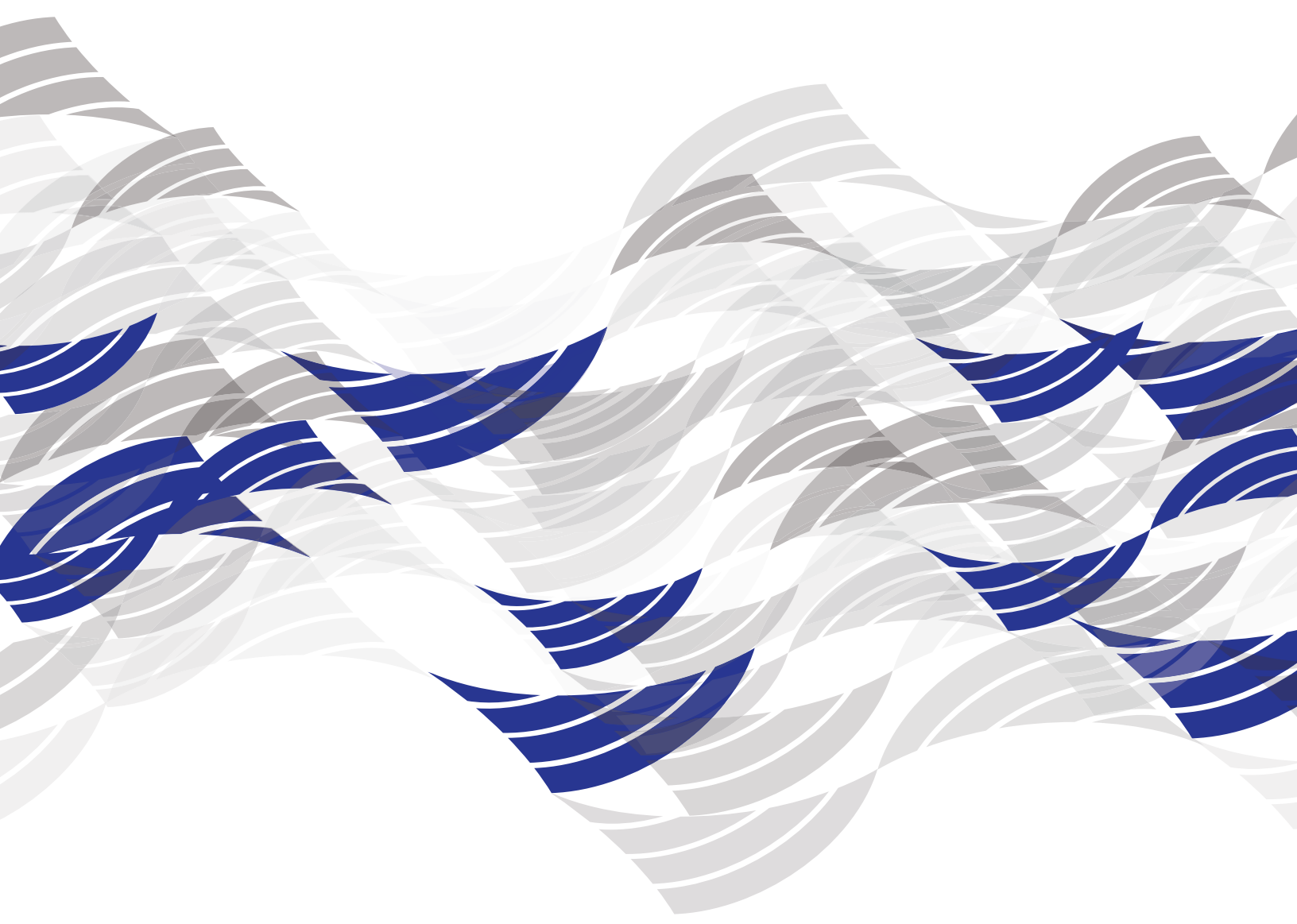


WHITE PAPER

Using Political Skill to Maximize and Leverage Work Relationships

By: Phillip Braddy and Michael Campbell





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What is Political Skill and Why Is It a Good Thing?

Take a moment and think about a leader in your organization whom you would consider to be *political*. How would you describe that leader? Some common descriptions that may immediately come to mind are *self-serving*, *manipulative*, *phony*, or *untrustworthy*. You may conjure up images of secret pacts made behind closed doors or on the golf course. Or, perhaps, you came up with descriptions such as *influential*, *well-connected*, *trustworthy*, or *concerned for others*. Often, the idea of a leader being *political* is associated with negative perceptions and behaviors. In reality, though, *political skill* is a necessity and can be a positive skill for leaders to possess when used appropriately.

We define political skill as the ability to maximize and leverage relationships in order to achieve organizational, team, and individual goals.

Thought of in this way, political skill is a capability that leaders must demonstrate daily (Ferris et al. 2005). The challenges leaders face require working with, understanding, influencing, and motivating others—in order to define a clear direction and vision, align and gather resources to get work done, and build employee commitment and engagement. Two of the most common challenges faced by organizations are getting employees to collaborate effectively

across multiple stakeholder groups (functions, teams, and divisions) and developing talent (identifying, developing, and rewarding others). Both of these require leaders to maximize and leverage relationships—they require political skill. Indeed, when we view political skill through this lens, it is difficult to envision any leader being effective without it.

This white paper presents the results of research conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®), as well as the work of other noted scholars, on political skill. In this paper, we present the following information to support leaders in developing and improving their ability to maximize and leverage relationships in order to get work done:

1. We describe four distinct practices leaders can use to harness the positive effects of political skill (Ferris et al. 2005):

Social Awareness—a leader’s ability to astutely observe others to understand their behaviors and motives

Interpersonal Influence—a leader’s ability to influence and engage others using a compelling and charismatic interpersonal style

Networking—a leader’s ability to build diverse relationship networks across and outside of the organization

Sincerity—a leader’s ability to be forthright, open, honest, and genuine with others

2. We describe how leaders typically use these four practices and how the use of these practices influences coworkers’ perceptions of a leader’s effectiveness.

3. We look at how the four political skill practices are used to navigate complex challenges, using the examples of managing collaborations and developing talent.

4. For individuals and leadership development professionals, we provide tools for self-assessment of strengths and development needs, suggestions for improving political skill, and cautions for avoiding negative perceptions and effects that could be associated with the misuse of political skill.



Four Political Skill Practices

Leaders often rely on their political skill (whether they are aware of it or not) to achieve work-related goals, manage work groups or teams, and navigate leadership challenges. To maximize the positive impact of political skill on others and on their organizations, we recommend that leaders utilize four practices: **social awareness**, **interpersonal influence**, **networking**, and **sincerity**. Each of these political skill practices is briefly defined below (Ferris et al. 2005).



Social Awareness—Leaders who are socially aware are keen observers of others in social situations. They are very aware of their own feelings and actions and are particularly skilled at interpreting the motives and actions of others. Because of their ability to understand others in social situations, leaders who are socially aware typically know what to say and what actions to take to successfully influence their coworkers. They know how to make positive impressions on others as well.



Interpersonal Influence—Leaders who are proficient in this skill often use their compelling or charming interpersonal style to influence others. Specifically, their attempts to influence others are usually successful due to their ability to put others at ease, establish rapport, get others to like them, and communicate with others in positive ways.



Networking—Leaders with strong networking skills are adept at building connections and relationships with diverse groups of people. Quite often, they have connections to key stakeholders within their organizations who have access to scarce and valuable resources. Leaders with good networking skills are also effective at leveraging their networks to make things happen quickly at work as well as to obtain critical resources for themselves and for their work teams.



Sincerity—Leaders who are sincere behave in a forthright manner that others perceive as being open, honest, and authentic. They also show genuine interest in other individuals. Because these leaders are not perceived to be manipulative or to have hidden motives, they typically are trusted and are better positioned to influence others using a variety of practices such as interpersonal influence.

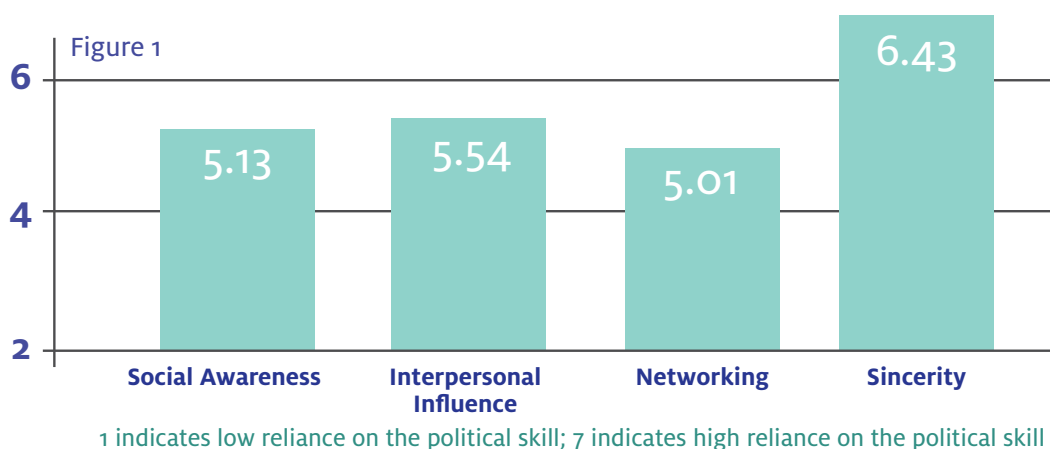
In summary, politically skilled leaders are adept at reading others' behaviors and motives, influencing others to achieve important goals, building diverse relationship networks, and interacting genuinely and sincerely with others. These skills enable leaders to maximize and leverage their relationships in order to get things done efficiently and effectively at work (Ferris et al. 2005).

Gerald Ferris and his colleagues first discussed these four political skill practices in an article published in 2005. They called these practices social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity. In this white paper, we adapted the names of three of these skills to more accurately reflect their definitions. Specifically, we changed social astuteness to *social awareness*, networking ability to *networking*, and apparent sincerity to *sincerity*.

Extent of Use of the Political Skill Practices

With multiple political skill practices available to leaders, we wondered whether leaders use some skills more than others to manage their relationships at work. In a study conducted at CCL between 2009 and 2010, we asked approximately 200 leaders to rate the extent to which they used each of the four political skill practices in their own leadership roles. As can be readily seen in Figure 1, we found that leaders believe they utilized *sincerity* the most, followed by *interpersonal influence*, *social awareness*, and

then *networking*. This may be due to the fact that *sincerity* is the most natural, or easiest, practice for leaders to employ, while *networking* is the most difficult practice to use due to limited time or other organizational constraints. On the other hand, it is possible that *sincerity* is the practice that leaders value most and *networking* is the practice they value the least. While we are not certain why leaders exhibited these specific preferences, it is clear that, on average, leaders use some political skill practices more than others.



Another question we investigated was whether the usage of political skill differs based on a leader's gender or job level within his or her organization. As illustrated in Figure 2, both men and women leaders reported that they relied most heavily on *sincerity*, followed by *interpersonal influence*, *social*

awareness, and *networking*. Interestingly, while the rank-orders of the most used to least used political skill practices were identical for men and women, women reported that they used each of these political skill practices to a slightly greater extent than did men.

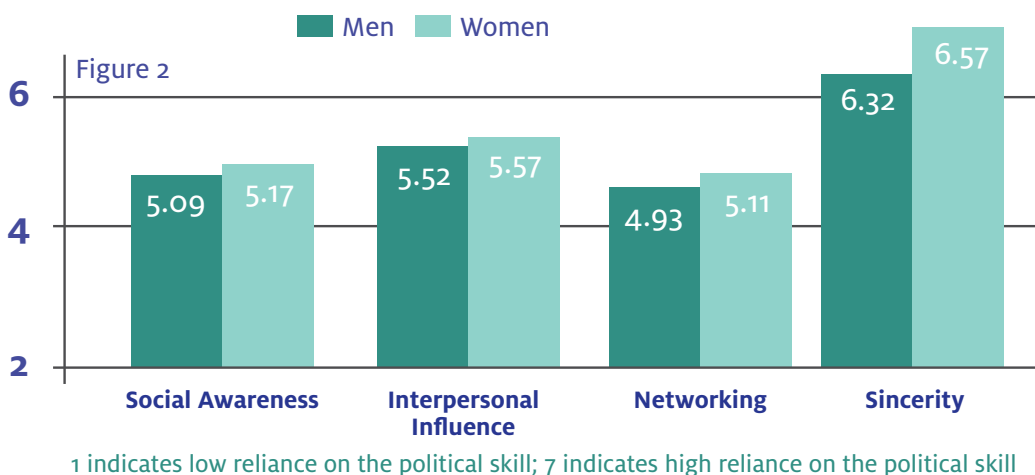
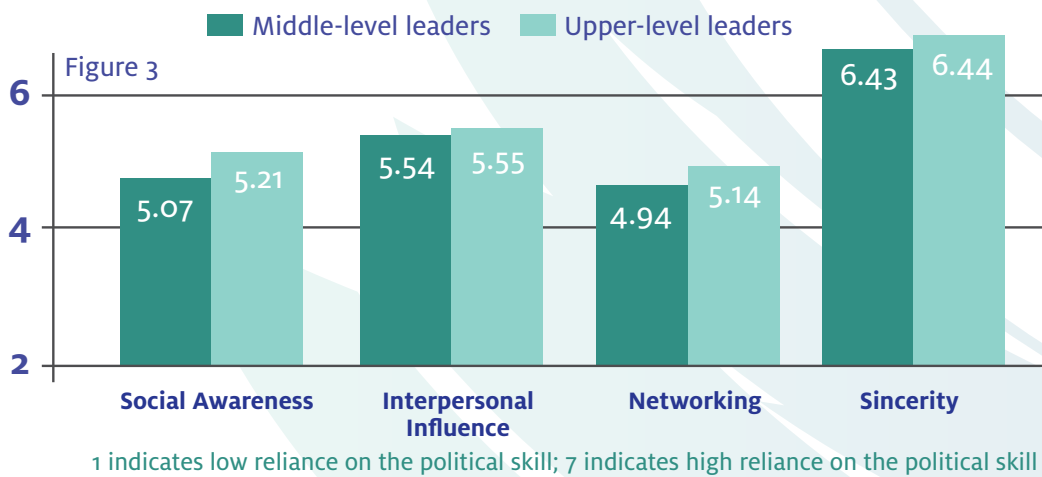


Figure 3 shows a similar pattern for our job-level comparisons. Here again, middle-level leaders (e.g., office managers and mid-level administrators) and upper-level leaders (e.g., department heads and plant managers) reported that they used *sincerity* the most, followed by *interpersonal*

influence, *social awareness*, and finally *networking*. While both groups of leaders used *sincerity* and *interpersonal influence* to nearly identical degrees, upper-level leaders reported using *social awareness* and *networking* to a slightly greater extent than did middle-level leaders.



Overall, we conclude that leaders tend to utilize the political skill practices fairly similarly in organizational contexts, regardless of their gender or job level. Additionally, given that leaders appear to be underutilizing their *networking* and *social awareness*

(see Figures 1–3), we believe that leaders as a collective probably have a greater need to improve their use of these two skills than they do *sincerity* and *interpersonal influence*. In other words, leaders may be overplaying their strengths in a few areas and not effectively leveraging the entire political skill repertoire.

Improving Leader Effectiveness and Reducing Problems That Can Stall a Career

Leaders use political skill to motivate and compel others to take action and to access critical resources needed by their work teams. Contrary to the stereotypical perceptions of being *political*, the correct use of political skill also positions leaders to be seen as trusting and reputable within both their work teams and their organizations. Thus, when used collectively, these political skill practices permit leaders to exert greater influence on others and to help their work teams increase their efficiency and productivity (Ferris et al. 2005).

Given the role that political skill plays in helping leaders manage their work teams, we believe that leaders' political skill also helps them maximize their own job success.

In fact, in our study conducted with about 200 individuals, we found that leaders who employed these four political skill practices to a great extent were perceived by their coworkers (i.e., direct reports, peers, and bosses) to exhibit greater leadership effectiveness compared to leaders who underutilized these practices. Put slightly differently, leaders with better political skill tended to receive higher leadership, or job, approval ratings from their coworkers as compared to leaders with less political skill.

We also found a relationship between leaders' use of political skill and whether they displayed problems that could potentially stall or derail their leadership careers (i.e., cause them to plateau, get fired, or get demoted). Specifically, leaders who used the political skill practices to a great extent were *generally* viewed by their direct reports, peers, and bosses as being less likely to have difficulty building and leading work teams, meeting critical business objectives, and maintaining good interpersonal relationships. However, there were three notable exceptions in our study's results: (1) leaders' use of *social awareness* was not associated with their peers' or direct reports' perceptions of leaders' ability to *meet business objectives*; (2) leaders' use of *networking* was not associated with their bosses' perceptions of their ability to *maintain good interpersonal relationships*; and (3) leaders' use of *sincerity* was not associated with their bosses' perceptions of their ability to *meet business objectives*. We mention these exceptions to emphasize that political skill is just one of many skills that leaders need and that some political skill practices (e.g., *interpersonal influence*) may be somewhat more relevant than other practices (e.g., *social awareness*) in terms of helping leaders prevent career derailment.

In summary, leaders who effectively use political skill in the workplace will likely enhance others' perceptions of their ability to successfully lead their work groups or teams. Effective use of political skill is also likely to help leaders avoid displaying problems that can lead to career failure or derailment.

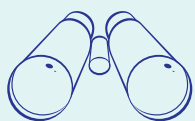


How to Apply Political Skill to Leadership Challenges

Because leaders who are more adept at using political skill are generally perceived to be more effective, it is important to understand how leaders can apply the four political skill practices to navigate common (and critical) leadership challenges. CCL has identified two of the most common challenges that leaders encounter to be managing collaborations and developing talent (Smith and Campbell 2010). We offer a brief example of each challenge type and present a series of questions to help leaders understand how they might apply the four political skill practices in the context of that challenge.

Managing Collaborations

Creating high-performance groups or teams is already a difficult leadership challenge, but getting these teams to collaborate with others across multiple boundaries (e.g., departments, divisions, or organizational levels) can be even more daunting. Many organizations are pushing teams to collaborate to take advantage of collective knowledge and spur new innovations. For those leaders who may be facing the challenge of managing complex collaborations (e.g., bringing two teams to work together to design a new product), here are some common ways the four political skill practices can help.



Social Awareness (Being a keen observer of others in social situations)

- What have you observed about your current team to give you an indication of individual and collective norms, beliefs, values, and expectations? In other words, have you observed what makes this team unique?
- What have you observed about the “other team’s” identity? How can you increase your team’s interaction with this team?

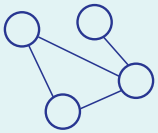
By using these questions to hone your *social awareness*, you’ll likely come up with some very strong descriptions of your team’s unique identity and contributions. In all likelihood, the team you need to collaborate with has an equally strong identity and one that may be very different from your own team’s. Using the practice of social awareness when collaborating with another team helps leaders recognize and understand these unique identities and contributions, and then formulate the best way to acknowledge those differences and forge potential common ground when preparing to work together.



Interpersonal Influence (Putting others at ease, building rapport, and communicating with others in positive ways)

- How would you characterize your current relationship with other team leaders?
- When and where would be an opportunity to engage with team leaders individually or all together to focus on building a relationship with other teams?

The impact of establishing relationships that promote *interpersonal influence* should not be underestimated. The process of establishing a good rapport with each team leader may be a springboard for helping members of each team build rapport.



Networking (Building connections with diverse groups of people)

- Have you identified key stakeholders within each team who may be more influential, connected, or respected?
- Are there potential stakeholders within each team who may be less connected but could have expertise or knowledge that is currently untapped?

The formal reporting structure of each team may not be a good indicator of who wields the most influence or has the most expertise in a team. The practice of *networking* recognizes that often there is an informal structure of influential individuals who need to be engaged to support collaborative work between different teams.



Sincerity (Being perceived as open, honest, and authentic)

- How open and transparent are you in your communications with each team about the vision and direction driving the need to collaborate?
- What level of trust does each team have in you, and what may be some of the causes for that level of trust?

Skepticism, concern, and confusion are common feelings that different teams experience when asked to engage in collaborative work. A leader's *sincerity* is constantly on display. The leader's words and actions communicate the level of trust he or she has in each team. The level of trust shown by the leader is often a reflection of the level of trust each team has in that leader.

Developing Talent

Identifying, developing, and retaining talented individuals continues to be a critical challenge facing organizations. The desire for leaders to be “developers of people” at all levels of an organization is increasingly recognized as both an opportunity to accelerate talent development and a challenge in training leaders with the capabilities necessary to be effective as “talent developers.” For leaders seeking to develop their direct reports more effectively, here are some ways political skill practices support building others’ capabilities.



Social Awareness (Being a keen observer of others in social situations)

- What have you directly observed about your direct reports’ strengths and development needs based on their day-to-day work activities? How have your direct reports responded to challenging situations and assignments?
- What have you seen that gives you an indication of what motivates and energizes your direct reports?

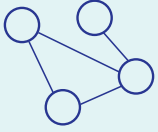
Effectively developing talent requires leaders to observe and understand a person’s strengths and development needs, along with understanding what motivates and engages that person at work. Increased *social awareness* allows leaders to take what they see in the work environment and anticipate how people will respond to different types of developmental challenges or opportunities.



Interpersonal Influence (Putting others at ease, building rapport, and communicating with others in positive ways)

- What have you done to learn more about your direct reports’ personal interests and lives outside of work?
- How much positive feedback (feedback that reinforces effective behaviors) do you provide to your direct reports on a daily basis?

Direct reports who have been identified as “high potentials” want exposure, visibility, and feedback from their leaders. Leaders are able to use *interpersonal influence* when they have taken the time to engage their direct reports in conversation and understand their needs and interests at a deeper level. Effective interpersonal relationships may help direct reports be less defensive when receiving developmental feedback and may help the leader persuade direct reports to take on new challenging job assignments or opportunities.



Networking (Building connections with diverse groups of people)

- Whom do you know with current knowledge, expertise, or skill, and whom could you connect with a direct report needing to develop similar knowledge, expertise, or skill?
- Have you helped your direct report assess his or her network of relationships to identify others to reach out to for support on development goals or challenging assignments?

It is not necessarily your job alone to develop your direct reports. By leveraging *networking*, a leader can play the role of “relationship broker” between a direct report and others in the organization who could support the direct report’s development. Leaders may also assist in building the direct report’s *networking* by helping him or her define supportive developmental relationships within the direct report’s own network.



Sincerity (Being perceived as open, honest, and authentic)

- Are you truly invested in the career development of your direct reports? How do you show that you are truly invested?
- Have you told your direct reports that the organization wants to invest in their development? How have you set realistic expectations for development and for promotion opportunities?

Leaders have to display sincerity in multiple ways when it comes to developing direct reports. They must first be open and honest with themselves about their interest and commitment to developing talent as well as their belief that developing talent is “part of their job.” Direct reports who demonstrate high potential want to understand the career-path options that are available, and leaders need to be forthright in setting realistic expectations for their direct reports’ development and promotion opportunities.

The challenges of managing collaborations and developing talent are just two examples of how employing political skill, or maximizing and leveraging relationships, supports leaders in being more effective. While our questions and descriptions of the ways each of the four political skill

practices may be utilized are certainly not exhaustive, they demonstrate both how leaders can begin to hone their political skill and the impact political skill can have on dealing with complex challenges.

Improving Your Own Political Skill

Given the importance of political skill in helping leaders navigate challenges and keeping their careers on track, we think demonstrating political skill is essential for effective leadership. This section will help you identify your strengths and development needs and will provide you with tips and suggestions for improving on each political skill practice. We also provide cautionary advice on how to avoid misusing political skill.

Assessment

The first step in your personal development journey is to assess your current level of political skill. We recommend that you use the questions provided below for this purpose (Ferris et al. 2005). For each pair of statements, place a check mark by the statement that best describes your behavior.

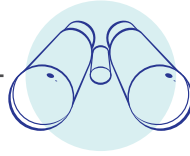
Do I ...

Social Awareness

Focus primarily on my own agenda and myself?

Struggle with knowing how to present myself to others?

Struggle with having small talk or carrying on conversations?



Try to understand the motives of other individuals' actions?

Consistently make positive impressions on others?

Naturally know the right things to say to influence others in most situations?

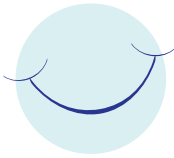
OR

Interpersonal Influence

Find it difficult to establish rapport with others?

Struggle with communicating with others?

Have difficulty getting to know others?



Put people at ease?

Interact easily and effectively with my coworkers?

Have a knack for getting others to like me?

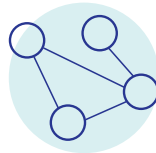
OR

Networking

Stay to myself and spend virtually all my time at work completing job-related tasks?

Primarily spend time with a close group of coworkers and friends with whom I feel comfortable?

Almost exclusively rely on formal processes for securing resources and getting things done?



Deliberately spend time networking with others at work?

Invest in building relationships with diverse and influential people at work?

Often leverage my networks and relationships at work to secure valuable resources and get things done?

OR

Sincerity

Only show interest in others when I need something from them?

Come across as being manipulative because I say and do what is needed to get what I want?

Have a tendency to be very secretive and to keep people on a strict "need to know" basis?



Take time to regularly show genuine interest in people at work?

Act sincerely around others?

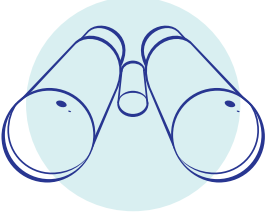
Communicate openly and transparently with others?

OR

Note: This mini-assessment was adapted from the Political Skill Inventory (PSI) developed by Ferris et al. (2005)

As you read the descriptions above, which statements typically described you? If you put more check marks by statements on the right than on the left, you may already be effectively using the political skill practices. If you put more check marks by statements on the left than on the right, then you may find that improving your performance on certain political skill practices is necessary. If you are interested in enhancing your political skill, review the tips and suggestions provided below.

Tips and Suggestions for Becoming More Politically Skilled

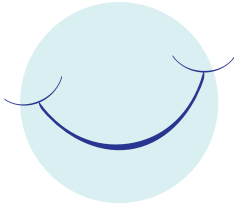
Political Skill	Development Activities	Why Is This Important?
<p style="text-align: center;">Social Awareness</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on understanding what motivates the people with whom you work. Identify the incentives and agendas that are driving their behaviors. • When attempting to influence or persuade others, show them how your proposed idea actually helps them achieve their goals or agendas. • Pay attention to the language others use as well as their body language. Observe physical behaviors such as eye contact and gestures as clues to a person’s feelings and motives. • Tailor your interactions with others based on your analysis of their motives. Flex and adjust your style to meet the needs of others. • If you’re planning to have one-on-one meetings with others, develop some talking points to help you engage others and make them feel comfortable. • Spend more time thinking about and planning how to make a positive impression on others, but remember to still be genuine. 	<p>Any good navigator must understand the terrain he or she is traveling. The same holds true when utilizing the practice of <i>social awareness</i>. Whether it is entering a meeting or speaking to someone one-on-one, there are many social cues that give you an idea of how people are feeling, their level of engagement and interest, and their intentions.</p> <p>Researchers have found that up to 93% of the meaning conveyed when communicating is nonverbal, which means there is a lot of information available to a leader in social interactions beyond what is actually said (Gentry and Kuhnert 2007).</p> <p>Researchers at MIT’s Human Dynamics Laboratory have found that <i>how</i> teams communicate is much more important to high performance than <i>what</i> is said (Pentland 2013).</p>

Political Skill

Development Activities

Why Is This Important?

Interpersonal Influence



- Ask more questions and be prepared to actively listen to others. Be sure that others know they are being heard.
- Have one-on-one conversations with others that de-emphasize any power dynamics. Try to have conversations in a neutral location rather than in someone's office. This may help put others at ease and increase their receptivity to your ideas.
- Don't underestimate the power of being affable and friendly with others. Try to learn more about others by talking to them about their personal and professional interests. Also, be prepared to reveal more about yourself. This will enhance your likeability and help you establish rapport and connections with others, which ultimately will increase your ability to influence others.
- Sell others on your ideas rather than forcing your ideas on them. Help them understand how they will personally benefit from taking your suggestions.
- Communicate clearly and concisely with others. When having formal meetings, jot down the specific points you want to make. When relevant, close meetings by drafting specific action items. This will help ensure that there is shared understanding and agreement, and thus builds in accountability for all involved parties.

Coworkers may want to know that they are being heard and understood, and asking questions and listening are effective tools to integrate into your interpersonal style. CCL's work with senior leaders has shown that friendliness and affability are some of their lowest rated characteristics, and that simply displaying warmth and inquiring about others are powerful ways to build relationship capital, which can be used later to make progress on current and future challenges.

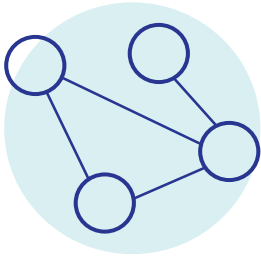
The top-down, command-and-control style of communication is losing its effectiveness and is being replaced by a more engaging, person-to-person conversational model that is built on gaining trust, listening, and knowing employees on a more personal level (Groysberg and Slind 2012).

Political Skill

Development Activities

Why Is This Important?

Networking



- Become aware of your existing network and to whom you tend to go for advice, information, and resources. Determine whether your network is too restrictive.
- Expand your network by building new relationships with others who may be outside of your group, team, or function.
- Focus on building a diverse network, not just a large network. A diverse network provides access to different and unique viewpoints, resources, and opportunities.
- Avoid building connections only when you need something. Rather, build relationships with others for the right reasons (e.g., you have genuine interest in them).
- Maintaining good relationships takes time and effort. You need to spend time with others, even when you don't need something from them.
- Spend time with others when you can connect with them on a personal level (e.g., during lunch or after hours).
- Make sure you are connected to both higher-level and lower-level people in your organization.
- Leverage your networks and connections to get things done and to secure valuable resources for your group. One way to get others to help you is by first helping them. This draws on the principle of reciprocity.

With the complexity leaders face, it simply is not possible for a single person to have the necessary skills, knowledge, and abilities to solve all problems and always make wise decisions. Effective leaders build and use their networks to tap into the resources, knowledge, and skills of others in order to handle complex challenges.

Research on networks has found that for leaders, bigger does not mean better. Instead, effective leaders build targeted and diverse networks that extend their current knowledge and abilities. These leaders know when and where to build their networks as well as when to decrease connectivity with individuals (Cross and Thomas 2008).

One of the common network traps leaders fall into is insularity. An insular network can develop when leaders are primarily connecting with like-minded individuals who share very similar perspectives. Having an insular network can mean the leader is limiting his or her access to new ideas and different insights (Willburn and Campbell 2012).

Political Skill

Development Activities

Why Is This Important?

Sincerity



- Become aware of whether others perceive you to be authentic and genuine.
- Make sure to follow through on your commitments in order to build trusting relationships.
- Be purposeful and clear in how you compliment or reward others. In other words, be genuine.
- Be transparent in communicating with others to avoid the appearance of withholding information.
- Treat all of your subordinates equally and fairly. Avoid creating the perception of showing favoritism.
- Don't rush trust; it takes a long time to build and only a short time to lose.
- Don't be afraid to show your vulnerability to others.
- Allow others to see you express a range of natural emotions. It is okay to let others see you when you're upset, frustrated, or disappointed.

Building trusting relationships is critical to effectively leading others. Trust is built over time and through multiple interactions, which makes displaying sincerity critical.

Research from the Reina Trust Building Institute has identified three ways that leaders build trust: (1) by doing what you say you will do; (2) by displaying a willingness to share information, tell the truth, and admit mistakes; and (3) by displaying confidence in others' abilities to perform and make decisions (Reina and Reina 2006).

Leaders who display trust in these ways will find that trust is reciprocal—the more they give, the more trust they receive in return from others (Reina and Reina 2006).

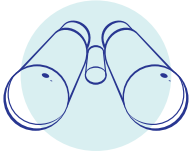
Trying to master all four of the political skill practices may seem overwhelming. We recommend first identifying the political skill practice you think could make the biggest difference in your own leadership effectiveness. When making this decision, consider the following questions:

1. **What group of coworkers are you most interested in influencing? And which political skill practice do you think would be most effective with this particular coworker group?**
2. **On which of the four political skill practices do you have the greatest development need?**
3. **Which of the four political skill practices do you feel most comfortable working on first?**
4. **Which of the four political skill practices do you personally value most?**

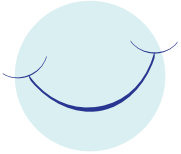
Once you have identified the area(s) in which you want to improve, set specific development goals and strategies that will enable you to achieve your goals. For example, if you are interested in improving your *networking*, you could set a simple goal to have lunch with one individual each week whom you don't know particularly well. Take these opportunities to learn more about these individuals and explore whether you have similar interests. After improving on one of the political skill practices, try to expand your skill set by developing in another practice.

A Word of Caution

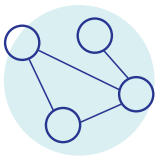
Although each of these political skill practices potentially can be used to navigate leadership challenges and increase your effectiveness as a leader, the *misuse* of these skills can also have a detrimental impact on your relationships as well as promote negative stereotypes of the *political* leader. Here is some advice on how to avoid *misusing* the political skill practices.



Social Awareness—Don't overanalyze people's actions, motives, and intentions to the point that people feel they are being judged or labeled by you. Don't play the role of "pop" psychologist.



Interpersonal Influence—If you primarily use interpersonal influence with your boss or senior managers, and not with your peers, direct reports, and others, you could be perceived as ingratiating others for your own personal gain. Don't be seen as "sucking up" to the boss.



Networking—If you find that you are making connections with others only when you need something, people may feel that you are not interested in them personally but only in what you can get out of them. Don't be a surface networker (i.e., having lots of connections but with little depth).



Sincerity—Sometimes people act as if displaying sincerity means being overly enthusiastic, positive, and flattering. This may give others the impression that they are not seeing the real you, even if you are genuinely very positive at work. Don't shy away from showing vulnerability and also from giving tough feedback.

Conclusion

Developing political skill is essential for becoming a more effective leader (Ferris et al. 2005). Leaders who have the behavioral flexibility to employ all four political skill practices, or to target the use of their political skill to different stakeholders as needed, will be more adept at maximizing and leveraging their relationships with others at work. If used properly, political skill can help you maintain a positive image in your organization and can help drive your individual, team, and organization's performance.

About This Research

Purpose

In 2005, Gerald Ferris of Florida State University and his colleagues developed a questionnaire to measure political skill that they called the Political Skill Inventory (PSI). During the development of their inventory, they determined that political skill was related to political savvy and emotional intelligence, but that it was not related to general mental ability or generalized anxiety. Political skill may be affected by leaders' personality characteristics, including affability and perceptiveness. Ferris and his colleagues also studied the relationship between political skill and leader effectiveness. They found that leaders who scored high on overall political skill (i.e., the four political skill practice ratings combined) were also more effective leaders in their organizations. They suggested that political skill contributes to leader effectiveness through two primary mechanisms: (1) coordinating interactions among team members and (2) establishing a positive reputation as a leader (Ferris et al. 2005).

Although Ferris and his colleagues significantly advanced our understanding of political skill, one of the shortcomings of their research was that they measured leader effectiveness primarily from the boss's perspective. Moreover, they did not examine the relationship between leaders' political skill and whether leaders displayed problems that could stall their careers. Finally, Ferris and colleagues did not investigate the actual usage of political skill for men and women separately or at different managerial levels. Our research was conducted to specifically address these limitations as well as the voids in current leadership research and practice on this topic.

Study Participants

During a sixth-month period between 2009 and 2010, we collected data from participants who attended one of three CCL programs: (1) the Assessment Certification Workshop; (2) the Women's Leadership Program; and (3) the Leadership Development Program. Participants in these programs completed Ferris et al.'s (2005) 18-item PSI on computer kiosks during their onsite visits to CCL in a data-collection initiative that was part of CCL's Ideas2Action (I2A) research process. Additionally, for this study, we linked participants' political skill ratings to their 360-degree (i.e., Benchmarks[®]) ratings collected as part of their program experiences.

Below is a summary of the demographic characteristics of the 207 participants who took part in this study. Findings reported in this white paper on leaders' political skill usage and the connections between political skill and career-related outcomes are based on a study using this sample of participants.

Figure 4

Demographics: Gender	Percentage
Male	55.5%
Female	44.1%
Not Identified	.5%

Figure 5

Demographics: Age	Percentage
26-30	2.4%
31-35	9.6%
36-40	20.3%
41-45	27%
46-50	21.7%
51-55	10%
56-60	5.3%
61+	3.4%

Figure 6

Demographics: Level in Organization	Percentage
Middle Level	58.8%
Upper Level	41.1%

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