POLITICAL WILL AND POLITICAL SKILL: EXAMINING THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

Monika KULIKOWSKA-PAWLAK[1], Maciej ZATOŃSKI[2*]

[1] University of Economics in Katowice; monika.kulikowska-pawlak@ue.katowice.pl,
ORCID: 0000-0003-3370-1383
[2] University of Economics in Katowice; maciej.zatonski@uekat.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-1936-4256
* Correspondence author

Purpose: This study aims to fill the gap in the existing literature on organizational behavior by examining the combined effects of individual factors (e.g., gender, age, job tenure) on political will (PW) and political skill (PS).

Design/methodology/approach: This study employs a quantitative approach. Data were collected via questionnaires filled out by senior and middle managers employed in large and medium-sized enterprises operating in Poland. To establish the relationship between the variables, we used Spearman's rho correlation coefficient and to compare the mean values of PW and PS between the analyzed groups we implemented the Student's t-test for independent samples.

Findings: The study revealed significant insights into PW and PS in organizational settings. Women demonstrated higher interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity compared to men. Negative correlations were found between age and all dimensions of PW and most dimensions of PS, indicating lower levels of these attributes in older employees. Similarly, negative correlations were observed with job tenure, as longer-tenured employees exhibited lower levels of PW and PS. These findings underscore the need for targeted developmental programs to enhance political skills across different demographic groups within organizations.

Research limitations/implications: The study underscores the necessity for integrated studies that simultaneously examine PW and PS for a holistic understanding of these constructs within organizational settings. Future research should involve larger or more diverse samples to validate the findings and conduct longitudinal studies to observe how PW and PS evolve over time and with organizational changes.

Practical implications: This research offers practical implications for leaders and managers seeking to foster effective political behaviors and enhance organizational outcomes. Ultimately, it aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between individual factors in shaping PW and PS as they are vital for navigating the complex political landscapes of modern organizations.

Originality/value: This paper offers new insights into demographic influences on PW and PS within organizational settings, challenging conventional assumptions. By highlighting that older employees and those with longer tenure may have lower levels of PW and PS, the research calls for a reevaluation of developmental practices within organizations. This paper is particularly valuable to organizational leaders, HR professionals, and scholars interested in

enhancing leadership effectiveness and promoting equitable development opportunities across diverse employee groups.

Keywords: political will, political skill, organizational politics, political behaviors, organizational outcomes.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

The work environment is inherently political. Consequently, to be effective, one must develop the ability to persuade, influence, and control others, often referred to as political skill (PS) (Mintzberg, 1983, 1985). According to Ferris et al. (2005, p. 127), PS is "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." PS is a concept often discussed in the context of organizational behavior and leadership; it is a vital attribute for effective leadership and organizational success, encompassing the ability to understand and influence others to achieve desired outcomes (Ferris et al., 2005).

PS is a multidimensional construct, comprising: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity (Ferris et al., 2000, 2005). Social astuteness relates to individuals who are perceptive of others and are very good at sensing even the most subtle social situations and can adjust their behaviors accordingly (Blass, Ferris, 2007). Interpersonal influence is best described as the ability to induce intended changes in other people (Bing et al., 2011). Networking is the ability to both: establish and take advantage of a range of alliances, coalitions, and friendship networks (Pfeffer, 1993). Finally, apparent sincerity is the ability of those with this competency to conceal the motives for their actions and present themselves as sincere and trustworthy (Blass, Ferris, 2007). It is now widely accepted that performance, effectiveness, and career success depend less on intelligence and hard work and more on social astuteness, position in the organization, and political savvy. According to Ferris et al. (2006), PS may be one of the most important competencies that individuals, especially leaders, must possess in today's work environment.

For individuals to survive in the political arena, they must possess both PS and political will (PW) (Mintzberg, 1983). PW refers to the willingness to use one's energy to achieve political goals and is seen as an essential condition for engaging in political behavior (Mintzberg, 1983). According to Treadway (2012, p. 533), the individual-level PW is "the motivation to engage in strategic, goal-directed behavior that advances the personal agenda and objectives of the actor that inherently involves the risk of relational or reputational capital". Treadway also argued that PW includes self-serving and altruistic motives. The self-serving motives are related to the individual need for achievement, power, and Machiavellianism, while altruistic motives relate to the need for affiliation, organizational citizenship behavior, and voice behavior. The desire

to engage in political behavior is inherent in many aspects of our professional lives (Kapoutsis et al., 2017). Although theory exists explaining the importance of PW in influencing others and managing politics (e.g., Doldor et al., 2013; Treadway, 2012), empirical research addressing this construct is scarce in the management science literature (Treadway, 2012). One of them is (Kapoutsis et al., 2017), who asserted that PW is one of the main motivators that spark personal and organizational resources to achieve political goals. In another research Semadar et al. (2006) indicate interpersonal competencies can be vital predictors of managerial job performance.

The two concepts discussed above are related to the term "organizational politics", which is used to describe behavior to create, maintain, modify, and abandon shared meanings (Sederberg, 1984). They are also critical to understanding organizational behavior. Despite their importance, there is limited research on how individual factors (e.g., gender, age, job tenure) and organizational factors (e.g., level of position in the organization, number of employees in the organization, type of industry) jointly influence PW and PS. Thus the study addresses this gap by exploring the relationship between PW, PS, and the individual factors mentioned above.

1.1. Gender, PW and PS

Studies have shown that men often display higher levels of PW compared to women, driven by societal expectations and organizational cultures that historically favor male-dominated leadership styles (Eagly, Carli, 2007). Men are generally more likely to pursue and assert political objectives within organizations, reflecting traditional power dynamics. Conversely, women may exhibit PW differently, often focusing on collaborative and consensus-building approaches rather than direct confrontation or assertiveness. This difference in approach can influence how PW is perceived and enacted within organizational settings (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

Gender also affects the development and application of PS. Women, for instance, are often found to excel in the dimensions of social astuteness and apparent sincerity due to their typically higher emotional intelligence and interpersonal sensitivity (Rosener, 1990). Also Goleman (2020) highlights that women generally score higher on measures of emotional intelligence, which includes skills such as empathy, social astuteness, and interpersonal influence. This allows us to formulate the following hypotheses:

H1a: Men exhibit higher PW compared to women due to traditional power dynamics within organizations.

H1b: Women exhibit higher levels of social astuteness, interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity as components of PS compared to men.

1.2. Age, PW and PS

Younger employees often exhibit lower levels of PW compared to their older counterparts, primarily due to limited experience and job tenure (Kacmar, Ferris, 1991). As individuals age and gain more experience, they develop a clearer understanding of organizational dynamics and become more confident in pursuing political objectives. Older employees, with their accumulated experience and established networks, typically display higher PW. They are more likely to engage in political behavior to influence organizational outcomes, driven by a sense of responsibility and commitment to their roles (Lawrence, 1988).

Also, as younger employees are concerned, while they are potentially adept at certain dimensions of PS, such as networking ability, they may simultaneously lack the social astuteness and interpersonal influence that come with experience (Avolio et al., 1999; Ng, Feldman, 2010).

As individuals age, they refine these skills through continuous learning and adaptation to organizational politics. Older employees, with their extensive experience, often demonstrate high levels of PS. They can navigate complex social interactions and influence organizational decisions effectively, leveraging their deep understanding of organizational culture and politics (Ng, Feldman, 2008). Thus, we formulate the below hypotheses:

H2a: Older employees exhibit higher PW compared to younger employees due to greater experience and job tenure.

H2b: PS increases with age, as older employees develop more refined interpersonal and networking abilities.

1.3. Job tenure, PW and PS

Longer tenure is associated with increased PW, as long-serving employees often have a deeper commitment to the organization and its objectives (Lawrence, 1988). This commitment is driven by their investment in the organization's success and their desire to see their contributions recognized and sustained (Luthans et al., 2007). PS improves with experience, as employees learn from their interactions and observations within the organization. Experienced employees are more adept at understanding the nuances of organizational politics and are better equipped to influence others effectively (Ng, Feldman, 2010). They develop a keen sense of social astuteness and networking ability, which are critical for navigating complex organizational landscapes (Ferris et al., 2008).

H3a: Employees with longer tenure display higher PW, driven by their commitment to the organization.

H3b: PS is positively correlated with job tenure, as longer-tenured employees have more opportunities to refine these skills.

2. Research method

For this study, a Polish version of the measurement tool was developed to assess the constructs mentioned above. This tool is based on established measurement scales whose validity and reliability have been rigorously tested. The following scales were used to construct the questionnaire:

- **PW**: Political Will Scale (PWS), developed by Kapoutsis et al. (2017), with a Cronbach's α of 0.88; PWS consists of 8 items, sample questions are "I would engage in politics to serve the common good" and "I would use political tactics to improve my working conditions";
- **PS**: Political Skill Inventory (PSI), developed by Ferris et al. (2005), with a Cronbach's α of 0.80; PSI consists of 18 items, sample questions are "I am good at building relationships with influential people at work" and "I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others".

The groups of control variables were also included:

- **Employee Demographics**: Gender (1 = male; 2 = female), age (in years), and job tenure with the organization (in months).

For the Polish version we used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The empirical research was conducted among senior and middle managers employed in large and medium-sized enterprises (employing at least 50 people) operating in Poland. The companies' contact information was obtained from the Central Statistical Office, and the sample selection was both random and purposeful.

The research comprised two stages. The first stage, a pilot study, was conducted from October to December 2021, yielding 113 completed questionnaires. The second stage, conducted from January to December 2022, involved the main study and collected an additional 365 completed questionnaires. Out of these, 108 questionnaires were excluded for formal reasons. The results were analyzed and interpreted using SPSS for Windows 10.0.

3. Results

Firstly, the examined sample was characterized in terms of demographic variables. Subsequently, descriptive statistics values for the analyzed interval variables were calculated. The shape of the distributions of the analyzed variables was assessed based on the values of skewness and kurtosis measures. Additionally, an analysis of differences in the intensity of the analyzed variables between the group of women and the group of men, the group of individuals of different ages (8 age intervals), and the group of individuals with different job tenures

(5 intervals) was conducted. The statistical significance of differences between the compared groups was verified using the Student's t-test for independent samples. The relationship between the age of the respondents and their job tenure in the organization with the analyzed variables were examined based on the values of Spearman's correlation coefficient.

The study involved 370 participants, comprising 189 women and 181 men. Table 1 presents the age distribution of the respondents.

Table 1.
Age of respondents

Age	n	%
up to 25 years	58	15,7
26-30 years old	27	7,3
31-35 years	21	5,7
36-40 years old	47	12,7
41-45 years old	58	15,7
46-50 years old	66	17,8
51-55 years old	37	10,0
56 years and over	56	15,1
Total	370	100

Note. n – number of people; % – percentage of the sample.

Source: own study.

The largest group of respondents were those aged 46-50 years. A total of 153 respondents (41.4%) were under 40 years of age, while 217 respondents (58.6%) were over 40 years of age. Table 2 presents the distribution of the respondents' job tenure.

Table 2.
Job tenure of respondents in the organization

Job tenure	n	%
less than 1 year	28	7,6
at least 1 year but less than 2 years	36	9,7
at least 2 years but less than 5 years	82	22,2
at least 5 years but less than 10 years	55	14,9
10 years and older	169	45,7
Total	370	100

n – number of people; % – percentage of the sample.

Source: own study.

Most of the respondents are people with at least 10 years of work experience, 146 people (39.5%) are people with up to 5 years of work experience and 224 people (60.5%) are people with at least 5 years of work experience.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the analyzed interval variables, i.e., mean values, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values, and the values of skewness and kurtosis measures. The summary is supplemented with the values of Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients.

Table 3.
Descriptive statistics for interval variables analyzed

Variables	M	SD	min	max	S	K	α
Political will							
Benevolent	12,37	3,46	4	20	-0,36	-0,51	0,81
Self-serving	8,92	3,42	4	18	0,35	-0,60	0,87
Political skill							
Social astuteness	17,86	2,72	9	25	-0,04	0,25	0,76
Interpersonal influence	15,31	2,17	8	20	-0,24	0,26	0,76
Network ability	20,12	3,42	9	30	-0,25	0,05	0,75
Apparent sincerity	12,29	1,38	7	15	-0,04	0,88	0,57

Note. M – average value; SD – standard deviation; min – minimum value; max – maximum value; S – measure of skewness; K – measure of kurtosis; α - value of the Cronbach measurement reliability coefficient α.

Source: own study.

The values of the skewness measures fell within the range characteristic of a normal distribution, i.e., from -1 to 1. This indicates that the distribution of the analyzed variables is approximately normal, which is important because it validates the use of parametric statistical tests and supports the generalizability of the study's findings.

Table 4 presents a comparison of the mean values of the analyzed variables between the group of women and the group of men. The summary is supplemented with the values of the Student's t-test for independent samples.

Table 4.
Mean values of the analyzed variables in the group of women and in the group of men

Variables	Women		Men				
	M	SD	M	SD	t	df	p
Political will							
Benevolent	12,21	3,29	12,54	3,63	-0,90	368	0,368
Self-serving	9,00	3,49	8,83	3,34	0,48	368	0,630
Political skill							
Social astuteness	18,02	2,76	17,69	2,68	1,17	368	0,244
Interpersonal influence	15,54	2,04	15,07	2,27	2,11	368	0,036
Network ability	20,01	3,37	20,23	3,49	-0,62	368	0,535
Apparent sincerity	12,45	1,35	12,12	1,39	2,35	368	0,020

Note. M – average value; SD – standard deviation; t – value of the Student's test t for independent samples; df – number of degrees of freedom; P – bilateral statistical significance.

Source: own study.

It was found that the scores on the interpersonal influence scale and the apparent sincerity scale were statistically significantly higher in the group of women than in the group of men (Figure 1).
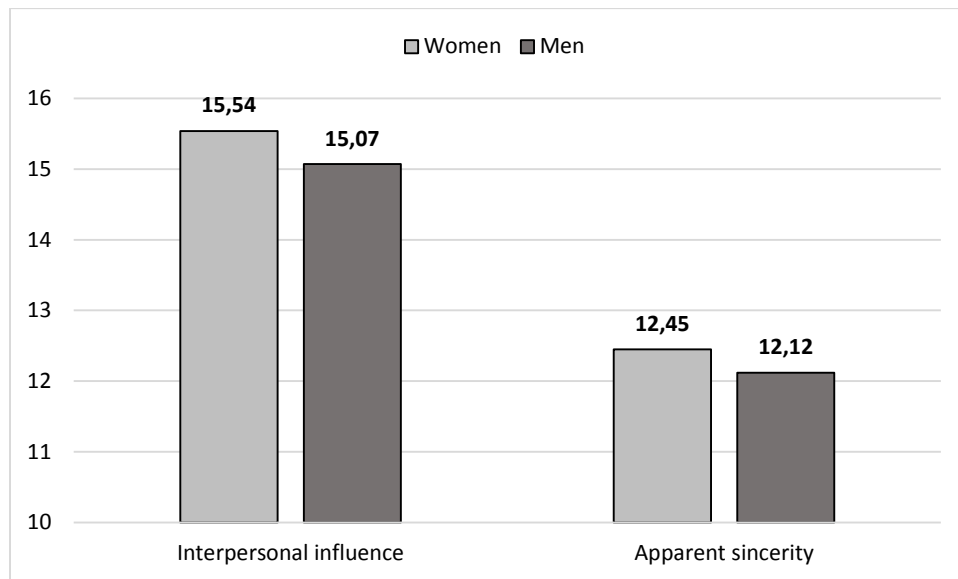
Figure 1. Average scores on the Interpersonal influence scale and on the Apparent sincerity scale in the female and male groups.

Source: own study

Table 5 presents the values ρ of Spearman's correlation coefficients between the age of the subjects and the variables analyzed. A two-tailed test of statistical significance was used.

Table 5.
Correlation coefficients between the age of respondents and the analyzed variables

Variables	Age	
	ρ	p
Political will		
Benevolent	-0,174	0,001
Self-serving	-0,233	0,001
Political skill		
Social astuteness	-0,267	0,001
Interpersonal influence	-0,194	0,001
Network ability	-0,218	0,001
Apparent sincerity	-0,071	0,172

Note. ρ – the value of ρ the Spearman correlation coefficient; P – bilateral statistical significance.

Source: own study.

Statistically significant negative correlations were obtained between the age of the respondents and all dimensions of PW and most indicators of PS, except for the scores on the apparent sincerity scale. The older the respondents, the lower their scores on all dimensions of PW and most indicators of PS.

Table 6 presents the values of Spearman's correlation coefficients between the job tenure of the respondents in the organization and the analyzed variables. A two-tailed test of statistical significance was applied.

Table 6.

Correlation coefficients between the job tenure of the respondents in the organization and the analyzed variables

Variables	Job tenure	
	ρ	p
Political will		
Benevolent	-0,109	0,036
Self-serving	-0,114	0,029
Political skill		
Social astuteness	-0,118	0,023
Interpersonal influence	-0,186	0,001
Network ability	-0,084	0,108
Apparent sincerity	-0,031	0,554

Note. ρ – the value of ρ the Spearman correlation coefficient; P – bilateral statistical significance.

Source: own study.

Statistically significant negative correlations were obtained between the job tenure of the respondents in the organization and all dimensions of PW, as well as the scores on the social astuteness and interpersonal influence scales. The longer the respondents' job tenure in the organization, the lower their scores on all dimensions of PW, social astuteness, and interpersonal influence scales.

Summarizing the results of the conducted empirical research, the study aimed to investigate the relationship between PW and PS across different demographic variables, including gender, age, and job tenure. To achieve this, several hypotheses were formulated to test specific aspects of these relationships. The next section presents the verification of hypotheses, which explore the influence of gender, age, and job tenure on PW and PS among the respondents.

Significant findings included higher scores for women on the interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity scales compared to men. Statistically significant negative correlations were found between age and all dimensions of PW, and most indicators of PS, except for apparent sincerity. Similarly, significant negative correlations were observed between the job tenure and all dimensions of PW, as well as social astuteness and interpersonal influence, indicating that older respondents and those with longer job tenure scored lower on these dimensions.

4. Discussion

The results of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on PW and PS within organizational settings, highlighting the nuanced influences of demographic variables such as gender, age, and job tenure. By examining these relationships, this research provides a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics that underpin political behaviors in organizations. Existing literature has underscored the importance of PS in navigating organizational environments, which are inherently political in nature (Mintzberg, 1983, 1985; Pfeffer, 1981).

PW, on the other hand, defined as the motivation and determination to engage in political behaviors within organizations, is crucial for achieving both personal and organizational goals. The study examined several hypotheses to understand the role of demographic factors in shaping PW.

Hypothesis H1a posited that men would exhibit higher PW compared to women due to societal expectations and traditional power dynamics within organizations. This hypothesis was not confirmed; the findings did not support the notion that men have higher PW compared to women. Hypothesis H1b suggested that women would exhibit higher levels of social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and apparent sincerity as components of PS compared to men. This hypothesis was partially confirmed, as women scored significantly higher than men on the interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity scales, but the results did not indicate higher levels of social astuteness for women compared to men.

Hypothesis H2a posited that older employees would exhibit higher PW compared to younger employees due to greater experience and job tenure. This hypothesis was not confirmed. The findings indicated a significant negative correlation between age and PW, showing that older employees had lower PW. Hypothesis H2b suggested that PS increases with age, as older employees develop more refined interpersonal and networking abilities. This hypothesis was also not confirmed. The results showed significant negative correlations between age and most indicators of PS, indicating that older employees had lower PS in terms of social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and network ability.

Hypothesis H3a posited that employees with longer job tenure would display higher political will, driven by their commitment to the organization. This hypothesis was not confirmed. The findings indicated a significant negative correlation between job tenure and PW, showing that employees with longer tenure had lower PW. Hypothesis H3b suggested that PS was positively correlated with job tenure, as longer-tenured employees had more opportunities to refine these skills. This hypothesis was also not confirmed. The results showed significant negative correlations between job tenure and social astuteness, as well as interpersonal influence, indicating that longer-tenured employees had lower PS in these areas.

Empirical findings from this study present a nuanced understanding of the relationship between PW and PS across different demographic variables, including gender, age, and job tenure. This research builds on previous studies, particularly those of Ferris et al. (2005) and Doldor et al. (2013), to enhance our understanding of the complex dynamics of organizational politics.

Firstly, our results indicated higher scores for women on the interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity scales compared to men. This contradicts Ferris et al. (2005) findings, that there are no systematic relationships between political skill and gender but aligns with Doldor et al. (2013) findings, which emphasize the importance of gender in the development of PS, particularly in how women navigate organizational politics differently from men. This suggests that women may employ certain aspects of PS more effectively, likely due to

societal expectations and gender norms that encourage women to develop strong interpersonal skills and sincerity in their professional interactions.

Secondly, the study found statistically significant negative correlations between age and all dimensions of PW, and most indicators of PS, except for apparent sincerity. This contradicts the commonly held belief that PS and PW increase with age and experience, as suggested by mainstream theories in organizational behavior (Pfeffer, 1981). Instead, our findings highlight a potential decline in these attributes with age, which could be attributed to factors such as burnout, resistance to organizational change, or diminishing motivation to engage in political behaviors (Dent, Goldberg, 1999; Maslach, Leiter, 2016).

Similarly, significant negative correlations were observed between the job tenure and all dimensions of PW, as well as social astuteness and interpersonal influence. These findings challenge traditional assumptions that longer tenure within an organization leads to greater political acumen. It raises important questions about the nature of PS development over time and suggests that prolonged exposure to the same organizational environment may limit the growth of political competencies due to factors like entrenched routines (Tushman, Romanelli, 1985) or decreased exposure to diverse perspectives and new challenges (Leonard-Barton, 1992).

5. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the relationships between gender, age, job tenure, and the dimensions of PW and PS. While some hypotheses were not confirmed, the findings highlight important demographic differences that can inform organizational development practices. Understanding and addressing these differences is crucial for fostering effective leadership and enhancing organizational performance (Yukl, 2013). The literature review highlights the critical roles of gender and age in shaping PW and PS within organizational settings (Eagly, Carli, 2007). Understanding these influences can provide significant value for both theory and practice, helping organizations foster effective political behaviors across diverse employee groups. Future research should continue to explore these relationships to develop a more comprehensive understanding of political dynamics within organizations (Ferris et al., 2005).

The study underscores the importance of examining demographic variables in understanding political behaviors within organizations. The unexpected findings regarding age and tenure suggest that further research is needed to explore the underlying mechanisms that influence the development of PW and skill over time. Future research should explore the underlying causes of the observed negative correlations and examine potential interventions. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into how PS evolves over time and in response to

organizational changes. Additionally, qualitative research could uncover the personal and contextual factors that influence the development and maintenance of PS (Mintzberg, 1983).

Based on our findings, we recommend that organizations implement targeted training programs to enhance political skills across all employee demographics, ensuring that both younger and older employees, as well as those with varying job tenures, can develop the necessary competencies to navigate organizational politics effectively. Specifically, we suggest the need for targeted developmental programs that address the specific needs of different demographic groups. For instance, older employees and those with longer tenure might benefit from training that refreshes their social skills and adapts their strategies to current organizational contexts (Ferris et al., 2005). Additionally, organizations could implement mentorship programs to help less experienced employees develop their PS (Ahearn et al., 2004).

There is also a need for future research that would delve deeper into the organizational level factors that influence PW and PS. Key variables such as organizational culture (Chatman, O'Reilly, 2016), leadership style, changes in professional roles (Ibarra, 2003), and human resource practices play significant roles in shaping these political competencies. Investigating these factors can provide valuable insights into how different organizational environments foster or inhibit political behaviors, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of organizational dynamics (Pfeffer, 1993).

Additionally, examining the impact of organizational size and industry context on PW and PS can enhance our understanding of the complex nature of organizational politics. Larger organizations, with their increased complexity and formalization, may necessitate different political strategies compared to smaller, more agile firms (Bolman, Deal, 2003). Similarly, industry-specific factors can shape the development and application of PSs, highlighting the need for tailored strategies to manage political behaviors effectively across diverse organizational settings (Mintzberg, 1983).

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