

# The Influence of Political Skill on Workplace Friendship Based on the Social Capital Theory

Jing Gao<sup>1,a</sup>, Hui-Hui Wang<sup>1,b,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Management, Northwestern Polytechnical University, Xi'an, Shanxi Province, China

<sup>a</sup>gaojnpu@nwpu.edu.cn, <sup>b</sup>wanghuihui@mail.nwpu.edu.cn,

\*Corresponding author

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**Abstract.** The workplace friendship plays a significant role in the development of individuals and organizations. Although there is a considerable body of literature on organizational political skill and workplace friendship respectively, scholars hasn't paid enough attention to the influence of political skill on the workplace friendship. So, based on social capital theory, the influence of political skill on the workplace friendship has been studied, the origins and essence of political skill, and dimensions division has been listed. The study collects 124 valid questionnaires and verifies the hypothesis by multiple hierarchical regressions. The results suggest that political skill have significant positive influence on workplace friendship.

## Introduction

As we all know, people can neither live independently, nor work independently, people have formed a variety of intricate relationships to meet their own needs, aiming at creating high-quality work and learning state. As one of the types of interpersonal relationships, friendship affects people's cognitive or emotional state. Workplace friendship is different from ordinary friendship. It is an internal relationship between colleagues at work that members share their values, commitments and interests. Embedded legitimately in workplace friendship, Social capital is conducive to the uptake of social resources for staffs. But time, money and vigor is required if individuals want to maintain their workplace friendships. When these capital investments are excessive, they will make workplace friendship be a burden, which is not conducive to the development of individuals and organizations.

Among different factors of the workplace friendship, political skill of employees has important implications on the building of interpersonal networks, evolution and expansion [1]. Therefore, based on social capital theory, the influence of political skill on the workplace friendship has been studied in China. In order to help employees gain a satisfying in workplace game as well as enjoy the pleasure from work. This article fills in the blank about the research on political skill and workplace friendship with empirical study.

## Literature Review

### Workplace Friendship Embedded by Social Capital

There are different kinds of relationships in workplace, including superior-subordinate, peer, as well as mentoring relationships. These relationships often grow closer, developing into intimate bonds known as 'friendships'. Scholars have not got a uniform definition about workplace friendship. Friendships are unique workplace relationships in two primary ways: 1) friendships are voluntary although individuals can not typically choose with whom they work, they do choose which of those individuals to be friend with, and 2) friendships have a personalistic focus in which individuals come to know and treat each other as whole person, rather than simply workplace role occupants[2], blending the co-worker and friend roles and blurring the boundaries between public work role and private personal realm [3]. Dotan identified six main reasons as to why individuals form friendship at work, namely: 1) Work Safety/Trust, 2) Missing

Role, 3) Sanity Check, 4) Work-values/Life-interests Similarity, 5) Proximity, and 6) Instrumentality [4].

Not only providing instrumental support, workplace friendship also provides emotional support. As workplace friendship facilitates information sharing and spreading among employees [2]. Thus, it can help reduce uncertainty and ambiguity with the support of voluntary and reciprocal relations [5,6,7]. For example, if the situation is more uncertain and ambiguous, employees will not know what will be rewarded, punished or recognized [8,9]. Consequently, employees will seek answers and suggestions from colleagues. That is how instrumental support works. Emotional friendships rely on dependence and cooperation among colleagues. Individuals through interpersonal to share information and obtain each other's support in the organization. Scholars have lots of controversies on whether exist friendship in the workplace. Some scholars believe that the existence and development of workplace friendship is the inevitable result of teamwork [10,11], no matter it is between superior-subordinate or peer. Appropriate friendship is conducive to the development of individual and organizational growth [12]. The others considered that if managers want to make management efficient, they are supposed to avoid workplace friendship, particularly friendship between supervisors and subordinates, because it will be impediment of organizational institution [13].

The concept of social capital has become increasingly popular in a wide range of social science disciplines. Coleman defined capital as: "The social structure of the resources owned by individuals" [14]. Social capital strengthens supplier relations [15], regional production network [16]. If we embed social capital reasonably, it will be better for participants to pursue their common goals and improve social efficiency [17]. But excessive social capital embedded in workplace friendship will bring a series of negative impacts as follows: social ties will bring about greater control over wayward behavior and provide privileged access to resources, they can also restrict individual freedoms and keep away outsiders from gaining access to the same resources through particularistic preferences [18]. These are not propitious to the development of the organization.

### **Political Skill in Organization**

Since the 1990s, scholars gradually pay attention to organizational politics. Organizational politics may, therefore, stem from informal behaviors which are not sanctioned by the organization but which are designed to promote the goals of an individual [19]. Earlier researches on organizational politics focused on individual political awareness and political behavior. In recent years, scholars have begun to shift research perspective from the negative effects of organizational politics to political skill. Former experiences indicate that sometimes the use of political skill can be more propitious to solve problems. Political skill is defined 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 organizational objectives" [20], which has been put forward as a necessary ability workers need in such environments [21,22]. Political skill can be divided into four parts: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity [23].

*Social astuteness:* individuals who owe political skill are astute observers of others. They understand social interactions well and accurately interpret the behavior of others. They are keenly attuned to diverse social settings and have high self awareness.

*Interpersonal influence:* politically skilled individuals have an unassuming and convincing personal style that exerts a powerful influence on others around them. Interpersonal influence allows people to adapt and calibrate their behavior to different situations, aiming at eliciting the desired responses from others.

*Networking ability:* individuals with political skill are good at identifying and developing diverse contacts and networks. People in these networks tend to hold assets seen as valuable and necessary for successful personal and organizational performances.

*Apparent sincerity:* politically skilled individuals appear to other persons as having high levels of integrity and as being authentic, sincere, and genuine. They are, or appear to be, honest and forthright.

Ferris suggests that people with high political skill combine social astuteness with the capacity to adjust their behavior to different and changing situational demands in a way that appears to be sincere, inspires support and trustworthy, and effectively influences and controls the responses of others [23]. Political skill

focuses primarily on the interpersonal ability in organizational scenarios. As one of social skills, researches have shown that political skill has a positive effect, for instance, it has been announced that political skill contributes to lessen the side effect such as pressure from the society, role overload and role conflict as well as improve organization performance [24,25,26,27]. The person who has low political skill tend to avoid group activities [28] reduces collegial interaction, withholds information from others and maligns others for prominence [8], this will result in poor workplace friendship or even no workplace friendship. Gradually they will be separated by the others and even worse they may resign.

Persons with high political skill are able to build an effective and advantageous partnership with others at work successfully [29]. Treadway demonstrated that individuals with positive performance were more likely to possess higher levels of interpersonal power if they were high in political skill [30]. Thus, the following hypothesis is formed.

**Hypothesis: political skill has significant effect on workplace friendship.**

## **Methodology**

### **Sampling**

Participants in this paper include 124 full-time employees ranging from Human Resources Department, Financial Department, Production Department etc. Of the 168 questionnaires distributed, 124 completed questionnaires were returned representing a 73.8% response rate. There are 87(70.16%) male respondents. It also shows that 70(56.5%) of the respondents are between 18 to 24 years, 46(37.1%) of the respondents are between 25 to 29 years, while 6(4.8%) of the respondents are aged of 50 years and above. The Education Background of the respondents show that 21(16.9%) have junior college diploma or below, 95(76.6%) of them have college degree certificates, 8(6.4%) of them have graduate degree or above. General staff employees accounted for 104(83.9%).

### **Measures**

Questionnaires were on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Independent variable (IV) is political skill and examined by the questionnaire created from Ferris( $\alpha=0.90$ )[23]. They measured political skill by four perspectives in their questionnaire, which are social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity.

Dependent variable (DV) is workplace friendship and examined by the questionnaire created from Nielsen, Jex, and Adams [31]. They measured workplace friendship by two perspectives, which are friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence. Statistical results showed cronbach's  $\alpha=0.907$  and we can safely draw the conclusion that those questionnaires can be trusted.

Lastly, to purify the relationship between IV and DV, four demographical variables were adopted as control variables which include gender, age, education and tenure.

## **Results**

In this paper, we use simple regression to examine the relationship between political skill and workplace friendship. Table 1 was Pearson correlations it showed means, standard deviations, and correlation of independent variables, dependent variable, and other four control variables. Multiple hierarchical regressions were adapted for purification. According to correlation analysis to obtain political skill and workplace friendship are related. In this paper, after four control variables been examined,  $R^2$  increases 0.220. Then, the outcome of samples statistical showed the relationship between political skill and workplace friendship  $p<0.001$ ,  $\beta=0.477$ ,  $R^2=0.245$ . Thus, we may conclude that the hypothesis above is convincing.

Table 1 Means, Standard deviation and Pearson correlation

	Means	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1.Gender <sup>a</sup>	1.300	.459	1				
2.Age <sup>b</sup>	1.490	.690	.038	1			
3.Education <sup>c</sup>	1.910	.503	.039	-.002	1		
4.Tenure <sup>d</sup>	1.540	.825	.094	.731**	.037	1	
5.Political <sup>e</sup>	3.475	.468	.135	.101	.063	.052	1
6.Workplace Friendship <sup>f</sup>	3.640	.363	.126	.007	.013	.048	.478**

Notes:<sup>a</sup>1=male, 2=female, <sup>b</sup> measured in years, <sup>c</sup> 1=junior college diploma or below, 2=college degree, 3=graduate degree or above, <sup>d</sup> measured in years, \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01.

## Discussion

From the perspective of social capital, the results show that political skill has significant positive impact on workplace friendship. How can we improve our political skills in the organization?

There are 3 steps to build political skill, first of all, self assessment and understanding, the employees are supposed to tell which behavior is impolite. Secondly, they need to form and develop a certain political skill though a specific way. At last, they can ask surroundings to assess the progress made by themselves in political skill, which can provide a necessary feedback. Ferris has come up with four ways to develop political skill, namely experiential exercise, vicarious learning, communication skills training and dramaturgy [32].

However, there still exists few limitations in this paper. 1) Except for political skill there is no doubt that some other factors could also impact on employees' workplace friendship. Such as gender difference [33], job characteristic [34]. 2) Although being proved that the questionnaires is suitable for samples from both eastern and western, it's better to develop local measuring scales or modify the scale of the West in order to fit the given situation more appropriately. 3) The questionnaires of this paper come from different kinds of industries, it will reduce internal validity. Further research will control these limitations.

Besides its limitations, this study has made several progress: 1) exploring the relationship between political and workplace friendship. 2) coming up with a new perspective about over embedding social capital which has adverse effects on workplace friendship.

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