

NEUTRALIZING JOB STRESSORS:
POLITICAL SKILL AS AN ANTIDOTE
TO THE DYSFUNCTIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF ROLE CONFLICT STRESSORS

PAMELA L. PERREWÉ
Florida State University

KELLY L. ZELLARS
University of North Carolina – Charlotte

GERALD R. FERRIS
Florida State University

ANA MARIA ROSSI
Clinica De Stress E Biofeedback

CHARLES J. KACMAR
Florida State University

DAVID A. RALSTON
University of Oklahoma

ABSTRACT

We examined the neutralizing effects of political skill on perceived role conflict– strain relationships. Strain was operationalized as psychological anxiety, somatic complaints, and physiological strain (i.e., heart rate, systolic and diastolic blood pressure). Results supported the moderating effects of political skill such that greater political skill reduced the negative effects of role conflict on all types of strain. We examined key contributions and limitations of the study, as well as directions for future research.

Job stress continues to be a major problem today, costing organizations billions of dollars in employee disability claims, employee absenteeism, and lost productivity (e.g., Xie & Schaubroeck, 2001). Because research has supported the deleterious effects of stressors on individuals' mental and physical health (e.g., Spector, Chen, & O'Connell, 2000), it is important to continue examining potential antidotes that can reduce strain and the related costs of strain to organizations. According to Lazarus' (1991) transactional theory, stress has been defined as a relationship between the person and the environment that is cognitively appraised (or evaluated) by the person as being relevant to his or her well being, and in which the person's resources are appraised as being taxed or exceeded. The essence of the transactional theory of stress is to consider how the individual appraises what is happening in order to understand his or her emotional and physiological reactions (Lazarus, 1991).

It is through the appraisal process that the individual and the environment are linked. There are two kinds of appraisal. Primary appraisal refers to what is at stake for the person, the significance of an encounter for the individual's well being (Folkman, 1992). Secondary appraisal, on the other hand, occurs when the person reviews the availability of coping resources for dealing with a stressor, and decides what can be done to alleviate the negative impact of that stressor (Folkman, 1992). The focus of this paper is on political skill as an individual characteristic that we believe sheds further light on Lazarus' (1991) secondary appraisal construct and, thus, on his transactional theory of stress.

Using Lazarus' (1991) transactional theory assertions, we examine how one personal characteristic, political skill, might moderate the relationship between a work environmental factor, role conflict, and psychological anxiety, somatic complaints, and physiological strain. According to Perrewé, Ferris, Frink, and Anthony (2000), the negative effects arising from a

stressor (e.g., role conflict) should be reduced for individuals high in political skill because of their increased confidence and sense of control. Combining the conceptual work of Lazarus (1991) and Perrewé et al. (2000), we argue that political skill is a unique type of coping resource and, thus, an antidote to the dysfunctional consequences of stressors on strain.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS

Role Conflict and Job Strain

For several decades, research has shown role conflict to be linked with a number of dysfunctional outcomes including job dissatisfaction and psychological strain (e.g., Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Schaubroeck, Cotton, & Jennings, 1989). When two or more sets of role pressures exist in an individual's workspace, and the compliance with any one of these pressures impedes the accomplishment of another, role conflict is the result (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, & Snoek, 1964). Experiencing incompatible or irreconcilable expectations between roles, or within a role, is presumed to be psychologically uncomfortable for individuals, and generates negative emotional reactions (Schaubroeck, et al. , 1989).

Role conflict occurs because of the roles occupied by an individual. As such, they are most often chronic rather than unique or temporary. In attempting to explain the mechanisms by which role stressors are linked to negative consequences for the individual, many researchers have examined the role of personality traits and coping mechanisms in the experience of strain. For example, considerable work has reported a link between negative affectivity and psychological strains, (e.g., Spector et al., 2000). Others have examined individual difference variables such as neuroticism (Zellars & Perrewé, 2001) and self-efficacy (Schaubroeck, Jones, & Xie, 2001) as important determinants of individuals' emotional and behavioral reactions to stressors. The

evidence to date clearly seems to suggest that some dispositional characteristics influence individuals' perceptions of, and reactions to, conditions in the job environment.

However, more work is needed that examines the efficacy of individuals' specific coping resources in reducing strain. One such resource might be the political skill utilized in interpersonal interactions, given their association with role conflicts (French & Caplan, 1972). In this study, we propose that political skill can serve as a coping resource that neutralizes the degree of negative outcomes experienced due to role conflict occurring on the job.

Political Skill

Although a large body of research on influence and politics in organizations has been developed, Jones (1990) noted that we know surprisingly little about the issues of personal style that might contribute to the success of specific influence tactics and behaviors. He speculated that the components of style: “. . . have something to do with mixtures of self-confidence and self-mockery, comfort with one's achievements but humility in citing them, the ability to communicate in ways that touch and arouse constituents, and selected aspects of physical appearance and bearing that are difficult to locate in our psychological theories . . .” (p. 199). Indeed, more than a decade after Jones's statement, we have yet to adequately address the effective execution of influence behaviors (e.g., Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, Blass, Kolodinsky, & Treadway, 2002).

Earlier, Mintzberg (1983) coined the term “political skill” to refer to a personal characteristic of individuals required in order to be effective in the political arenas of organizational life. Characterized as an intuitive sense for how to use power effectively, Mintzberg regarded political skill as the ability: “. . . to exercise formal power with a sensitivity

to the feelings of others, to know where to concentrate one's energies, to sense what is possible, to organize the necessary alliances" (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 26).

Although the notion of political skill makes intuitive sense, and it has been used in the ensuing years in anecdotal and casual ways, serious scholarship on this construct was not initiated until nearly two decades after Mintzberg's initial statement. Furthermore, whereas Mintzberg tended to associate political skill explicitly with formal power, the political skill construct, as it is characterized today, fits better with the ideas suggested by some scholars concerning the exercise of influence devoid of formal authority (e.g., Kotter, 1985).

Definition and construct delineation. Ferris and his colleagues (e.g., Ferris, Berkson, Kaplan, Gilmore, Buckley, Hochwarter, & Witt, 1999) initiated research on delineating the construct domain space of political skill, provided initial evidence for its convergent and discriminant validity, and developed a concise unidimensional measure of this construct. In their conceptualization, and following Mintzberg's (1983) work, political skill refers to 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.

Political skill, thus, implies a facility in dealing with and through others, and feelings of enhanced control are gained by those with political skill as they are successful at influencing others at work. More specifically, Ferris et al. (1999) argued that political skill should generate a sense of self confidence and personal security because people will experience a greater sense of understanding and control over people at work, and the requisite tactics to get what they want. It is this increased confidence and sense of control that explains why high political skill individuals should experience less anxiety and stress at work (Perrewé, Ferris, Frink, & Anthony, 2000).

The six items developed by Ferris et al. (1999) to measure political skill were, by their own admission, an initial attempt to representatively tap the principal aspects and features of this construct in a concise, unidimensional manner. Besides the Ferris et al. study, several other studies have assessed the factor structure of the 6-item political skill scale and found strong support for unidimensionality (e.g., Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, in press; Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2001). The definition of political skill reflects the understanding of others at work and the use of that knowledge to influence others. For example, understanding others is exhibited in the item: "I understand people well". The use of the knowledge about others for influence purposes is seen in the item: "I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me". Thus, the definition of political skill appears to convey the essential elements of the construct adequately and representatively, and the construct seems to be accurately operationalized by the 6-item scale. All items are listed in the Appendix.

Construct validity. Concerning its construct validity, Ferris et al. (1999) argued that political skill is expected to overlap with other social effectiveness constructs, but only to a modest degree, and not so highly as to indicate construct redundancy. Ferris, Perrewé, and Douglas (2002) reviewed the proliferation of social effectiveness constructs that have emerged in recent years (including political skill), and concluded there is a unique quality to each of the constructs examined. However, they also suggested that there is natural overlap among the measures of most of these constructs, but it is of only limited magnitude.

Individuals high in political skill possess an understanding of people, along with a basic belief that they can control the processes and outcomes of interactions with others. A key component of political skill is the "development and leveraging of social capital" needed to achieve one's goals (Perrewé et al., 2000, p.117). Individuals who have built social connections

characterized by confidence, trust, and sincerity should sense greater control over their work environment.

Experienced strain is reduced as political skill enhances individuals' understanding of their work environment and the adverse stimuli encountered (Ferris et al., 1999; Perrewé et al., 2000). Furthermore, people high in political skill tend to view interpersonal interactions as opportunities rather than threats, and they evaluate and interpret environmental stimuli differently than those low in political skill (Perrewé et al., 2000). Perrewé et al. argued that political skill can have two types of effects related to stress and strain. First, individuals high in political skill should generally experience fewer perceived stressors at work. Second, when politically skilled individuals do encounter stressors in the work environment, such stressors are less likely to produce dysfunctional consequences.

Therefore, political skill should act as a moderator of the perceived source of stressor – strain relationship. The negative effects arising from a stressor should be reduced for individuals high in political skill because they feel more adept at handling such situations. Therefore, we suggest that political skill serve as an antidote of sorts to the dysfunctional effects of role conflict. Based on the foregoing literature, we formulated the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis: The relationship between perceived role conflict and strain is moderated by political skill such that higher political skill attenuates the negative relationship between role conflict and psychological, somatic, and physiological strains. Specifically, for individuals low in political skill, the negative effects of role conflict are experienced in the form of increased psychological anxiety, somatic complaints, and physiological strain.

METHOD

Sample

We collected data from 230 full-time employees (99 had supervisory responsibilities and 131 did not have supervisory responsibilities) from three large oil companies in Brazil over a fifteen-month period. Theory and research on political skill has always argued implicitly as well as explicitly that political skill is important for individuals whose work involves having contact with others (Ferris et al., 1999; Ferris, Perrewé, Anthony & Gilmore, 2000). Research on political skill has found interesting and important effects on samples of social work caseworkers, secretarial/clerical employees, and recruiters/interviewers. Thus, political skill is argued to be important for all individuals, even those employees without supervisory responsibilities.

Participation in the study was voluntary. The sample was predominantly male (72.6%) and married (69%). The average number of years of work experience exceeded 19 years, and 82% of the sample had ten or more years of work experience. The questionnaire, designed by the authors, was translated from English to Portuguese and back translated by two English teachers, fluent in both languages. The two translators worked independently. Only a few minor discrepancies in wording emerged and were resolved by the translators as they talked through the differences.

Data were collected from each participant at two points in time as part of a large stress-related program sponsored by the companies. Each respondent completed a questionnaire containing personality and stressor items at a professional biofeedback clinic. In an effort to reduce concerns about common method variance for our survey items, the respondents returned to the clinic approximately one week later. Readings were taken for systolic and diastolic blood pressure and heart rate by a professionally educated clinical psychologist (an author) with more

than twenty years of experience in conducting and supervising biofeedback studies.

Respondents also completed questionnaires that measured anxiety experienced in their lives.

Measures

Political skill. Respondents' political skill was measured using six items developed by Ferris et al. (1999) that utilized a 5-point Likert-type scale, with item responses ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Responses to the six items were summed and averaged into a composite with higher scores indicating greater political skill. The coefficient alpha internal consistency reliability estimate was .71.

Perceived role conflict. Eight items developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) were averaged to measure role conflict. Respondents used a 7-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" to indicate their agreement with the items regarding their jobs. Higher scores indicate greater perceived role conflict. The coefficient alpha reliability estimate was .81.

Psychological anxiety and somatic complaints. We measured respondents' psychological anxiety and somatic complaints using scales developed by Lehrer and Woolfolk (1982). Using a 7-point format, with endpoints of "never" and "extremely often," respondents indicated how often they feel the way the statement describes. The psychological anxiety measure contains eleven items and the somatic complaint scale contains sixteen items. Higher scores on each scale indicate greater anxiety. The coefficient alpha reliability estimates for psychological anxiety and somatic complaints were .82 and .85, respectively.

Physiological measures. Heart rate was measured using a stethoscope and blood pressure was measured using a sphygmomanometer. Each time a heart beats, a surge of blood is pumped from the heart into the arteries, which increases the pressure in the arteries. In between

heartbeats, the pressure in the arteries decreases. Blood pressure is reported as two numbers; systolic is the pressure of the blood against the artery walls when the heart contracts, and diastolic is the pressure against the artery walls when resting (Wellsource, Inc, 1996). These cardiovascular symptoms have long been known risk factors for coronary heart disease (Fried, Rowland, & Ferris, 1984).

Control variables. In order to ensure that the hypothesis test was appropriately conservative, several variables were controlled in the regression analyses: total years of work experience, age, average number of hours worked per week, gender, marital status, education level, and hierarchical position within the organization.

Also, based on prior research linking negative affect (NA) and psychological symptoms (e.g., Spector et al., 2000), we controlled for NA using the PANAS scales developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988). Using a 5-point scale ranging from "very slightly" to "extremely," respondents indicated the degree to which they generally felt the way the item indicated. Higher scores indicate higher levels of NA. The coefficient alpha reliability estimate was .82.

Finally, in order to make clear that political skill represents something beyond mere general self-efficacy, we statistically controlled for this construct. Respondents' general self-efficacy was measured with nine items developed by Riggs, Warka, Babasa, Betancourt, and Hooker (1994). Using a 7-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly disagree," respondents indicated the degree to which they possess confidence in their skills and abilities. Six items are reverse-coded. The original scale contains ten items but we eliminated one item that appeared to be problematic, "Most people in my line of work can do the job better than I can." This is the only item in the original scale that requires respondents to compare themselves with others.

Higher scores indicate greater general self-efficacy. The reliability estimate for the scale was .72. Items for the measures are listed in the Appendix.

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the study variables are shown in Table

1. Prior to testing the Hypothesis, we tested for the construct validity of our measures.

Insert Table 1 about here

Construct Validity of Political Skill

Ferris et al. (1999) found that political skill was positively (but moderately) related, as expected, to self-monitoring ($r = .21, p < .01$), empathy ($r = .28, p < .01$), understanding of events ($r = .39, p < .001$), extraversion ($r = .28, p < .01$), positive affectivity ($r = .36, p < .001$), and conscientiousness ($r = .25, p < .01$). They also argued that political skill would be independent of general mental ability; that is, political skill is an identifiable personal attribute in its own right, and not simply subsumed under general intelligence. Ferris et al. (1999) reported a non-significant correlation between political skill and general mental ability ($r = -.08, n.s.$).

Finally, in the present study, we measured respondents' general self-efficacy for two reasons. First, it might be argued that general self-efficacy and political skill are redundant constructs. Therefore, we need to be able to demonstrate that whereas they might correlate, the relationship is no more than modest in magnitude. The zero-order correlation between political skill and general self-efficacy was $r = .31 (p < .01)$, placing it within the range of modest relationships that political skill has been argued (and found) to have with other interpersonally-

oriented constructs. Second, general self-efficacy was included in this study as a control variable because it has been found to be a significant moderator in prior stress research.

Measurement Model Construct Validity

Construct validity was assessed using the Anderson and Gerbing (1988) method. Applying this method, convergent validity is demonstrated if the path loading from an item to its latent construct is significant and if the item's loading is more than twice the item's standard error.

Discriminant validity is demonstrated when a chi-square difference test between the unconstrained measurement model and one in which a pair of latent variables is correlated at 1.0 is significant.

LISREL 8.3 was used to assess both convergent and discriminant validity. A measurement model consisting of all items for the constructs of role conflict, political skill, negative affectivity, and self-efficacy was estimated from a covariance matrix. Items within constructs were correlated if the correlation between the item and another item within the same construct was greater than or equal to .25. Correlations between items across constructs were not specified. Relationship equations associated the latent construct with its respective items. No relationships, constraints, or paths involving the latent constructs were specified.

The fit statistics for the measurement model ($\chi^2 = 383.03$, $p = .08$, $df = 346$, $GFI = .90$, $CFI = .97$, $RMSEA = .022$, and standardized $RMR = .05$) were acceptable (Kelloway, 1998). This model was then compared using chi-square difference tests against 6 alternate measurement models to assess discriminant validity. In each alternate model, one pair of latent constructs was correlated at 1.0, per the Anderson and Gerbing (1988) method. Setting the correlation for a pair of constructs to 1.0 assumes that the two constructs are the same. Thus, if the alternate model fails the chi-square difference test, discriminant validity is demonstrated, as the two constructs

are not the same. In each case, the chi-square difference test was significant at $p < .01$. Thus, discriminant validity among the constructs was demonstrated.

Alternate Model Tests

Two alternate models were tested to determine if specific latent constructs did indeed contribute to and have a significant influence on the hypothesized 4-factor model. Both models started with the 4-factor model, from which one latent construct (political skill, self-efficacy) was removed, producing a 3-factor model, which was then compared to the hypothesized 4-factor model. The analysis of these models was accomplished using two approaches: the ratio of χ^2 to degrees of freedom as recommended by Bollen (1989) (Keeping & Levy, 2000:715), and the AIC fit statistic (Schumacker & Lomax, 1996: 7-8). The ratio of χ^2 to degrees of freedom was smaller in the 4-factor model versus each of the alternate models (4-factor: 1.11, without political skill: 1.29, without self-efficacy: 1.43). The model AIC was lower in the 4-factor model (4-factor: 683.03, without political skill: 739.75, without self-efficacy: 787.52). Thus, we concluded that the 4-factor model is an effective representative of the data in our study.

Moderated Regression Results for Hypothesis Test

Once we were satisfied with the construct validity of our measures, we tested the Hypothesis: the relationship between perceived role conflict and strain is moderated by political skill such that greater political skill reduces the effect of conflict on strain. All independent variables were centered prior to analysis and tests for normality demonstrated no violations of assumptions underlying the regressions. The results are shown in step 2 of Table 2. The interaction term significantly predicted psychological anxiety ($p < .01$), somatic complaints ($p < .05$), systolic blood pressure ($p < .05$), diastolic blood pressure ($p < .05$), beyond the variance

accounted for by the main effects and control variables. However, the interaction term was not significant for heart rate. Therefore, we found strong but not full support for the Hypothesis.

Insert Table 2 about here

In order to examine the nature and form of the interactions more closely, we plotted them using procedures by Aiken and West (1991). They are graphically illustrated in Figures 1a-1d. There appears to be sufficient evidence across the four criterion variables to support the hypothesis that political skill attenuates the negative effects of role conflict. As can be seen, the negative effects of role conflict are much more dysfunctional for individuals low in political skill as compared with those high in political skill. This is most dramatically highlighted in Figure 1c where increases in role conflict are associated with increases in systolic blood pressure for individuals low in political skill. However, increments in role conflict for those high in political skill are actually associated with reductions in systolic blood pressure. Similar, but less dramatic, results are shown in Figure 1d for diastolic blood pressure.

Insert Figures 1a-1d about here

General Self-Efficacy

In order to conduct the most rigorous assessment of political skills' moderating effects, we repeated the moderated regression analysis, this time examining the moderating role of general self-efficacy on the role conflict– strain relationships, after controlling for political skill. The results of these analyses demonstrated that the role conflict x general self-efficacy

interaction term was not significant for any of the strain outcomes. The p values ranged from .23 (diastolic blood pressure) to .75 (heart rate).

DISCUSSION

Job stress has been a costly and disruptive problem for organizations for decades, and it shows no signs of diminishing any time soon. Indeed, large-scale changes involving downsizing and restructuring of organizations, have resulted in numerous role changes for employees at work, thus further increasing stress levels. Therefore, it is incumbent upon organizational scientists to develop a more informed understanding of the factors that can protect people from the negative consequences of job stress.

Following Perrewé et al. (2000), it was hypothesized that political skill at work moderates the relationship between role conflict and psychological anxiety, somatic complaints, and physiological strain, and strong support was found. For four of the five criterion measures, political skill attenuated the dysfunctional effects of role conflict, as predicted. We believe these results have interesting implications, and we discuss what we see as the key contributions and limitations of the study, as well as directions for future research.

Contributions to Theory and Research

The work of Lazarus (e.g., Lazarus, 1991,1999) has largely influenced the proposition that person variables influence the stressor-strain relationship. That body of work has indicated that the degree of fit between the person and his (her) environment is a significant determinant of the amount of strain experienced. Instead of simply examining the environmental causes of strain, Lazarus suggested that strain results when a person feels unable to adequately cope with an identified threat. In the appraisal model, individuals assess whether events have implications for their well being. Those deemed to be irrelevant have no bearing on well being. Events that

potentially affect well being, in this case perceived role conflict, initiate a secondary appraisal in which individuals determine the adequacy of their coping resources. We argue that political skill is a unique and effective coping resource that has not been considered previously in Lazarus' transactional theory, and one that sheds further light on Lazarus' secondary appraisal construct. This is a significant contribution in that political skill is a resource that appears more amenable to change and development by the individual than some of the previously examined individual differences known to influence experienced strain (e.g., NA). Moreover, unlike other resources which largely depend on management's ability or willingness to provide (e.g., increased staffing levels), political skill is a coping resource the individual can draw upon on his (her) own.

Further, previous stress research has not systematically examined psychological, somatic, and physiological strain criterion measures in the same study. The fact that we found convergent findings across the three types of strain reinforces confidence in the validity of the results. The results provide further support for, and validation of, the political skill construct, and one of the roles it can play in the organizational sciences. Our findings support that political skill serves as an antidote to the dysfunctional consequences of stress.

As perceptions of role conflict increased, individuals with low political skill reported increases in psychological anxiety and somatic complaints at a higher rate than individuals with high political skill. Thus, it appears that high political skill can help to ameliorate the negative effects of role conflict. It is interesting that for somatic complaints, the largest degree of separation between low and high political skill occurred when perceived role conflict was low. Perhaps individuals with high political skill require a certain amount of stimuli or activation in their environment to feel comfortable. Stimuli that are stressful for some may be perceived as welcome challenges for individuals with high political skill. A quick examination of all four of

the graphs indicates that strain was higher under conditions of low role conflict for individuals high in political skill. Clearly, additional research is needed to determine if individuals with high political skill require a higher level of activation than individuals with low political skill.

With regard to blood pressure, individuals low in political skill had higher increases in both systolic and diastolic blood pressure than individuals high in political skill as perceived role conflicts increased. Systolic blood pressure actually decreased for individuals with high political skill under conditions of high role conflict. Together, these findings provide strong support for the neutralizing effects of political skill in the role conflict – strain relationship.

Although political skill significantly predicted heart rate, the reason an interaction was not detected is less clear. Researchers have reported mixed results for “background stressors,” which are sources of stress within one’s environment. In their review of background and acute stressors on cardiovascular reactivity (i.e., heart rate, systolic and diastolic blood pressure), Gump and Matthews (1999) noted that it is important to utilize several measures of reactivity because stressors can exhibit different effects on blood pressure and heart rate reactivity. As they stated “No one measure was more consistently associated with background stress than another” (p. 487).

Limitations and Future Research

Although role conflict has been well substantiated as a key stressor in organizations, one of the limitations of this study is that only one stressor was examined. To some extent, we were constrained by the parameters of the data collection situation, and had to limit the amount of information that could be collected. We recommend future studies examine a broader set of job stressors to see if political skill demonstrates similar moderating effects. The inclusion of other health-related variables (e.g., smoking) as controls would also expand our efforts. Future

conceptual work, which incorporates how an individual selects a specific coping resource as part of Lazarus's (1991) appraisal process, is critically important in this area of research.

Another limitation is that political skill was measured only through self-report assessment. Although this might be acceptable as an initial test of these ideas, future efforts should include additional assessments of political skill (e.g., peer perspectives), in order to ensure the construct is being captured in a valid manner.

Finally, the field of psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) has recently become one of the most exciting areas of stress research. Essentially, PNI is the examination of the relationship between stress, the immunity system, and health outcomes (DeAngelis, 2002). Future research is needed to determine whether political skill may be one psychosocial factor that can buffer the stressor – stress response relationship. Previous research has demonstrated clear links between stress and the immune system, and has examined the beneficial effects of psychosocial factors (e.g., social support and optimism). Based on the findings of this study, it appears that political skill may, indeed, have psychological and physiological benefits for employees. An examination of the role of political skill in PNI may prove to be an important step in stress research.

Implications for Practice

The results of the present study provide some interesting implications for practice. Perhaps most immediately, we would emphasize the importance of efforts to develop political skill. Characterizations of the nature of political skill have depicted it as part dispositional and part developmental (e.g., Ferris et al., 1999). Therefore, we need to consider efforts to develop political skill in order to contribute to an internal stressor-strain neutralizing process. Ferris, Anthony, Kolodinsky, Gilmore, and Harvey (2002) recently have suggested ways to develop political skill, relying more on process-focused techniques such as drama-based training,

developmental simulations, and behavior modeling. Such training and development efforts for political skill are complex and will need to be established carefully and effectively, and evaluated systematically. In conclusion, this study provides strong evidence in support of the psychological and physiological benefits from possessing political skill in stressful contexts.

REFERENCES

- Ahearn, K.K., Ferris, G.R., Hochwarter, W.A., Douglas, C., & Ammeter, A.P. in press. Leader political skill and team performance. *Journal of Management*.
- Aiken, L. S. & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple Regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Anderson, J. C., & D. W. Gerbing. 1988. Structural equation modeling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach. *Psychological Bulletin*, 103(5), 411-423.
- Bollen, K. 1989. *Structural Equations with Latent Variables*. New York: Wiley.
- DeAngelis, T. 2002. A bright future for PNI. *Monitor on Psychology*, 33: 46-50.
- Ferris, G. R., Anthony, W. P., Kolodinsky, R. W., Gilmore, D. C., & Harvey, M. G. 2002. Development of political skill. In C. Wankel & R. DeFillippi (Eds.), *Research in management education and development, volume 1: Rethinking management education for the 21st century*: 3-25. Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Ferris, G. R., Berkson, H. M., Kaplan, D. M., Gilmore, D. C., Buckley, M. R., Hochwarter, W. A., & Witt, L. A. 1999. *Development and initial validation of the political skill inventory*. Paper presented at the 59th Academy of Management Meetings, Chicago, IL.
- Ferris, G.R., Hochwarter, W.A., Douglas, C., Blass, F.R., Kolodinsky, R.W., & Treadway, D.C. 2002. Social influence processes in organizations and human resources systems. In G.R. Ferris & J.J. Martocchio (Eds.), *Research in personnel and human resources management*, vol. 21: 65-127. Oxford, UK: Elsevier Science.
- Ferris, G.R., Perrewé, P.L., Anthony, W.P., & Gilmore, D.C. (2000). Political skill at work. *Organizational Dynamics*, 28, 25-37.

- Ferris, G. R., Perrewé, P.L., & Douglas, C. 2002. Social effectiveness in organizations: Construct validity and research directions. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 9: 49-63.
- Folkman, S. 1992. Making the case for coping. In B. N. Carpenter (Ed.), *Personal coping: Theory, research and application* (pp. 31-46). Westport CT: Praeger.
- French, J.R.P., Jr., & Caplan, R.D. 1972. Organizational stress and individual strain. In A.J. Marrow (Ed.), *The failure of success*: 30-66. New York: AMACOM.
- Fried, Y. Rowland, K.M., & Ferris, G.R. 1984. The physiological measurement of work stress: A critique. *Personnel Psychology*, 37: 583-615.
- Gump, B.B., & Matthews, K.A. 1999. Do background stressors influence reactivity to and recovery from acute stressors? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 29: 469-494.
- Jones, E.E. 1990. *Interpersonal perception*. New York: W.H. Freeman.
- Kahn, R.L., Wolfe, D.M., Quinn, R.P., Snoek, J.D., & Rosenthal, R.A. 1964. *Occupational stress: Studies in role conflict and role ambiguity*. New York: Wiley.
- Kelloway, K. 1998. *Using LISREL for structural equation modeling*. Sage Publications.
- Keeping, L., & Levy, P. 2000. Performance appraisal reactions: Measurement, modeling, and method bias. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85:708-723.
- Kolodinsky, R.W., Hochwarter, W.A., & Ferris, G.R. 2001. *Nonlinearity in the relationship between political skill and job satisfaction and job tension: Convergent evidence from two studies*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Management Association, New Orleans.
- Kotter, J.P. 1985. *Power and influence: Beyond formal authority*. New York: Free Press.

- Lazarus, R.S. 1991. Progress on a cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotions.
American Psychologist, 46: 819-834
- Lazarus, R.S. 1999. *Stress and emotion: A new synthesis*. London: Free Association Books.
- Lehrer, P.M., & Woolfolk, R.L. 1982. Self-report assessment of anxiety: Somatic, cognitive, and behavioral modalities. *Behavioral Assessment*, 4: 167-177.
- Mintzberg, H. 1983. *Power in and around organizations*. Englewood cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Perrewé, P. L., Ferris, G. R., Frink, D. D., & Anthony, W. P. 2000. Political skill: An antidote for workplace stressors. *Academy of Management Executive*, 14: 115-123.
- Riggs, M.L., Warka, J., Babasa, B., Betancourt, R., & Hooker, S. 1994. Development and validation of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy scales for job-related applications.
Educational and Psychological Measurement, 54: 793-802.
- Rizzo, J.R., House, R.J. & Lirtzman, S.I. 1970. Role conflict and ambiguity in complex organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 15: 150-163.
- Schaubroeck, J., Cotton, J. & Jennings, K. 1989. Antecedents and consequences of role stress: A covariance structure analysis. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 10: 35-58.
- Schaubroeck, J., Jones, J.R., & Xie, J.L. 2001. Individual differences in utilizing control to cope with job demands: Effects on susceptibility to infectious disease. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86: 265-278.
- Schumacker, R., & Lomax, R. 1996. *A Beginner's Guide to Structural Equation Modeling*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Spector, P. E., Chen, P. Y., & O'Connell, B. J. 2000. A longitudinal study of relations between job stressors and job strains while controlling for prior negative affectivity and strains.
Journal of Applied Psychology, 85: 211-218.

Watson, D., Clark, L.A., & Tellegen, A. 1988. Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affects: The PANAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54: 1063-1070.

Wellsource, Inc. 1996. <http://www.bloodpressure.com/focus/blood/whatisit.asp>.

Xie, J. L. & Schaubroeck, J. 2001. Bridging approaches and findings across diverse disciplines to improve job stress research. In P. L. Perrewé & D. C. Ganster (Eds.), *Research in occupational stress and well being*, vol. 1: 1-53. Oxford, UK: Elsevier Science.

Zellars, K. L., & Perrewé, P. L. 2001. Affective personality and the content of emotional social support: Coping in organizations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86: 459-467.

APPENDIX

Political Skill: I find it easy to envision myself in the position of others; I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me; It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people; I understand people well; I am good at getting others to respond positively to me; I usually try to find common ground with others.

Role Conflict: I must do things that I think should be done differently; I work under incompatible policies and guidelines; I have to oppose a rule or policy in order to carry out an assignment; I receive assignments without the manpower to complete them; I receive incompatible requests from two or more people; I have to work under vague directions or orders; I receive assignments without adequate resources and materials to execute them; I work on many unnecessary things.

Psychological Anxiety: I picture some future misfortune; I can't get some thoughts out of my mind; I dwell on mistakes that I have made; I think about possible misfortunes to my loved ones; I cannot concentrate at a task or job without irrelevant thoughts intruding; I keep busy to avoid uncomfortable thoughts; I can't get some pictures or images out of my mind; I imagine myself appearing foolish with a person whose opinion of me is important; I am concerned that others might not think well of me; I have to be careful not to let my real feelings show; I have an uneasy feeling.

Somatic Complaints: My throat gets dry; I have difficulty in swallowing; My heart pounds; My limbs tremble; My stomach hurts; My neck feels tight; I feel dizzy; I breathe rapidly; I can't catch my breath; My arms or legs feel stiff; My muscles twitch or jump; I experience a tingling sensation somewhere in my body; My arms or legs feel weak; I experience muscular aches and pains; I feel numbness in my face, limbs or tongue; I experience chest pains.

General Self-Efficacy Items: I have confidence in my ability to do my job; There are some tasks required by my job that I cannot do well; When my performance is poor, it is due to my lack of ability; I doubt my ability to do my job; I have all the skills needed to perform my job very well; I am an expert at my job; My future in this job is limited because of my lack of skills; I am very proud of my job skills and abilities; I feel threatened when others watch me work.

Negative Affectivity: Distressed; Upset; Guilty; Scared; Hostile; Irritable; Ashamed; Nervous; Jittery; Afraid.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Yrs of Exp.	19.42	8.56	1.00														
2. Age	38.6	8.99	.93	1.00													
3. Gender	1.27	.45	-.18	-.07	1.00												
4. Marital	1.31	.47	-.25	-.22	.30	1.00											
5. Hier. Pos'n	1.78	1.04	.24	.31	.17	-.03	1.00										
6. Hours/week	42.67	7.04	.06	.11	.08	-.01	.48	1.00									
7. NA	2.73	.65	-.09	-.05	.17	-.01	-.01	-.03	1.00								
8. Gen. SE	5.22	.98	.25	.19	-.10	-.08	.05	.13	-.34	1.00							
9. Conflict	3.18	1.27	-.04	-.02	.11	-.01	.09	-.04	.31	-.33	1.00						
10. Pol. Skill	3.76	.62	.02	.03	.14	.06	.21	.09	-.40	.31	-.05	1.00					
11. Psy. Anxiety	3.14	1.05	-.02	.03	.16	-.02	.05	-.02	.67	-.38	.42	-.30	1.00				
12. Som. Comp.	3.23	.97	-.05	.02	.21	-.07	.05	-.02	.69	-.37	.42	-.23	.83	1.00			
13. Diastolic BP	78	10	.09	.16	.04	.01	.12	.09	.01	.05	.11	-.04	.04	.04	1.00		
14. Systolic BP	123	13	.08	.14	.03	-.01	.01	.02	.02	.13	.03	-.02	-.02	.01	.79	1.00	
15. Heart Rate	70	9	-.07	-.07	.20	.03	.14	.09	.10	.09	.11	.12	.09	.08	.09	.13	1.00

N= 230; $r > .12$, $p < .05$, $r > .17$, $p < .01$

Gender (1=male, 2 =female), Marital (1=married, 2= single/divorced), Hierarchical Position (1 = non supervisory; 2 = first level manager, 3= middle level manager, 4= upper level manager)

Table 2

Multiple Regression Tests for the Role Conflict and Political Skill Interaction on Strain

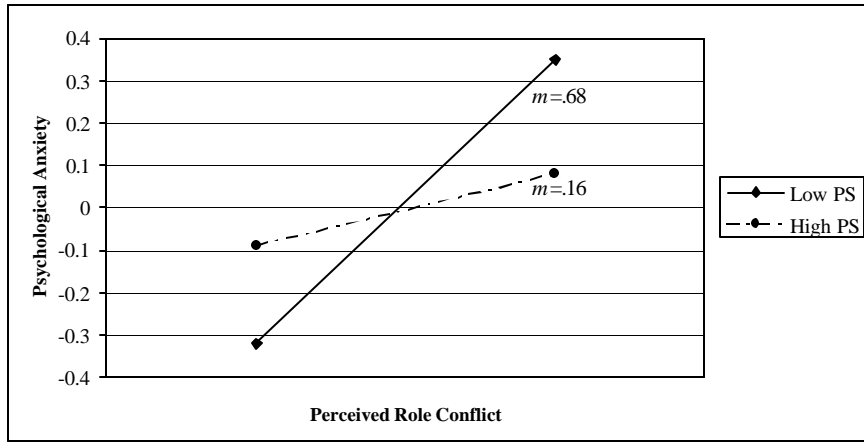
	Psychological Anxiety				Somatic Complaints				Systolic Blood Pressure				Diastolic Blood Pressure				Heart Rate			
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 1		Step 2		Step 1		Step 2		Step 1		Step 2		Step 1		Step 2	
	β	se	β	se	β	se	β	se	β	se	β	se	β	se	β	se	β	se	β	se
<i>Step 1</i>																				
Years of Experience	-.02	.02	-.01	.02	-.16	.02	-.16	.01	-.40*	.27	-.39*	.27	-.44*	.21	-.43*	.21	.12	.20	.12	.20
Age	.09	.02	.09	.02	.20	.01	.21	.01	.49**	.26	.49**	.25	.54**	.20	.55	.20	-.24	.19	-.24	.19
Gender	.04	.12	.06	.12	.08	.11	.09	.11	.02	2.10	.03	2.08	-.01	1.64	.01	1.63	.16*	1.56	.17*	1.56
Marital Status	-.03	.11	-.02	.11	-.10	.10	-.10	.10	.01	1.90	.02	1.88	.04	1.49	.05	1.47	-.03	1.41	-.03	1.41
Hierarchical Position	.03	.06	.02	.06	-.01	.05	-.01	.05	-.05	.09	-.06	.97	.05	.77	.04	.76	.12	.73	.12	.73
Hours/Week	.00	.01	-.01	.01	.00	.01	-.01	.01	.01	.14	-.00	.13	.04	.11	.03	.10	.01	.10	.01	.10
Negative Affectivity	.54**	.09	.54**	.09	.58**	.08	.59**	.08	.03	1.46	.03	1.45	-.05	1.15	-.04	1.13	.13	1.08	.14	1.09
Gen. Self-Efficacy	-.12*	.06	-.12*	.06	-.12*	.05	-.12*	.05	.20**	.99	.21**	.98	.12	.77	.12	.76	.16*	.73	.16*	.73
Role Conflict	.21**	.04	.21**	.04	.19**	.04	.19**	.04	.09	.72	.09	.71	.15*	.56	.16*	.55	.09	.53	.09	.53
Political Skill	-.06	.09	-.04	.09	.03	.08	.05	.08	-.08	1.57	-.05	1.54	-.11	1.23	-.09	1.21	.09	1.15	.09	1.16
<i>Step 2</i>																				
Role Conflict x Political Skill			-.13**	.06			-.11**	.05			-.16*	1.00			-.17*	.78			-.05	.75
Model F (df)	24.19** (10,219)		23.28** (11,218)		27.40** (10,219)		26.01** (11,218)		1.54 (10,219)		1.97* (11,218)		1.99* (10,219)		2.47** (11,218)		2.63** (10,219)		2.43** (11,218)	
Overall R ²	.52**		.54**		.55*		.57**		.06		.09		.08		.11		.10		.11	
R ² change			.02**				.02**				.03*				.03*				.01	

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

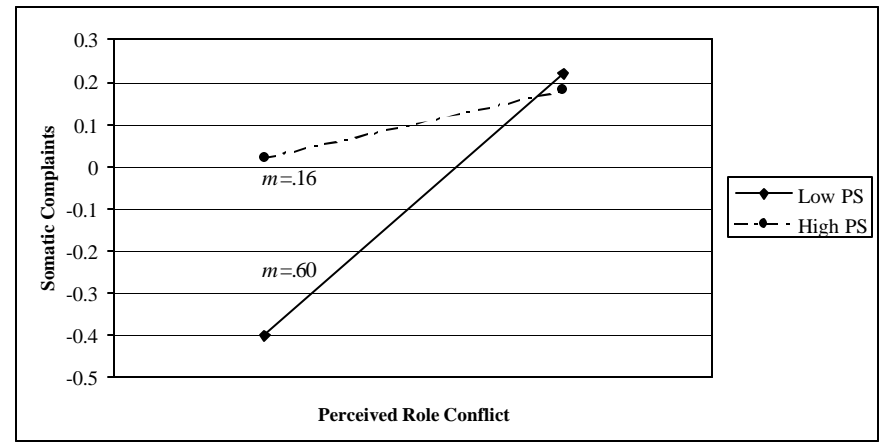
Notes: Gender (1=male, 2=female), Marital (1=married, 2=single/divorced),
 Hierarchical Position (1=non-supervisory; 2=first level manager, 3=middle level manager, 4=upper level manager)

FIGURES 1a - 1d

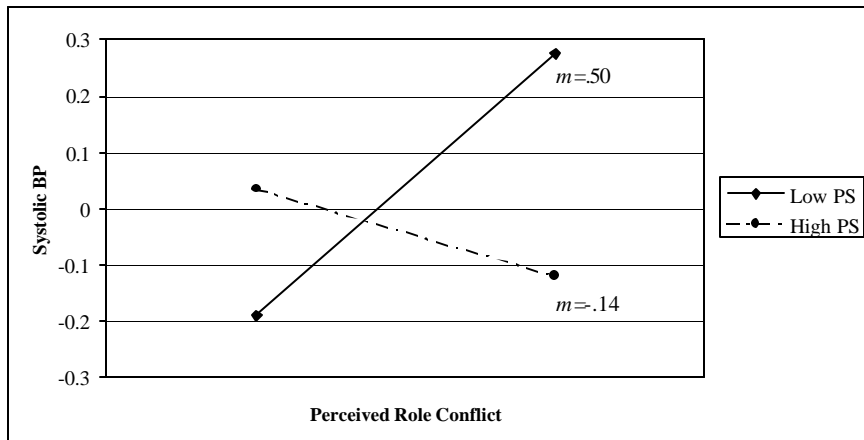
Interaction Between Supervisors' Role Conflict and Political Skills on various Anxieties and Blood Pressures



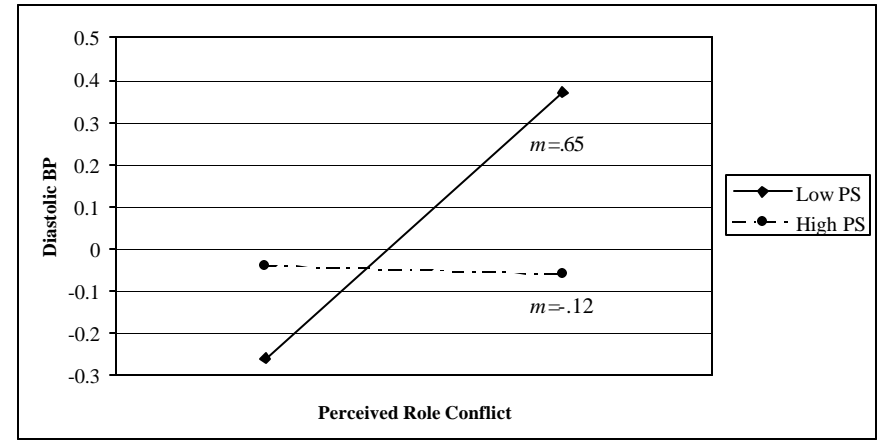
1a



1b



1c



1d

Notes:

m provides the slope of the line.

Interaction equation: $Y = C + \beta_1 IV_1 + \beta_2 IV_2 + (\beta_3 * IV_1 * IV_2)$

AUTHOR BIO STATEMENTS

Pamela L. Perrewé (pperrew@cob.fsu.edu) received her Ph.D. in Business Administration from the University of Nebraska. She is the Jim Moran Professor of Management at Florida State University. Her research interests include organizational stress, personality, emotions, and political influence.

Kelly L. Zellars (kzellars@email.uncc.edu) received her Ph.D. in Business Administration from Florida State University. She is an assistant professor of Management at the University of North Carolina - Charlotte. Her research interests include organizational stress, personality, emotions, and organizational citizenship.

Gerald R. Ferris (gferris@cob.fsu.edu) received a Ph.D. in Business Administration from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is the Frances Eppes Professor of Management and Professor of Psychology at Florida State University. His research interests include social and political influence processes in organizations, accountability at work, and the nature of individual reputation in organizations.

Dr. Charles J. (Chuck) Kacmar (ckacmar@cob.fsu.edu) received his Ph.D. in computer science from Texas A&M University. He is an associate professor of Management Information Systems at Florida State University. His research interests include behavioral and organizational information systems, human-computer interaction, collaborative systems, and hypertext/hypermedia.

Ana Maria Rossi (stress@anamrossi.com.br) earned her Ph.D. at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; she is the president of the Brazilian Branch of the International Stress Management Association (ISMA-BR) and the director of the Clínica de Stress & Biofeedback, in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Her current research interests include occupational stress and burnout.

David A. Ralston (dralston@ou.edu) earned his DBA at Florida State University. He is a Professor and Price Chair of International Business at the University of Oklahoma, with research focused on cross-cultural issues. He served as Guest Editor for the *Journal of International Business Studies*, and will be Guest Editor for a forthcoming issue of the *Academy of Management Review*.