (2016) reported how middle managers' practices, many of which were enterprising-related, affected the travel of new ideas within organizations. Huy (2002) found that middle managers who both championed change projects and attended to individual's emotions experienced beneficial workgroup adaptation. In sum, clearly, enterprising demands are related to managerial activities, but studies have yet to examine how differing levels of enterprising job demands affect the performance of managers.

Moreover, Holland's occupational classifications have a strong linkage to personality and individual differences (Hansen, 1984), particularly since the measures used to assess vocational interests were set in personality typologies (Holland, 1997). Interpersonal

characteristics figure prominently throughout Holland's (1997) model, influencing the vocational interests and work environments of individuals, similar to how it has been argued that interpersonal characteristics of employees structure the organization and its jobs (i.e., Schneider, 1987). Specifically, one of the strongest individual difference – occupation type relationships is that between Big Five extraversion and enterprising (see Schneider, Ryan, Tracey, & Rounds, 1996). Therefore, given both the management- and interpersonal-related nature of enterprising work demands, we examine how these demands shape the effects on performance of political skill (Ferris, Treadway, Brouer, & Munyon, 2012).

Political skill allows individuals to persuade others and use social networks to achieve individual and organizational goals (Ferris et al., 2005; 2007; 2012), indicating its particular relevance to enterprising work demands. Much theoretical and empirical research has established political skill's relevance to manager job performance (e.g., Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004; Blickle et al., 2013; 2014; Ewen et al., 2013; 2014; Munyon, Summers, Thompson, & Ferris, 2015; Smith, Plowman, Duchon, & Quinn, 2008; Wihler, Frieder, Blickle, Oerder, & Schütte, 2016). Indeed, managers play a crucial role in organizational goal achievement through their use of social influence (Ammeter, Douglas, Gardner, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2002; Chemers, 2014; Ferris & Judge, 1991; Pfeffer, 1981), indicating that political skill is a key differentiator affecting how managers respond to their enterprising demands.

A growing body of scientific work has demonstrated the importance of context to organizational behavior (Johns, 2006), and some studies have examined the enterprising occupational context of the political skill–job performance relationship (e.g., Bing, Davison, Minor, Novicevic, & Frink, 2011; Blickle et al., 2009; 2012). However, to date, no study has investigated variations of the context of the political skill–job performance relationship where political skill would seem to be most useful, namely, in management contexts with elevated

levels of enterprising job demands. We argue that, when directly considering the management context, which has heightened enterprising demands compared to the overall working population, political skill will demonstrate different effects on the enterprising job performance of managers. In situations with high (relative to other managers) demands (i.e., very high demands relative to the general working population), political skill will demonstrate a positive and increasingly stronger (i.e., exponential) relationship with enterprising performance, such that increases beyond average political skill result in over-proportional gains in performance. In contrast, in low (for managers) demand (i.e., mean demands for the working population) situations, increases in political skill will show an asymptotic relationship with manager enterprising job performance, such that increases beyond average political skill result in minimal performance improvements.

Our study extends prior research in four meaningful ways. First, our research demonstrates the *influence of context on the type of effect (i.e., exponential vs. asymptotic) that political skill has on manager performance*. Second, it has been suggested that the managerial jobs can be characterized as enterprising (Holland, 1997), and we believe that an important way to assess the expectations placed on a manager is to consider the extent of enterprising job demands and their effects on manager enterprising job performance. Thus, our study provides insight into *the importance of political abilities to management* by investigating their effects within differing levels of enterprising demands.

Third, we extend individual differences research on *nonlinear work phenomena* by investigating the exponential and asymptotic effects of the enterprising demands and political skill interaction, arguing that the type of effect (i.e., exponential vs. asymptotic) depends on the (level of the enterprising) context within which the phenomena occurs. Finally, although much prior research has used supervisor ratings of manager performance, these ratings primarily reflect a supervisor's technical competency rather than manager performance

(Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008). Consequently, based on Hogan and Hogan (2001), we use *subordinate ratings of manager enterprising job performance*, because subordinate ratings are reflective of factors that should be more attuned to the enterprising context (e.g., group process facilitation, trust, and perceived effectiveness; Kaiser et al., 2008).

The Enterprising Context

Following Holland's (1997) job type classifications, the present research is placed within an enterprising context (i.e., working with and through people to attain organizational or personal goals). Enterprising interests (e.g., leading a business, negotiating, and persuading others; Holland, 1997) are associated with work success (Hogan & Hogan, 1991; Huang, Frideger, & Pearce, 2013; Huang & Pearce, 2013; Wille, De Fruty, & Feys, 2010), and enterprising work contains a large degree of ambiguity and uncertainty (Holland, 1997). Therefore, the enterprising context places a premium on social perceptiveness, and building and maintaining effective relationships with others, which gives individuals the opportunity to use social skill at work (e.g., political skill; Munyon et al., 2015) to improve performance (Holland, 1997). Lastly, evidence shows that the personality profiles of those with enterprising interests are similar to persons with leadership and, to some extent, supervisory interests, and that these profiles are stable across managerial domains (Dilchert, 2007).

Since many occupational categories that otherwise would not be considered enterprising (e.g., engineering) have enterprising features (e.g., project management; Huang & Pearce, 2013), and to increase the generalizability of our results, we investigate enterprising demands and enterprising performance of managers across different occupations. Enterprising job demands expect individuals to perceive others' motivations accurately, excel at giving verbal direction and persuasion, and lead effectively (Holland, 1997), and enterprising job performance evaluates a person's effectiveness at meeting those expectations. Since, as argued above, managerial roles are highly related to enterprising

demands, the enterprising performance of managers should be particularly meaningful to both researchers and practitioners, even though, conceptually, enterprising performance is not the same as *overall* job performance. Consequently, given the complementary relations between political skill, enterprising characteristics, and management, being politically skilled should be especially helpful to manager enterprising performance when facing higher levels of enterprising demands.

Political Skill

Political skill has been described as a social competence that enables individuals to achieve goals due to their understanding of and influence upon others at work (Ferris et al., 2005; 2007). Research has found it to have four dimensions, including social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity (Ferris et al., 2012). In meta-analyses, political skill has demonstrated a beneficial influence on individual and group work outcomes (Munyon et al., 2015), including those rated by others, such as task and contextual performance (Bing et al., 2011; Munyon et al., 2015). In regards to manager outcomes, political skill has positively associated with, for example, manager charisma (i.e., Blickle et al., 2014), being recommended for managerial positions (Huang et al., 2013), and managerial effectiveness (e.g., Ewen et al., 2013; 2014). Managers high on political skill also have been shown to have better performing teams (Ahearn et al., 2004) and subordinates with greater trust in management (Treadway et al., 2004).

Given the importance of context to organizational behavior (Johns, 2006) and, specifically to the effects of political skill (Ferris et al., 2002), some research has examined political skill in relation to differing occupational demands (Bing et al., 2011; Blickle et al., 2009; 2012). Both work role (Biddle, 1986) and trait activation (Tett & Burnett, 2003) theories suggest that the context of the work and the attributes of the employee are interconnected in role enactment. Thus, the grouping of various work roles are reflected in

one's occupational features (Dierdorff & Morgeson, 2007). In regards to managers, although much scholarly research assumes that the work roles of managers are roughly equivalent across occupational contexts, and, thereby, places managers from various fields into the same category, Dierdorff, Rubin, and Morgeson (2009) found that discrete forms of work context influenced the work role requirements of managers, and they encouraged future examination of how precise forms of context predict managerial success. Our study responds to this call by focusing on political skill's effects on manager enterprising performance at varying levels of enterprising demands contexts.

Of the six Holland (1997) occupational classifications (i.e., Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, & Conventional), enterprising expectations are the most aligned with political skill. Across industries, managerial work involves interacting with others, which is the essence of enterprising demands. As argued by Floyd and Wooldridge (1992; 1996), managers have four strategic roles: implementing, synthesizing, championing, and facilitating. As can be seen, each of these roles concerns human work (e.g., influencing peers and subordinates and channeling information upward). Managers' influence on organizational strategy formation also has been found empirically via, for instance, their issue-selling to top management (e.g., Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, & Lawrence, 2001), promotion of strategic change to subordinates (e.g., Beatty & Lee, 1992), and social network position (e.g., Pappas & Wooldridge, 2007).

Likewise, within micro (i.e., organizational behavior, human resource management) literature, both enterprising and political skill have been related to extraversion (see Schneider et al., 1996; Ferris et al., 2007), workplace interpersonal influence (Holland, 1997; Ferris et al., 2007), and achieved status at work (Huang & Pearce, 2013; Munyon et al., 2015), suggesting their conceptual similarity. Also, across several studies, political skill has buffered the negative effects of social stressors (e.g., Brouer, Ferris, Hochwarter, Laird, &

Gilmore, 2006; Harvey, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2007; Meurs, Gallagher, & Perrewé, 2010), which suggests that it should help managers who possess it to better meet their heightened (social) enterprising demands. Moreover, in regards to enterprising performance, in meta-analyses, political skill has been shown to be especially impactful on interpersonal-related behavior and performance (Bing et al., 2011; Munyon et al., 2015). In sum, the social effectiveness of those high on political skill should be especially impactful to addressing high levels of enterprising job demands.

Political Skill in the Enterprising Context: Nonlinearity with Performance

Many organizational scholars have suggested that work phenomena are not necessarily linear (e.g., Converse & Oswald, 2014; Ferris et al., 2006; Grant & Schwartz, 2011) and empirical research has shown this to be the case (e.g., the personality – job performance relationship; Le et al., 2011). Prototypical enterprising jobs (i.e., working with and through people) are sales positions (e.g., insurance sales; Holland, 1997), and performance in these jobs has been best predicted by political skill (Bing et al. 2011; Blickle et al., 2009; 2012), suggesting that political skill is highly relevant to addressing enterprising job demands. Moreover, varying strength in a relationship is a characteristic of nonlinear relationships, and sales jobs with high enterprising demands (i.e., insurance sales) have a high level of performance variation between job incumbents (i.e., Hunter, Schmidt, & Judiesch, 1990; Wihler, Meurs, Momm, John, & Blickle, 2017). We believe this also would apply to other positions (i.e., manager) that have similarly elevated enterprising demands.

Previous research (i.e., Bing et al. 2011; Blickle et al., 2009; 2012) found that enterprising job demands (e.g., interpersonal and social requirements of occupations) increase the strength of the positive relationship between political skill and job performance. These authors reported a linear interaction, but, in these studies, the political skill – job performance relationship was investigated in a broad spectrum of jobs. The jobs of those in

non-management roles is likely to vary greatly in the degree to which the employee is expected to engage in enterprising behavior. However, the very nature of management functions requires employees to engage in enterprising activities (e.g., leading discussions, supervising, persuading, and speaking on behalf of a group). Thus, given these differences, it is understandable that, when taking into account both management and non-management roles, enterprising demands would linearly increase the strength in the relationship of political skill with enterprising job performance.

However, in the present study, we particularly examine the enterprising demands and political skill of managers, and, due to the enterprising nature of management positions (Dilchert, 2007; Holland, 1997), we expect mean enterprising demands to be higher than in the (non-manager specific) working population. Consequently, in our study, a high level of enterprising demands relative to other managers, should be equivalent to a very high level of enterprising demands for the overall working population.

Enterprising demands are interpersonal stressors, and many studies of work health and stress have investigated nonlinearity with outcomes (e.g., Rydstedt, Ferrie, & Head, 2006). Although many studies have not found nonlinear relationships, several studies have found nonlinearity between work demands and criteria (e.g., Noblet, Rodwell, & Allisey, 2009; Rydstedt et al., 2006; Warr, 1990). Theoretically, nonlinearity between work stressors (e.g., enterprising demands) and performance could be explained by Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Ferris et al., 2006), which argues that stress is cumulative experience, as opposed to a passing phenomenon, and individual resources are essential to explaining the stress response. Further, within the larger context of organizational behavior, Aguinis and O'Boyle (2014), argue for an exponential relationship between performance and value, where minor improvements in individual performance create substantial value increases for the organization, which could be reflected in performance evaluations.

Moreover, relative to our study, it has been suggested that nonlinearity is likely to occur with work demands when jobs are complex, involving multiple tasks and ambiguous outcomes (Gardner, 1986; Noblet et al., 2009). Therefore, since these same job characteristics are hallmarks of managerial positions, we argue that enterprising demands should demonstrate a non-linear relationship with enterprising performance for managers. Specifically, for managers experiencing high enterprising demands relative to other managers, we believe we will find an exponential relationship of political skill with enterprising job performance. Whereas, for those experiencing low enterprising demands, we expect an asymptotic relationship with performance.

Much like how some stressors can be seen as a challenge rather than a hindrance and, thus, lead to improved outcomes (Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007), enterprising expectations should be interpreted by politically skilled managers as opportunities to put their political skill into practice. In positions with high enterprising demands, by leveraging their political skill to a greater degree, the highly politically skilled managers can enhance their political abilities (Ferris et al., 2007; 2012). Thus, the increasingly better ways that the more politically skilled manage and buffer their stressors (i.e., enterprising demands) will strengthen political skill's relationship with enterprising performance. This is particularly the case at high levels of political skill, through its improved demand-abilities fit (Edwards, 2008) with the elevated enterprising expectations present in the position. In sum, in managerial jobs with high (relative to other managers) enterprising demands, increases in political skill should result in exponential increases in enterprising job performance, particularly for those with heightened political skill.

On the other hand, for managers with relatively low levels of enterprising job demands, increases in political skill from low levels will associate with modest increases in enterprising performance, as political skill has some relevance to work demands in this

position. Since managerial positions inherently involve some enterprising demands (Dilchert, 2007), those with relatively low enterprising expectations should yet have an amount roughly equal to the overall working population. Thus, in low enterprising demands contexts, as political skill increases from low to average levels, enterprising performance will increasingly improve in this situation.

However, in management positions with low enterprising demands, it is highly likely that meeting other types of demands (e.g., realistic or investigative demands; Holland, 1997) plays a much greater role in performance than addressing enterprising demands. The elevated levels of these other demands require other skillsets (e.g., technical or intellectual) to meet these challenges, and these other skills are not necessarily possessed by those high on political skill. In other words, highly successful management in these positions is not found through political skill, but via other means (e.g., transactional leadership). Consequently, when in management positions with relatively low levels of enterprising demands, political skill beyond an average amount does not provide additional benefits, because the enterprising demands can be satisfied with only a mean amount of political skill and the important (other) demands in these positions require different competencies. Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1. Enterprising job demands will moderate the relationship between political skill and enterprising job performance for managers in a nonlinear way.

Hypothesis 1a. For managers experiencing high enterprising job demands, political skill will have positive and increasing in strength (i.e., exponential) effects on enterprising job performance, such that political skill beyond the mean will result in over-proportional performance gains.

Hypothesis 1b. For managers experiencing low enterprising job demands, political skill will have positive but decreasing in strength (i.e., asymptotic) effects on enterprising job performance, such that political skill beyond the mean will only lead to minimal performance

gains.

Method

Participants and Procedure

In order to examine the manager political skill — job performance relationship in a heightened enterprising context, we sampled supervisors and their subordinates in a large industrial region in the western part of Germany. Through personal contacts, we identified individuals in organizations in full-time supervisory positions who had at least three reports. All potential participants were sent a paper and pencil survey with a prepared return envelope and a specific code. Supervisors also received three closed envelopes with subordinate surveys and were asked to give these envelopes - also comprising the same specific codes - to reports. Thereby, each supervisor and her or his subordinates shared a specific but identical code. Supervisors and subordinates sent the surveys directly to the authors, and surveys were matched by the authors using the specific code shared by supervisors and reports. By using codes instead of proper names to match surveys we avoided ambiguities which can arise if different people have the same name. Supervisors rated their political skill, enterprising job demands, and demographic information. Subordinates were asked to rate the enterprising job performance of their respective supervisor.

We distributed 410 questionnaires to supervisors, and 265 were returned. In addition, we received 726 subordinate surveys. Data from participating supervisors were analyzed if at least one of their subordinates responded. We matched 607 subordinate responses to 229 supervisors. Of the 229 supervisors, 14 were unique supervisor-subordinate dyads, 52 received responses from two subordinates, and 163 received responses from three subordinates.

For supervisors who reported values on demographics ($N = 215$), 174 (81%) were male (41 female; 19%), and 57% had at least a bachelor-level degree. On average, these

supervisors were 47 years old ($SD = 8.76$) and had 13.6 years ($SD = 8.74$) of supervisory experience. Most worked in finance ($n = 69$; 32.1%) or trade and service ($n = 58$, 27.0%); 23 worked in social welfare (10.7%), 22 in manufacturing (10.2%), and 21 (9.8%) in public administrations. Sixteen (7.4%) were in communication and 6 (2.8%) worked in education. On average, supervisors had a total of about 27 subordinates. Supervisors ($N = 207$) and subordinates ($N = 558$) were affiliated with 110 organizations, with an average of 2 supervisors ($SD = 3.05$) and 5 subordinates ($SD = 8.00$) per organization.

We also evaluated potential non-response bias. For supervisor ratings there was no significant difference between those who reported demographic information and those who didn't, in both political skill ($t(227) = -.736$, $p = .463$) and enterprising job demands ($t(227) = .158$, $p = .874$). Further, ANOVA results show that there is no significant difference between groups with different numbers of raters (political skill: $F[2, 226] = 1.501$, $p = .225$; Enterprising job demands: $F[2, 226] = .223$, $p = .793$). For subordinates, we did not find differences in performance ratings for both respondents vs. non-respondents ($t(605) = -1.630$, $p = .104$) and number of raters $F[2, 604] = 1.830$, $p = .161$). Thus, we conclude that non-response bias is not an issue in our data.

Consequently, in the present sample, with reference to our sample mean, both the overall mean of enterprising job demands ($M = 2.51$) and the mean of those with relatively lower ($= M - 1 SD$) enterprising job demands ($M = 1.95$) were higher than in a general (i.e., non-manager specific) working adult sample (i.e., Blickle et al., 2012, $M = 1.83$). This supports our assumption that the jobs of managers are generally characterized by elevated levels of enterprising job demands (Holland, 1997). Thus, we were able to examine the political skill – enterprising performance relationship in jobs that, when compared to the overall working population, had medium to very high levels of enterprising job demands.

Measures

Manager political skill. To assess supervisor political skill, the validated German translation (Ferris et al., 2008) of the *Political Skill Inventory (PSI)* (Ferris et al., 2005) was used for self-assessment. This translation has shown measurement invariance (Lvina et al., 2012) across samples from China, Germany, Mexico, Russia, Turkey, and North America. The scale is composed of 18 items, which are answered on a seven-point, Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. A sample item is “I am good at building relationships with influential people at work.” The Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = .88$.

Manager enterprising job demands. Self-assessments of supervisor enterprising job demands (EJD) were measured with the enterprising items of the German UST (Umwelt-Struktur-Test [Environmental-Structure-Test]; Bergmann & Eder, 1992). This measure has been previously used in research (Blickle, Kramer et al., 2009, Blickle et al., 2012). The UST measures Holland’s (1997) six occupational environment characteristics, using 10 items for each scale. The respondents were asked to report the importance of the job features for their current job using the scale from 0 = *not relevant* to 4 = *very important*. The job features being rated are: (1) leading a group at work, (2) leading a business, (3) leading discussions, (4) advertising, (5) organizing meetings, (6) supervising others, (7) selling, (8) persuading others, (9) negotiating, and (10) speaking on behalf of a group. Our Cronbach’s alpha (α) was $\alpha = .75$.

Manager enterprising performance. The enterprising performance of supervisors was measured by subordinates, using the scale developed by Blickle et al. (2012) and assessed by Ewen et al. (2013) and Blickle et al. (2014) in the managerial context. The ten items were the same as used to assess supervisor enterprising demands, except that the question asked subordinates about the manager, “How effective is this person at: ...” (1) leading a group at work, (2) leading a business, (3) leading discussions, (4) advertising, (5) organizing meetings, (6) supervising others, (7) selling, (8) persuading others, (9) negotiating, and (10) speaking

on behalf of a group. Subordinates were asked to assess supervisor enterprising performance using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *much worse than other persons in a comparable position* to 5 = *much better than other persons in a comparable position*. Since supervisors could have several subordinate raters, we computed *ICC*-values (Shrout & Fleiss, 1979). The *ICC(1,1)* was .38, meaning that 38% of the variance in manager enterprising performance varies on the supervisor level and 62% on the subordinate level (Snijders & Bosker, 2012), indicating the usefulness of multilevel data analyses (Hox, 2010). Our Cronbach's alpha (α) of the 607 raters was $\alpha = .91$.

Control variables. In our analyses, we controlled for the number of raters, since this is a determinant of the reliability and validity of such a criterion (Oh, Wang, & Mount, 2011).

Data analyses

Since we had multiple reports rating a supervisor, we used moderated multilevel analyses (Hox, 2010) to test our hypotheses using Mplus 7.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012). Multilevel modeling allowed us to account for the nested data structure and avoid atomistic and ecologic fallacies that would threaten the validity of conclusions drawn from our results (Hox, 2010). We computed different multilevel models, entering the target variables hierarchically into the equations. Prior to analyses, political skill (PSI) and enterprising job demands (EJD) were centered (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). In the first model, the linear effects of PSI and EJD, the quadratic effect of PSI, and the linear interaction were entered. The number of raters (subordinates) describing each target (supervisor) varied from one to three raters. To increase statistical power (Cohen, 1992), we excluded as few as possible targets and raters from our analyses.

Following Jaccard and Turrisi (2003), the quadratic interaction between PSI and EJD (PSI x PSI x EJD) was entered in the second model. Our hypothesis initially would be supported if the quadratic interaction term between PSI and EJD was significant. Following

Dawson (2014), this interaction was plotted to evaluate its form, and inflection points (Le et al., 2011) were computed. Inflection points represent standardized points that indicate how many *SD* above or below the mean the direction of the curvilinear slope changes..

Results

To assess the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the two constructs (i.e., enterprising job demands and political skill) that were assessed via the same source, we ran two nested confirmatory factor analyses and compared the fit of the two models. In the first model, one single general factor was tested to account for all items. The second model comprised two factors (i.e., enterprising job demands and political skill), representing the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the two constructs within the same data source. In the first model, χ^2 goodness of fit was $\chi^2[350] = 1393.75$. In the second model, all items loaded on their respective factor, and the χ^2 goodness of fit was $\chi^2[349] = 1200.18$. All items loaded significantly on their respective factor ($p < .01$) with factor loadings ranging from .21 to .72. Furthermore, the second model exhibited a significantly better fit than the first model: $\Delta \chi^2 = 193.57$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .001$, thereby, supporting the uniqueness and distinctiveness of these two constructs.

Next, we evaluated whether our core constructs were normally distributed. Since supervisors nominated which subordinates would assess them, there could be a selection bias regarding manager enterprising performance. However, the scores of all variables were normally distributed (manager enterprising performance: $M = 3.67$, $SD = .72$, skewness = $-.255$, kurtosis = $-.014$; political skill: $M = 5.12$, $SD = .65$, skewness = $-.463$, kurtosis = $-.226$; enterprising job demands: $M = 2.51$, $SD = .56$, skewness = $-.476$, kurtosis = 1.015 ; Curran, West, & Finch 1996). In sum, these findings do not support indications of selection or attrition bias.

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, correlations, and Coefficient alpha (α) estimates of all variables. Both political skill ($r = .21, p < .01$) and enterprising job demands ($r = .09, p < .05$) were correlated with ratings of manager enterprising performance.

*** Insert Table 1 about here ***

The results for our hypotheses are shown in Table 2. Our analysis shows support for the quadratic moderated effect (Model 2: $\gamma = .22, p < .05$), which posits that the curvilinear relationship between manager political skill and manager enterprising job performance is moderated by manager job demands. This quadratic interaction effect explains an additional 2% variance ($p < .05$) in enterprising job performance

As Figure 1 shows, Hypothesis 1a generally is supported by the data: When enterprising job demands are high, after an initial, minimal decrease which was not hypothesized – we found that the inflection point of political skill at high levels of enterprising job demands was at two standard deviations *below* the mean, there is – as hypothesized – an exponential increase in the positive relationship between political skill and enterprising performance at increasing levels of political skill

As Figure 1 also shows, Hypothesis 1b is supported by the data: When enterprising job demands are low (relative to the sample mean, but a medium level relative to the overall working population, e.g. Blickle et al., 2012), there is an initial increase in the positive relationship, but this positive relationship becomes weaker as political skill increases. However, the relationship is not completely asymptotic, but has an inflection point at 1.30 *SD*, showing that the curve changes direction at 1.30 *SD* above the mean. Evaluations of these interaction plots after we control for extraversion and several demographic and organizational variables revealed that the shape of both slopes remained the same.

In addition, we computed regions of significance for political skill at high and low values of enterprising job demands (Miller et al., 2013). Results indicate that, at low values of

enterprising job demands, the relationship between political skill and enterprising job performance is significant for values of political skill between 4.30 (.83 SD below the mean) and 4.87 (.25 SD below the mean). In contrast, the relationship between political skill and enterprising job performance at high values of enterprising job demands is significant for values of political skill between 4.90 (.22 SD below the mean) and 6.40 (1.28 SD above the mean).

*** Insert Table 2 and Figure 1 about here ***

It is worth noting that, in supplementary analyses, our quadratic moderated effect remained significant when we added demographic (age, gender, tenure, educational level), organizational (e.g., manufacturing, education, administration), and personality (extraversion, Grant, 2012) variables. We also investigated the contributions of political skill dimensions (i.e., social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity), testing their linear and quadratic effects as moderated by job demands. Neither the linear nor quadratic interaction terms reached significance; we only found a significant standardized direct effect of interpersonal influence on employee-rated enterprising performance ($\gamma = .37$, $p < .01$). Although some research has shown political skill's dimensions to have differential relationships with workplace outcomes (see Ferris et al., 2012; Munyon et al., 2015), it also could be that the dimensions of political skill work in concert (Ferris et al., 2012). Thus, the latter seems to be the case, as it is mainly the quadratic effect of (composite) manager political skill that interacts with enterprising job demands to influence manager enterprising performance.

Discussion

The present study utilized Holland's (1997) theory on vocational job characteristics to create a specific context for our research (i.e., varying levels of high enterprising job demands) that is highly relevant to managers and their performance. Further, our research

focused on jobs that, compared to the overall working population, present high to very high enterprising demands. Given this context, we expected that the social effectiveness construct of political skill should be related to these demands beyond a linear interaction, and our results support this contention. We found that political skill demonstrated relationships with enterprising job performance, and that, for those high on enterprising demands, once political skill was greater than two standard deviations *below* the sample mean, enterprising performance *exponentially* increased as political skill increased. From Figure 1, it appears that the improvements in performance start to most greatly increase after political skill passes the medium region in our sample. However, for managers experiencing low (relative to other managers) enterprising job demands, reflecting a medium level compared to the work population (Blickle et al., 2012), increasing political skill resulted in a curvilinear relationship that was mostly *asymptotic*. In such contexts, our results demonstrated a decreasing rate of increase in performance ratings as political skill increased to the medium region in our sample. Once passing the medium region, increases in political skill did not result in performance gains. These results generally support our hypotheses, thereby, demonstrating that different levels of the same kind of situational demands yield different nonlinear predictor – criterion relationships.

Contributions and Implications

Our study adds to existing knowledge on the importance of a specific relevant context (i.e., enterprising job demands) to the evaluation of individual differences in managers in the workplace. Although political skill generally has been shown to be positively related to performance (Bing et al., 2011; Blickle et al., 2009; 2012; Munyon et al., 2015), we demonstrate that, for managers working under high enterprising job demands, the addition of increasing political skill yields much greater performance results. Our research expands the theoretical knowledge of person-environment (i.e., abilities-demands) fit by specifying the

form of the relationship between fit and performance, as has been noted by Edwards (2008) to be lacking in prior research. Further, our results indicate that not only personality, but perhaps also skills (i.e., political skill), can be activated when placed in a relevant context, suggesting potential extension of Trait Activation Theory (Tett & Burnett, 2003). But, in contrast to personality traits (e.g., social potency; Blickle et al., 2015), political skill shows exponential increases in high enterprising demands contexts, supporting the notion that political skill cannot develop adverse effects on performance (Harris et al., 2016). Finally, our findings contribute to the work stress literature, by identifying a context (i.e., enterprising) and skills (i.e., political skill) that allows individual managers to meet their work demands, resulting in a more active role and improved performance (Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Meurs & Perrewé, 2011), as has been suggested about political skill in prior work (Perrewé et al., 2004).

Further, given the overall elevated levels of enterprising demands for managers (Holland, 1997), we extend previous studies on the beneficial effects of political skill in the management context (Blickle et al., 2014; Ewen et al., 2013; 2014), by additionally showing differential effects (i.e., asymptotic vs. exponential) of political skill for managers experiencing high vs. very high (relative to the working population) enterprising demands. Given the demonstrated importance of political skill to managers, obtaining a more refined perspective of the contextual dependence of political skill's effects is particularly beneficial to understanding and predicting manager performance. Since context has been argued to be meaningful to the effects of political skill (Ferris et al., 2002) and performance relationships are not necessarily linear (Converse & Oswald, 2014), our results suggest that investigations continue into how context shapes nonlinear associations of political skill with work criteria.

Finally, for those managers experiencing lower enterprising demands relative to other managers, there was a much stronger *positive* political skill — manager performance

relationship in the region between low and medium levels of political skill compared to those working under high enterprising job demands (see Figure 1). Given the close connection between management and the enterprising context (Dilchert, 2007), it is likely that political skill is also relevant to such (medium) levels of enterprising demands, but that average levels of political skill fully satisfy those demands, meeting the entirety of enterprising performance expectations in these positions. Similarly, high levels of enterprising job demands might trigger higher performance expectations for persons in such positions, requiring comparatively greater levels of political skill to reach these heightened performance desires.

Also, for those experiencing low, relative to other managers, enterprising demands, it is unclear why there was a slight downward inflection point in performance ratings at high levels of political skill. Perhaps, these managers feel uninspired in such positions, due to the lack of an opportunity to engage their high political skill. However, the negative slope after this inflection point was very small and only for political skill greater than 1.30 standard deviations above the mean. Thus, this result seems to be of little theoretical or practical significance. In sum, our findings support earlier claims by leadership researchers, yet seldom tested, that manager performance is a phenomenon involving complex, nonlinear interactions among multiple variables (Kaiser et al., 2008; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001).

Our study took place in Germany, and, given the cultural similarities between Western countries (Hofstede, 2010), we expect our findings to be cross-culturally generalizable. Further, Lvina et al. (2012) showed that the factor structure of political skill and item intercepts are comparable across different western countries (e.g., United States and Germany). However, it remains an interesting question for future studies, whether the effect also occurs in Asian countries (e.g., China), since the item intercepts are not equivalent to Western countries (Lvina et al., 2012).

Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of our study warrant trust in the observed findings. We employed a multi-source design in which independent variables were collected from focal individuals and the criterion variable was collected from several subordinates, thereby, avoiding a mono-source bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Additionally, supporting the robustness of our results, the quadratic interaction was significant after including the other control variables (i.e., individual difference, experience, and occupational sector constructs) and, in additional analyses, neither the linear nor quadratic interaction terms of political skill facets demonstrated significance. We also should note limitations. First, the cross-sectional nature of our study limits conclusions about causation. Also, based on practical decisions and to increase the overall response rate, we collected performance ratings of only three subordinates. Although, inter-rater agreement has been shown to not substantially increase with more raters (Gwet, 2014), and we did not find a selection bias in performance ratings, future studies could collect performance ratings from a greater number of subordinates. Additionally, some concerns might arise from our scale format for enterprising performance. Although DeNisi and Murphy (2017) concluded that different scale formats have only limited effects, we cannot completely exclude such influences. Research should consider different scale formats for assessing performance in future work. Lastly, although our study used employed participants and enterprising jobs and features are increasingly important in the contemporary workforce (Reardon, Bullock, & Meyer, 2007), we are unable to generalize to non-enterprising (e.g., investigative) work demands and performance.

Practical Implications

Our findings suggest that organizations should consider the (demands-abilities) fit between the enterprising demands of a job and employee political skill when assigning managers to various positions or job duties. For instance, even when managers have only modest amounts of political skill, our results show that they can still be highly effective in

positions low in enterprising demands. Thus, politically skilled leadership may not be necessary for all management positions, allowing organizations more flexibility in the allocation of their human capital to managerial responsibilities.

However, a large proportion of high-ranking organizational leaders have enterprising interests (Hogan & Hogan, 1991). Therefore, it could be particularly helpful for ambitious employees to consider their degree of political skill as they ascend the organizational ladder. In addition, enterprising occupations comprise a large number of jobs, and many managers are employed in occupations that include some enterprising features (e.g., project management). Consequently, acquiring and maintaining some degree of political skill can be valuable to organizational managers from a range of occupations and across the organizational hierarchy. In sum, our research and prior findings suggest that managers and aspiring managers should reflect on their level of political skill as they plan their career path.

Directions for Future Research

Our results suggest the special importance of political skill to manager enterprising performance. Future research could examine how political skill influences success in other job contexts, such as investigative or social job performance. Another avenue involves the extended full-range model of leadership (Antonakis & House, 2014). As introduced in this model, instrumental leadership has strategic elements that might be affected by political skill, especially the interpersonal influence dimension, thereby, impacting managerial effectiveness.

Also, prior research shows that upward networking results in career ascendancy for those early in their career (Blickle, Witzki, & Schneider, 2009). Thus, future studies could examine performance ratings given by the manager's supervisor, to further test the dependence of a manager's career ascendancy on political skill. In addition, scholars could examine the demands placed on subordinates, since much of the social influence by managers

is directed at subordinates. Moreover, research could assess the differential impact of network centrality and political skill on manager outcomes, in order to more clearly discern in what ways the position a manager achieves (e.g., centrality) and how a manager achieves it (e.g., political skill) provide different and, perhaps, complementary results.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our findings support the importance of a specific kind of context to the effects of manager political skill. We found that high political skill is especially helpful to manager job performance, such that, for those experiencing (very) high enterprising demands, subordinate evaluations of performance exponentially grew as political skill increased. Additionally, for managers in positions with medium enterprising demands, high enterprising performance was achieved once managers obtained at least a modest degree of political skill. We hope future studies in these research areas will take advantage of our findings.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of the Study Variables

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
<i>Supervisor level</i>							
1 No. of raters†	229	2.55	.66				
2 Political skill	229	5.12	.65	.02	(.88)		
3 Enterprising job demands	229	2.51	.56	.04	.43**	(.75)	
<i>Subordinate-level</i>							
4 (Manager) Enterprising job performance	607	3.67	.72	.06	.21**	.09*	(.91)

Note. gender (0 = male; 1 = female); Correlations between the supervisor and subordinate variables are all provided at the individual level, with group-level variables disaggregated to each individual in the same group; † = 229 managers were rated by at least one subordinate, the mean number of subordinates rating the target supervisor was 2.55;

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

Table 2

Moderated Multilevel Analyses of Political Skill on Enterprising Job Performance

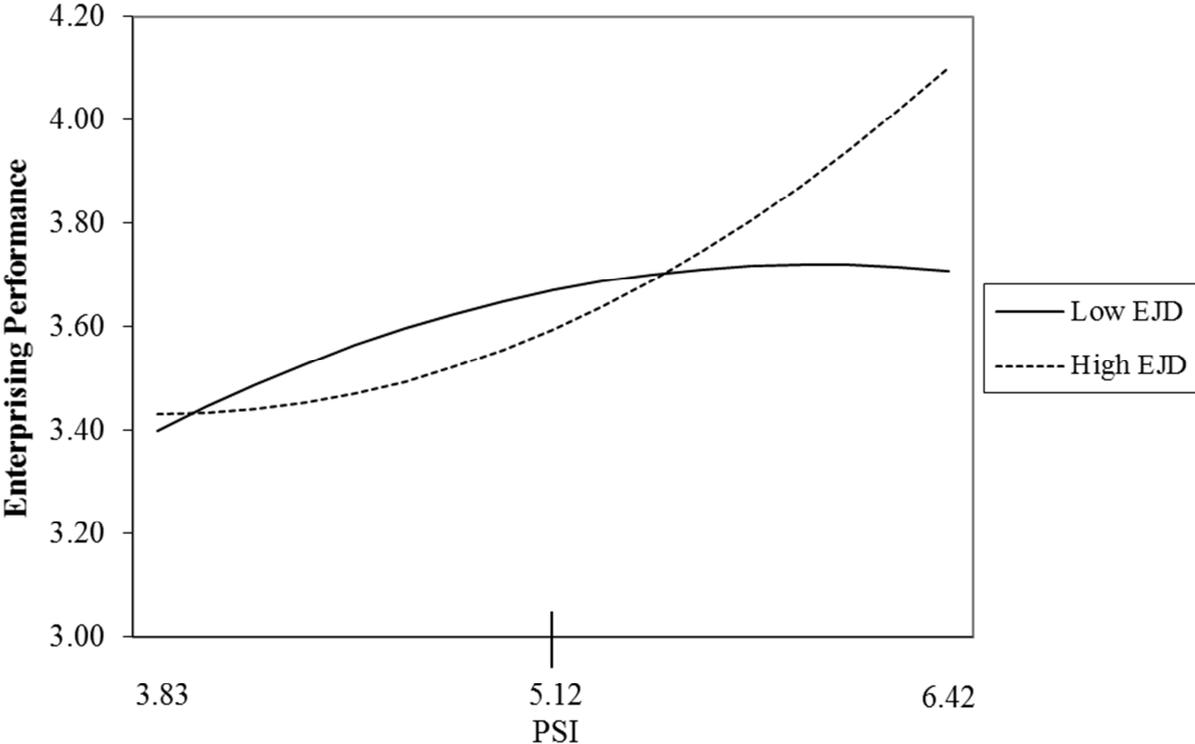
Enterprising Job Performance				
	Model 1		Model 2	
<i>Between-level</i>	<i>Est.(s.e.)</i>	γ	<i>Est. (s.e.)</i>	γ
No. of raters	.11 (.07)	.15	.12 (.07)	.17
Political Skill (PSI)	.23** (.07)	.34**	.19** (.08)	.28**
Enterprising Job Demands (EJD)	.01 (.07)	.01	-.07 (.08)	-.09
PSI x PSI	.02 (.09)	.03	.02 (.10)	.02
PSI x EJD	.02 (.12)	.02	.12 (.12)	.12
PSI x PSI x EJD			.15* (.07)	.22*
Intercept	3.65** (.05)		3.65** (.05)	
Residual variance	.17** (.03)		.16** (.03)	
R ²		.14		.16
ΔR^2				.02*

Note. $N = 229$ supervisors, $N = 607$ subordinates; Est. = unstandardized estimate; R^2 reports explained variance of the between level;

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

Figure 1

Interaction of Political Skill and Enterprising Job Demands on Enterprising Job Performance



Note. $N = 229$ supervisors, $N = 607$ subordinates; *EJD* = Enterprising Job Demands; graphs plotted from $-2SD < M < +2SD$. High EJD = Enterprising job demands 1 SD above the sample mean; Low EJD = Enterprising job demands 1 SD below the sample mean, which is yet above the mean of the overall working population in Germany.