

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU KNOW, BUT WHO YOU KNOW: NETWORKING ABILITY LINKING POLITICAL WILL AND JOB PERFORMANCE

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Purpose: This study examines the causal mechanism linking political will (PW) and job performance (JP). Specifically, it investigates whether political skill (PS) dimensions mediate the relationship between benevolent and self-serving dimensions of PW and task/contextual performance as dimensions of JP. By adopting a process-oriented perspective, the study moves beyond traditional interaction-based approaches to political behavior.

Design/methodology/approach: A quantitative study was conducted on 370 senior and middle managers in medium and large enterprises operating in Poland. Data were analyzed using path analysis with maximum likelihood estimation and bootstrapping. The explanatory variables included the dimensions of PW; the dimensions of PS were analyzed as parallel mediators, while task and contextual performance served as dependent variables. Measurement scales with established validity and reliability were used to assess all constructs.

Findings: Networking ability emerged as the exclusive mediator linking self-serving PW to both task and contextual performance. Contrary to expectations, social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and apparent sincerity did not serve as mediators. Furthermore, benevolent PW showed a direct negative relationship with task performance. These findings highlight the unique behavioral leverage of networking in the association between political motivation and performance outcomes.

Research limitations/implications: The cross-sectional nature of data requires caution with regard to conclusions concerning causality. Future research should implement longitudinal studies and more diverse samples to examine the temporal ordering and stability of the observed associations over time. The use of self-report measures also suggests the need for multi-source designs in future studies.

Practical implications: The findings suggest that organizations may benefit from channeling employees' self-serving ambitions into constructive networking behaviors, as these are positively associated with performance. Strengthening political competencies—particularly networking—may therefore serve as a high-impact lever in leadership development.

Originality/value: This paper challenges the assumption that all political skills function similarly by identifying networking ability as the critical dimension linking motivation (PW) and action. It offers empirical evidence for a differentiated, association-based model of political behavior in organizations.

Keywords: political will, political skill, organizational politics, political behaviors, job performance.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

The workplace is intrinsically political, requiring individuals to cultivate skills in persuasion, influence, and control – abilities collectively referred to as political skill (PS) (Mintzberg, 1983, 1985). Engagement in political behavior is a common feature of professional life (Kapoutsis et al., 2017). It's scope and strength depend on the individual's encouragement and determination to exert effort toward achieving political objectives, referred to as political will (PW) (Mintzberg, 1983). Importantly, political will operates as an internal motivational force, reflecting not only the intention to act politically but also the direction of this intention, which may be benevolent (pro-organizational) or self-serving (self-oriented).

Our study expands the domain of political influence research by shifting the focus from the interaction of these constructs to the causal mechanism linking them. While existing literature often conceptualizes PW and PS as interactive forces – where skill is necessary to activate the benefits of will (e.g. Maher et al., 2018; Treadway et al., 2005) – there is still limited research examining the processual nature of this relationship. Specifically, we propose that PW serves as the motivational antecedent that drives the development and deployment of specific PS, which in turn facilitate higher job performance (JP). In this framework, political will represents the motivational energy (“want to”), political skill reflects the behavioral competence (“know how”), and job performance captures the observable outcomes of political behavior (“what gets done”), illustrating a coherent motivational–behavioral–performance pathway.

Consequently, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the mediating role of PS dimensions (social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity) in the relationship between PW (both benevolent and self-serving) and JP (task and contextual). By adopting a detailed approach, we aim to move beyond global assessments of these constructs to identify precisely which specific political competencies act as the behavioral vehicles for translating political motivation into organizational effectiveness. This approach addresses calls for more nuanced empirical examinations of political dynamics in the workplace (Kapoutsis et al., 2017) and offers a clearer understanding of how motivation and skill combine to shape employee outcomes. Moreover, by identifying the particular skill dimensions through which political will translates into performance, this study provides insights that may support leadership development, managerial training, and HRM practices centered on strengthening constructive political competencies in organizations.

1.1. The Motivation: Political Will

According to Treadway (2012, p. 533), 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.” PW is a necessary trait for navigating the political dynamics of the workplace (Mintzberg, 1983). Treadway further contends that PW incorporates both self-serving motives – such as individual need for achievement, power, and Machiavellian tendencies, and benevolent motives, which are linked to need for affiliation, organizational citizenship behavior, and voice behavior.

While theoretical perspectives highlight PW’s significance in managing workplace politics and influencing others (e.g., Treadway, 2012), empirical studies on this topic remain limited (Treadway, 2012). Existing evidence suggests that PW often operates simultaneously in both forms, meaning that self-serving and benevolent motives can co-exist within the same individual rather than forming opposite ends of a single continuum (Kapoutsis et al., 2017). For instance, Kapoutsis et al. (2017) identify PW as a fundamental driver of personal and organizational resources toward political goals. Another study by Semadar et al. (2006) suggests that interpersonal competencies are key predictors of managerial performance. Taken together, existing literature positions PW as the motivational precursor of political behavior, yet it remains less understood how this motivation translates into concrete behavioral expressions—a gap that underscores the need to examine its relationship with political skill.

1.2. The Behavioral Mechanism: Political Skill

Ferris et al. (2005, p. 127) define PS as “the ability to effectively understand others at work and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one’s personal and/or organizational objectives”. This concept, frequently examined within the fields of organizational behavior and leadership, is recognized as a crucial trait for being an effective leader and for achieving organizational success. It involves the capacity to understand and influence others to accomplish specific goals (Ferris et al., 2005).

Political skill has been described as a core element of social effectiveness at work, conceptually related to but distinct from broader constructs such as emotional intelligence or self-monitoring (Ferris et al., 2007; Semadar et al., 2006). PS is understood as a multidimensional construct that includes four core components: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity (Ferris et al., 2000, 2005). Social astuteness pertains to individuals’ ability to perceive and adapt to subtle social cues in their environment (Blass, Ferris, 2007). Interpersonal influence is characterized by the ability to effectively bring about changes in others’ attitudes or behaviors (Bing et al., 2011). Networking ability refers to forming and leveraging relationships, alliances, and coalitions to one’s advantage (Pfeffer, 1993). Apparent sincerity reflects the capacity to convey authenticity and trustworthiness in social interactions, such that others are inclined to ascribe positive intent even when behavior is strategically managed (Blass, Ferris, 2007).

In contemporary work settings, attributes like social astuteness, organizational positioning, and political savvy often outweigh intelligence and diligence as determinants of performance, effectiveness, and career advancement. Ferris et al. (2006) argue that PS is among the most critical competencies for leaders in modern organizations. Consistent with this view, prior research has linked political skill to higher supervisor-rated performance, organizational citizenship behavior, and career success (Blickle et al., 2013; Semadar et al., 2006; Treadway et al., 2007). Building on these findings, we conceptualize PS as the key behavioral mechanism through which political will is translated into job performance in our study.

1.3. The Outcomes: Job Performance

The construct of job performance has long been explored in scientific literature, however there is still little consensus on its conceptual framework. Instead, its definition largely depends on the context and research approach. Yet, different terms are used to refer to job performance, such as productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness, but their meanings are not always distinct, and they are frequently used interchangeably (Tangen, 2005). In management studies, job performance is typically associated with the challenge of maximizing employee productivity (Luthfiyana et al., 2024; Viswesvaran, Ones, 2000). Moreover, it remains a key and widely utilized outcome measure in occupational research.

Crucially for modern organizational research, job performance is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct. Borman and Motowidlo (1993, 1997) proposed a fundamental distinction between task performance and contextual performance. Task performance refers to the proficiency with which individuals perform activities that are formally part of their job description and contribute to the organization's technical core. This includes activities that directly transform raw materials into goods and services or replenish the supply of these materials (Motowidlo, Van Scotter, 1994). Conversely, contextual performance – often referred to as Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) – encompasses behaviors that support the broader organizational, social, and psychological environment in which the technical core must function. These behaviors include volunteering for activities not formally prescribed, helping and cooperating with others, and endorsing organizational objectives (Borman, Motowidlo, 1993). Distinguishing between these two dimensions is essential, as they may have different antecedents and are likely differentially influenced by political dynamics within the organization.

Research consistently shows that task and contextual performance differ not only in content but also in their antecedents, with contextual performance more strongly influenced by interpersonal processes, social effectiveness, and political behavior (Blickle et al., 2013; Ferris et al., 2007). This distinction is particularly relevant for the present study, as it provides a theoretical basis for expecting political will and political skill to differentially impact these two facets of performance.

1.4. Integrative Theoretical Framework: Political Skill as a Mediating Mechanism

Research suggests that both PW and PS significantly enhance task and contextual performance, as individuals with high levels of both are uniquely equipped to address workplace challenges, build alliances, and influence others effectively. Yukl (2008), examining how top management and other leaders can influence the financial performance of a business organization, confirmed that leaders' ability to adapt, be flexible, and innovate – skills fostered by political will – enhances organizational effectiveness and helps organizations survive and thrive in turbulent and uncertain environments. Although these perspectives underscore the importance of PW and PS, they predominantly treat the constructs as independent contributors to performance, offering limited insight into the mechanisms by which political motivation is translated into effective political behavior.

Despite the arguments highlighting the importance of PW and PS, empirical research examining their interaction and relationship remains scarce (Maher et al., 2018). While some studies suggest an interactive effect, where PW has a positive effect on job performance only when PS is high (Ferris et al., 2019), a growing body of theoretical work suggests a causal, process-oriented relationship. According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2011), Social Cognitive Theory, SCT (Bandura, 2001), and other models of social influence, motivation (PW) serves as the antecedent that drives the acquisition and deployment of specific competencies (PS). Treadway (2012) posits that PW provides the necessary energy and determination to engage in political behavior, but it is the PS that serves as a tool through which this motivation is translated into effective action. In organizational behavior research, similar motivation→skill→behavior pathways have been demonstrated in studies on proactive behavior, leadership development, and social effectiveness (DeRUE & Ashford, 2010; Grant, Ashford, 2008), reinforcing the plausibility of a mediating mechanism.

In this view, PW is not merely a moderator but a precursor to PS. Individuals driven by self-serving motives (e.g., need for power or achievement) or benevolent motives (e.g., organizational benefit) are more likely to invest effort in developing their social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity to achieve their goals. For instance, an employee with a strong self-serving will to advance their career is likely to actively cultivate a professional network (networking ability). Consequently, this enhanced networking ability allows them to access resources and information more efficiently, thereby improving their task performance (Bing et al., 2011). Similarly, individuals with benevolent PW may utilize interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity to foster a supportive work environment, directly enhancing contextual performance.

Importantly, treating PW and PS as interacting predictors (as in the moderation model) provides an incomplete explanation of political behavior because it assumes that skill is a static attribute that merely amplifies motivation. In contrast, a mediational perspective conceptualizes PS as the behavioral expression of political will – an interpretation better aligned with

motivational theory and with empirical findings showing that social competencies develop in response to goal-directed striving (Kanfer, 2012; Latham, Pinder, 2005). This approach also addresses critiques that prior research has not sufficiently traced how political motivation is enacted within organizations (Kapoutsis et al., 2017).

Therefore, rather than viewing these constructs as interacting separate entities, it is reasonable to posit that PS acts as the behavioral mechanism that transmits the effects of PW onto JP. Without the requisite PS, PW remains a latent potential or untapped energy; it is the execution of PS that ultimately impacts organizational outcomes. This reasoning is consistent with process models in organizational psychology, which hold that motivation influences performance only when it is expressed through specific behaviors (Mitchell, Daniels, 2003). This theoretical framework leads to the proposition that PS mediates the relationship between PW and JP and to the following general hypothesis:

Dimensions of PS (social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, apparent sincerity) statistically mediate the relationship between the dimensions of PW (benevolent and self-serving) and job performance (task and contextual performance).

The complete list of specific hypotheses (H1-H16) required to fully test this general hypothesis is presented in Table 5 in Appendix.

2. Research method

Procedure and sample

The empirical study targeted middle and senior managers employed in medium-sized (50-250 employees) and large (over 250 employees) companies operating in Poland. Company contact details were obtained from the Polish Central Statistical Office (GUS). A purposive non-probability sampling strategy was applied, with the inclusion criterion that only middle and senior managers were eligible to participate.

The research was conducted in two stages. The pilot study, carried out from October to December 2021, yielded 113 completed questionnaires. The main study was conducted from January to December 2022. In the first quarter of 2022, invitations to participate in the survey were sent by email to entities randomly selected from the GUS's list, followed by reminders after three and six months. In addition, telephone calls were made to representatives of some of the enterprises in order to increase the response rate. The survey questionnaire was administered via an online survey platform (CAWI methodology). The invitations assured respondents of complete anonymity and that the data would only be used in aggregate form. The main study collected an additional 365 completed questionnaires.

A total of 478 surveys were collected, of which 108 were rejected for not meeting the criteria (respondents outside the target group or companies with fewer than 50 employees). A total of 370 complete questionnaires were qualified for analysis ($N = 370$), which exceeded the minimum required sample size as determined using the “Sample selection calculator” available on <https://www.naukowiec.org/dobor.html> website and allowed the empirical material obtained to be considered sufficient for further statistical analysis.

Of the study sample 189 were women and 181 were men. The largest group of respondents fell within the 46-50 years age bracket. A total of 153 respondents (41.4%) were under 40 years of age, while 217 respondents (58.6%) were over 40 years of age. Regarding professional experience, the largest cohort (169 individuals, 45.7%) reported having at least 10 years of work experience. A total of 146 individuals (39.5%) had up to 5 years of work experience, whereas 224 individuals (60.5%) had 5 or more years of work experience. The majority of the respondents were employed at a middle management level. Most respondents worked in organizations employing 50–250 people. In terms of the sector of economy, the highest percentage of respondents worked in the manufacturing industry (63 people, 17%). Overall, 207 participants (55.9%) were employed in the industry, manufacturing, and trading sectors, while 163 participants (44.1%) were employed in sectors related to intangible services.

Measures

In this study, a Polish version of the measurement tool was developed to assess the constructs outlined above. This tool was based on validated and reliable measurement scales. A 5-point Likert scale was used, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The following scales were used to construct the questionnaire:

- **Political Will Scale (PWS):** Developed by Kapoutsis et al. (2017), this scale has a Cronbach's α of 0.88 and includes 8 items. Sample questions are: “When I am right I am willing to act politically” and “I would engage in politics to preserve my self-esteem”.
- **Political Skill Inventory (PSI):** Developed by Ferris et al. (2005), this scale has a Cronbach's α of 0.80 and consists of 18 items. Sample questions are: “I spend a lot of time and effort at work networking with others” and “I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others”.
- **The Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWPQ),** developed by Koopmans et al. (2014). This instrument assesses employee performance through distinct subscales (18 items in total). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for contextual performance was 0.79, indicating good reliability. For task performance, the alpha value was 0.62. This reliability level is common in short subscales and acceptable provided that factor loadings meet recommended thresholds (Hair et al., 2019).

Sample questions are: “I kept in mind the results that I had to achieve in my work”, “I took on challenging work tasks, when available” and “I focused on the negative aspects of a work situation, instead of on the positive aspects”.

All instruments were translated into Polish ensuring conceptual and linguistic equivalence with the original scales.

3. Results

The empirical analysis contained in this section is presented in two main steps. First, descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients for the measurement scales are provided to assess data distribution and quality. Second, to establish the relationship between the variables, path analysis based on the maximum likelihood method was used. The independent variables included the dimensions of PW; dimensions of PS were analyzed as parallel mediators, while work performance dimensions were analyzed as dependent variables. Statistical significance of the mediation effects was verified using the bootstrapping method. Prior to estimating the structural model, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to verify the adequacy of the measurement model. All factor loadings exceeded recommended thresholds and global fit indices indicated good model fit.

Table 1 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 1.
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 skewness values fell within the range typical of a normal distribution (i.e. -1 to 1), indicating that the distribution of analyzed variables is approximately normal. All kurtosis values also fell within the acceptable ± 2 range, further supporting the assumption of

approximate normality. This is important as it justifies the use of parametric statistical tests and enhances the generalizability of the study's findings.

The relationships between variables were analyzed using path analysis based on the maximum likelihood method. The explanatory variables included the dimensions of PW: the benevolent dimension and the self-serving dimension. Indicators of PS – namely, social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity – were analyzed as parallel mediators, while work performance indicators, including task performance and contextual performance, were analyzed as dependent variables. Figure 1 presents the hypothesized empirical model of relationships between the study variables. Correlations among the four political skill dimensions and, separately, between the two work performance indicators were included in the model estimation but are omitted from the figure for clarity.

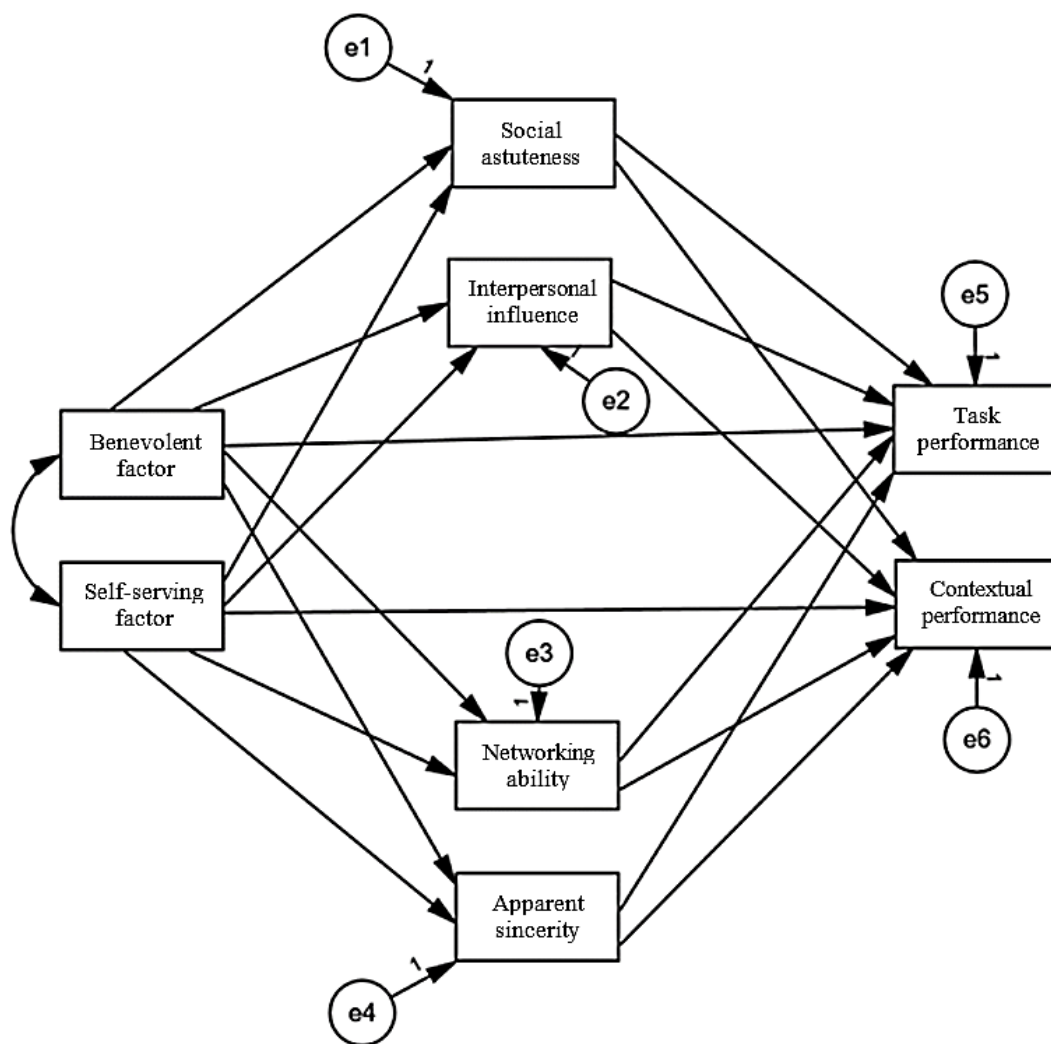


Figure 1. Hypothesized empirical model of relationships between the variables.

Source: own study.

The fit index values for the empirical model were optimal, with NFI = 0.99, CFI = 0.99, and RMSEA = 0.06. However, several relationships in the empirical model were not statistically significant. Table 2 presents the values of correlation coefficients. All variables

demonstrated adequate variability, with means and standard deviations consistent with prior research using these scales.

Table 2.
Values of correlation coefficients

Variables	M	SD	α	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
Job Performance										
1. Task performance	19.45	2.79	0.62	--						
2. Contextual performance	27.86	6.11	0.79	0.315**	--					
Political will										
3. Benevolent Factor	12.37	3.46	0.81	-0.112*	0.072	--				
4. Self-serving Factor	8.92	3.42	0.87	-0.129*	0.009	0.559**	--			
Political skill										
5. Social astuteness	17.86	2.72	0.76	0.103*	0.214**	0.153**	0.179**	--		
6. Interpersonal influence	15.31	2.17	0.76	0.102*	0.184**	0.086	0.069	0.510**	--	
7. Networking ability	20.12	3.42	0.75	0.142**	0.334**	0.184**	0.209**	0.484**	0.519**	--
8. Apparent sincerity	12.29	1.38	0.57	0.105*	0.181**	0.054	-0.042	0.377**	0.455**	0.327**

Note. M – average value; SD – standard deviation; α - value of the Cronbach measurement reliability coefficient α ; * $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$.

Source: own study.

No statistically significant relationships were found between the benevolent dimension of PW and interpersonal influence, social astuteness, networking ability, or apparent sincerity. Similarly, no statistically significant relationships were observed between the self-serving dimension of PW and apparent sincerity, interpersonal influence, or contextual performance. Social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and apparent sincerity were not statistically significantly related to task or contextual performance. After removing the non-significant relationships, the fit index values improved to NFI = 0.96, CFI = 0.98, and RMSEA = 0.05. Non-significant paths were removed following standard model-trimming procedures (Kline, 2016), provided that such modifications were theoretically justified and improved global model fit. Indirect effects were examined using 5000 bootstrap samples with bias-corrected confidence intervals to ensure robust estimation of mediation effects. The final empirical model after removing all non-significant paths is presented in Figure 2.

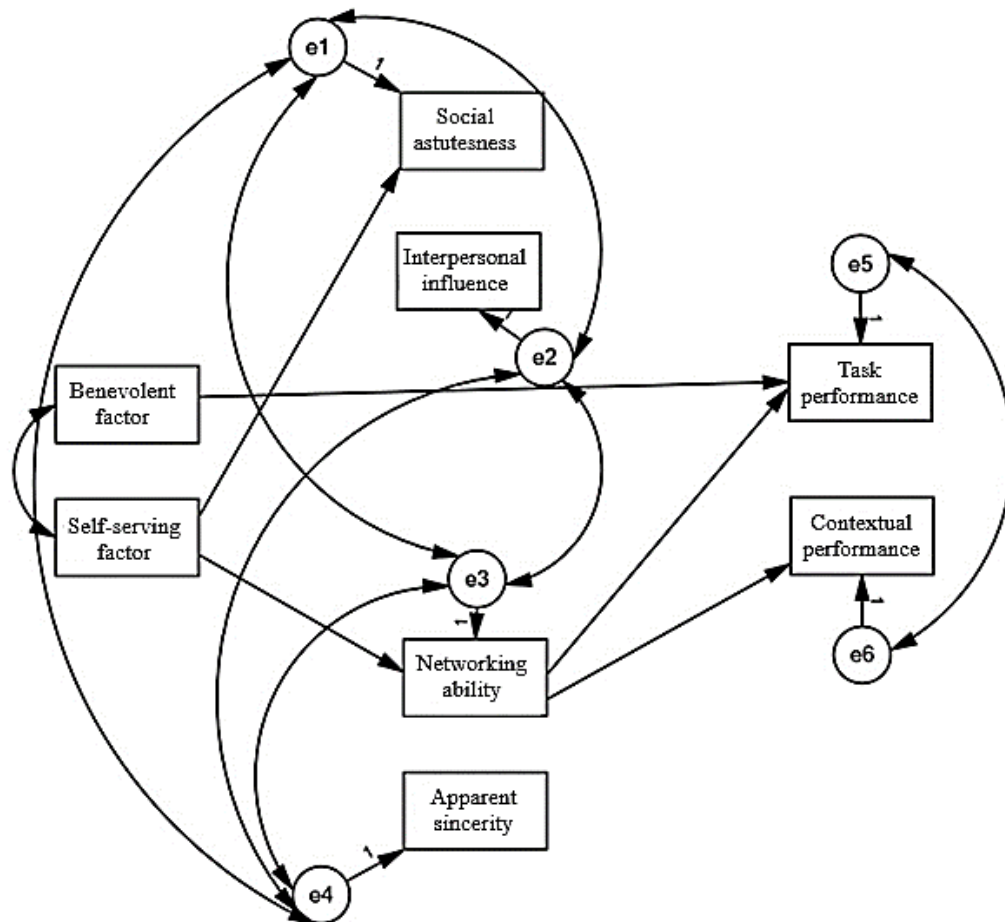


Figure 2. Final model of relationships between the variables.

Source: own study.

Table 3 presents the values of regression coefficients and correlation coefficients obtained in the final model.

Table 3.
Values of regression coefficients and correlation coefficients obtained in the final model

Relationship			Beta/r	p
Networking ability	<---	Self-serving factor	0.18	0.001
Task performance	<---	Networking ability	0.17	0.001
Contextual performance	<---	Networking ability	0.33	0.001
Social astuteness	<---	Self-serving factor	0.16	0.001
Task performance	<---	Benevolent factor	-0.15	0.003
Benevolent factor	<-->	Self-serving factor	0.56	0.001
Task performance	<-->	Contextual performance	0.29	0.001
Social astuteness	<-->	Interpersonal influence	0.51	0.001
Apparent sincerity	<-->	Networking ability	0.34	0.001
Social astuteness	<-->	Apparent sincerity	0.39	0.001
Social astuteness	<-->	Networking ability	0.47	0.001
Apparent sincerity	<-->	Interpersonal influence	0.46	0.001
Interpersonal influence	<-->	Networking ability	0.52	0.001

Note. Beta - standardized regression coefficient; r - Pearson's correlation coefficient; p - statistical significance.

Source: own study.

Both dimensions of PW—the benevolent and the self-serving—were positively correlated. Task performance was positively correlated with contextual performance, and all indicators of PS were also positively correlated with each other. The strong correlations among political skill dimensions are consistent with prior research validating the Political Skill Inventory, which conceptualizes PS facets as distinct yet interrelated components of a broader social effectiveness construct (Ferris et al., 2007).

The benevolent dimension was directly negatively correlated with task performance, meaning that the higher the level of PW on the benevolent dimension, the lower the task performance. The self-serving dimension of PW was positively associated with social astuteness and networking ability; higher levels of self-serving PW were linked to greater social astuteness and stronger networking ability. Networking ability, in turn, was positively correlated with both task and contextual performance; greater networking ability corresponded to higher levels of task and contextual performance. Overall, the structural model indicates that self-serving PW influences job performance exclusively through political skill, particularly networking ability, whereas benevolent PW exerts a direct negative effect on task performance without any indirect effects through PS dimensions. Networking ability was a statistically significant mediator of the relationship between the self-serving dimension of PW and task performance ($B = [0.02; 0.06]$, $p < 0.01$) as well as contextual performance ($B = [0.04; 0.10]$, $p < 0.01$). The self-serving dimension of PW was not directly correlated with task or contextual performance. The final model explained 4.4% of the variance in task performance and 11.1% of the variance in contextual performance.

4. Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to move beyond the traditional interactive perspective of political influence and examine the pattern of associations linking PW and JP through PS. Specifically, we tested the hypothesis that specific dimensions of PS mediate the relationship between benevolent and self-serving PW dimensions and task and contextual performance.

The results provided partial support for this general hypothesis, highlighting a differentiated pattern of relationships through which political motivation translates into organizational outcomes. Among the four dimensions of PS, only networking ability emerged as the statistically significant mediator, and exclusively for self-serving PW. Thus, hypotheses **H5** and **H6** were supported. The analysis showed that individuals driven by self-serving motives (e.g., the need for power, achievement, or status) report higher levels of effort invested in building and leveraging professional networks. This finding is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2011), suggesting that specific motivation (ambition) triggers

specific behaviors (networking) necessary to achieve goals. In turn, this enhanced networking ability was positively associated with both task and contextual performance. This result is consistent with previous research findings, that suggest networking is a high-leverage competency that allows employees to access critical information, resources, and support systems required to perform tasks efficiently and support the broader organizational context (Bing et al., 2011; Pfeffer, 1993).

Contrary to expectations, social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and apparent sincerity did not mediate the relationship between PW and JP. Thus, hypotheses **H1-H4** and **H7-H16** were not supported. This pattern suggests that while self-serving motivation may be related to the deployment of skills such as social astuteness, interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity, this skills are not sufficient to account for performance differences in the specific context of the surveyed Polish enterprises unless it is accompanied by the action-oriented behavior of networking.

Taken together, the findings indicate that, in the studied sample, “who you know” and the ability to mobilize those connections (networking ability) play a more central role in performance-related associations than how you present yourself (apparent sincerity) or how influential you are (interpersonal influence). This results may reflect characteristics of Polish organizational culture, which relies heavily on informal networks and relational access to resources

A particularly interesting and counterintuitive finding was the direct negative relationship between benevolent PW and task performance. The path analysis revealed that high levels of benevolent motivation (the desire to act for the good of the organization) were associated with lower task performance. This phenomenon might be explained in such a way that employees high in benevolent PW may become more involved in organizational politics to “fix the system”, advocate for others, or engage in voice behaviors. While well-intentioned, such activities consume time, energy, and emotional resources that – as a consequence – are diverted from their core duties (task performance). This may suggest that a potential cost of high political altruism is reduced individual efficiency.

Limitations and future research

Although the study offers valuable empirical insights, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. First, the purposive non-probability sampling strategy, while appropriate for targeting middle and senior managers, restricts statistical generalizability. Future research should expand to more diverse organizational levels and industries, thereby increasing the representativeness of the sample.

Second, the cross-sectional design prevents strong causal inferences about the direction of the observed relationships. Although the theoretical model assumes that political will is associated with job performance through political skill, reciprocal or dynamic effects cannot be

ruled out. Longitudinal or time-lagged designs would provide stronger evidence for temporal ordering and allow researchers to examine the dynamic development of workplace political behavior.

Third, the exclusive use of self-report questionnaires raises concerns about common method variance (CMV). While the measurement model showed good discriminant validity and the structural effects align with theory, CMV cannot be fully excluded because all data came from a single source at one time. Future work should integrate multi-source data, such as supervisor ratings of performance or peer assessments of political skill, to reduce potential inflation of associations.

Fourth, although reliability levels were generally satisfactory, several short-form subscales – particularly apparent sincerity and task performance – exhibited lower internal consistency. This is common in abbreviated instruments but may attenuate relationships and influence non-significant effects. Using full-length Polish scales could improve measurement precision.

Fifth, the study was conducted solely in the Polish organizational context, characterized by high power distance, relational dependence, and strong informal influence structures. These socio-cultural features may shape political behavior and managers' interpretations of political motives. Cross-cultural replications are therefore needed to assess whether the patterns of association identified in the present study generalize similarly in other environments.

Finally, the exclusive focus on middle and senior managers strengthens internal validity but limits generalization to non-managerial employees. Political will, political skill, and their links to performance may manifest differently among frontline staff or in collaborative, less hierarchical settings. Extending the model to diverse occupational groups would broaden theoretical generalizability.

These limitations point to several directions for future research. Probability-based sampling or larger, more heterogeneous samples would enhance generalizability across roles and industries. Longitudinal or time-lagged designs would clarify causal processes and better capture how political will and political skill evolve over time. Multi-source measurement strategies would reduce CMV and strengthen the validity of performance assessments. Psychometric refinement of political skill and performance measures would benefit future studies. Cross-cultural comparisons could identify boundary conditions related to power distance, informality, and leadership structures. Finally, expanding research to non-managerial roles and non-hierarchical environments may reveal alternative patterns of political motivation, political competencies, and performance outcomes, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of political behavior at work.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that PW and PS do not merely interact but are linked through a structured pattern of associations. However, this pattern is not uniform; it is highly specific to the networking ability dimension. This finding strengthens emerging theoretical perspectives suggesting that political behavior should be conceptualized as a motivational–behavioral sequence at the conceptual level rather than a static interplay of traits (Ferris et al., 2019; Kapoutsis et al., 2017).

By showing that self-serving PW is associated with higher levels of a specific behavioral competency – networking ability – this study provides empirical support for process-oriented models of political behavior grounded in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2011). In this view, political action does not stem from motivation alone; instead, motivation must be linked to contextually relevant behavioral strategies.

Importantly, the results refine existing theory by revealing asymmetry among PS dimensions. Although prior research typically treats PS as a unified set of competencies (Ferris et al., 2005), our findings indicate that only networking ability emerges as the central dimension statistically accounting for the association between political motivation and job performance. This supports a dimensional rather than global conceptualization of PS and suggests that different political competencies may serve distinct functional purposes in organizational contexts.

Finally, the negative direct effect of benevolent PW on task performance contributes to theoretical debates about the potential “dark side” of prosocial motives (Bolino, Grant, 2016). This finding suggests that political benevolence – while normatively highly valued – may impose cognitive or emotional costs that detract from core performance, offering a novel theoretical insight into unintended consequences of prosocial political engagement.

The findings of this study also offer several practical implications for leadership development and human resource management. First, the results highlight the importance of networking ability as the only political skill dimension consistently associated with performance outcomes. This aligns with prior research demonstrating that networking represents the most behaviorally consequential facet of PS, enabling access to resources, information, and support that facilitate superior performance outcomes (Blickle et al., 2013; Wolff, Moser, 2009). Organizations seeking to enhance managerial effectiveness should therefore prioritize strengthening relational and networking competencies. Targeted training initiatives, cross-functional assignments, and structured opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration may support the development of these competencies (Ferris et al., 2007).

Second, the differentiated effects of benevolent and self-serving political will suggest that managers may require tailored developmental support. Individuals high in benevolent PW may benefit from interventions focused on task prioritization, role clarity, and boundary

management, as prosocial motives can sometimes diffuse attention away from core task responsibilities (Grant, 2007). Conversely, individuals high in self-serving PW may require development aimed at channeling their political motivation into prosocial and organizationally constructive behavior, consistent with evidence that political skill can buffer or redirect self-serving tendencies (Ferris et al., 2007).

Third, the study reinforces the view that PS is not an innate trait, instead it could be developed and strengthened through coaching, feedback, behavioral modelling, and experiential learning (Ferris et al., 2005; Semadar et al., 2006). This suggests that organizations can purposefully design developmental pathways that target specific political competencies – particularly those most strongly linked to performance.

Finally, by clarifying how political motivation and political competencies jointly contribute to task and contextual performance, the study provides HR practitioners and senior leaders with a more precise framework for identifying high-potential employees and shaping leadership pipelines. Political competence, especially its relational and networking components, may be considered an essential element of managerial readiness and leadership effectiveness in contemporary organizational environments (Ferris et al., 2019).

5. Conclusion

This study clarifies the pattern of relationships through which PW is associated with JP by examining the mediating role of PS dimensions. Moving beyond the traditional interactive perspective, the findings provide empirical support for a process-oriented model in which political motivation is systematically linked to behavioral competencies that are relevant for work outcomes. The results indicate that this mechanism is not the same across PS components. Rather, networking ability emerged as the exclusive mediator linking self-serving PW with both task and contextual performance. This highlights the unique role of networking in gaining access to resources, information, and support necessary for effective performance, which is consistent with previous research, emphasizing its key importance in political competence (Blickle et al., 2009; Ferris et al., 2007; Wolff, Moser, 2009).

At the same time, the study revealed no mediating effects for social astuteness, interpersonal influence, or apparent sincerity, suggesting that these competencies – while theoretically important – may not be directly associated with performance within the managerial and cultural context examined. Moreover, the unexpected negative direct relationship between benevolent political will and task performance provides a new insight: prosocial political motives, although well-intentioned, may redirect effort and attention away from core responsibilities. This finding enriches existing theory by illustrating the potential performance costs of politically motivated prosocial engagement (Grant, 2007).

Taken together, the results contribute to political influence research by demonstrating that PW and PS are related through a structured and domain-specific pattern of associations primarily centered on networking behavior, rather than a uniform causal chain. These findings refine conceptualizations of political behavior at work and offer a more differentiated understanding of how motivational and behavioral political resources jointly shape managerial effectiveness.

Despite its contributions, the study has the limitations, including the use of purposive sampling, a cross-sectional and single-source design, lower reliability of selected short subscales, and the specificity of the Polish organizational context. These limitations highlight the need for future research employing longitudinal designs, multi-source data, culturally diverse samples, and psychometrically enhanced instruments.

Overall, this study advances both theory and practice by identifying networking ability as the behavioral dimension most strongly associated with the link between political motivation and performance outcomes, and by demonstrating that different forms of PW have distinct implications for managerial effectiveness. These insights may guide leadership development efforts by helping organizations more effectively cultivate political competencies that support task and contextual performance.

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Appendix

Table 4.

List of specific hypotheses (H1-H16) required to fully test a general hypothesis

Hypothesis No.	Relationship Tested (IV → Mediator → DV)	Description
H1	PW-S → PS-SA → JP-TP	Social astuteness mediates the relationship between self-serving political will (IV) and task performance (DV).
H2	PW-S → PS-SA → JP-CP	Social astuteness mediates the relationship between self-serving political will (IV) and contextual performance (DV).
H3	PW-S → PS-II → JP-TP	Interpersonal influence mediates the relationship between self-serving political will (IV) and task performance (DV).
H4	PW-S → PS-II → JP-CP	Interpersonal influence mediates the relationship between self-serving political will (IV) and contextual performance (DV).
H5	PW-S → PS-NA → JP-TP	Networking ability mediates the relationship between self-serving political will (IV) and task performance (DV).
H6	PW-S → PS-NA → JP-CP	Networking ability mediates the relationship between self-serving political will (IV) and contextual performance (DV).
H7	PW-S → PS-AS → JP-TP	Apparent sincerity mediates the relationship between self-serving political will (IV) and task performance (DV).
H8	PW-S → PS-AS → JP-CP	Apparent sincerity mediates the relationship between self-serving political will (IV) and contextual performance (DV).
H9	PW-B → PS-SA → JP-TP	Social astuteness mediates the relationship between benevolent political will (IV) and task performance (DV).
H10	PW-B → PS-SA → JP-CP	Social astuteness mediates the relationship between benevolent political will (IV) and contextual performance (DV).
H11	PW-B → PS-II → JP-TP	Interpersonal influence mediates the relationship between benevolent political will (IV) and task performance (DV).
H12	PW-B → PS-II → JP-CP	Interpersonal influence mediates the relationship between benevolent political will (IV) and contextual performance (DV).
H13	PW-B → PS-NA → JP-TP	Networking ability mediates the relationship between benevolent political will (IV) and task performance (DV).
H14	PW-B → PS-NA → JP-CP	Networking ability mediates the relationship between benevolent political will (IV) and contextual performance (DV).
H15	PW-B → PS-AS → JP-TP	Apparent sincerity mediates the relationship between benevolent political will (IV) and task performance (DV).
H16	PW-B → PS-AS → JP-CP	Apparent sincerity mediates the relationship between benevolent political will (IV) and contextual performance (DV).

Note. Independent Variable (IV) - Political Will (PW): Benevolent (PW-B) and Self-Serving (PW-S); Mediator - Political Skill (PS): Social Astuteness (PS-SA), Interpersonal Influence (PS-II), Networking Ability (PS-NA), Apparent Sincerity (PS-AS); Dependent Variable (DV) - Job Performance (JP): Task Performance (JP-TP) and Contextual Performance (JP-CP).

Source: own study.