The Impact of Political Skill on Impression Management Effectiveness

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In this study, the authors investigated the effect of an individual's political skill on the relationships between 5 different impression management tactics (intimidation, exemplification, ingratiation, self-promotion, and supplication) and supervisor evaluations of performance. To test these relationships, the authors used a matched sample of 173 supervisor–subordinate dyads who worked full time in a state agency. Findings showed that individuals who used high levels of any of the tactics and who were politically skilled achieved more desirable supervisor ratings than did those who used the tactics but were not politically skilled. Opposite results were found when impression management usage was low. That is, individuals who were not politically skilled created a more desirable image in their supervisors' eyes than did their politically skilled counterparts when they did not use these tactics. Practical and research implications for the findings as well as directions for future research are offered.

Keywords: impression management, political skill, social influence, supervisor evaluation, job performance

Impression management refers to the process by which individuals try to influence the impressions others have of them (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995). This process has been studied in a variety of contexts, with particular attention in recent years to work settings. Impression management researchers have focused on a number of different aspects of the workplace, including teamwork (Turnley & Bolino, 2001), interviews (Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Franke, 2002; Stevens & Kristof, 1995), performance appraisals (Wayne & Kacmar, 1991; Wayne & Liden, 1995), and promotability ratings (McFarland, Ryan, & Kriska, 2003).

In each of these situations, a person's overarching goal when engaging in impression management is to create a desired image in the minds of others (e.g., Leary & Kowalski, 1990), which can be achieved by using a variety of tactics (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). Early research on impression management primarily examined the relationship between the frequency of specific tactic usage and work outcomes such as performance ratings and career success (e.g., Judge & Bretz, 1994;

Wayne & Liden, 1995; Wayne, Liden, Graf, & Ferris, 1997). Although the extant research has established the effectiveness of certain impression management behaviors, little is known about why and how these tactics work. Social influence theory suggests that individual characteristics of the influencer may have an important effect on the efficacy of impression management tactics. Turnley and Bolino (2001) provided one attempt to begin examining this issue with an investigation of how self-monitoring affected the success of impression management behaviors in student workgroups. Their study provides an excellent starting point for understanding the impact of the personal characteristics of the influencer on impression management outcomes.

Social influence theory (Levy, Collins, & Nail, 1998) leads us to postulate that political skill is another key individual variable that will exhibit a strong influence on the effectiveness of impression management techniques. Political skill provides an individual with the ability to understand others and use that knowledge to effectively influence situations. In terms of impression management, it is likely that individuals higher in political skill will achieve more positive images when managing impressions than will their low political skill counterparts. Integrating the ideas introduced above, we offer three purposes for our study. First, we expand impression management research by investigating the images that supervisors hold of employees based on the use of five impression management behaviors (supplication, intimidation, ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification) in the same study. Second, we examine political skill as a moderating variable to determine whether it enhances the effect of the impression management tactics. Finally, we investigate these relationships using a matched sample of 173 supervisor–subordinate dyads, thus providing a research design that minimizes the concerns related to same-source variance.

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Social Influence, Impression Management, and Political Skill

Social influence is one of the most broadly studied areas in social psychology (Levy et al., 1998). At the crux of all social influence theories is the attempt to understand the process by which individuals can be persuaded to change their perceptions and decisions (Levy et al., 1998). In a work setting, individuals may want to influence how they are seen by their colleagues, by their customers, and by their subordinates. By effectively manipulating these relationships, employees may create an image of themselves at work that influences subsequent performance appraisals (Wayne & Kacmar, 1991; Wayne & Liden, 1995) and the allocation of work tasks and extra responsibilities (Becker & Martin, 1995).

Various impression management tactics can be used in the pursuit of social influence. In fact, researchers have investigated a number of different impression management tactics and taxonomies (e.g., Jones & Pittman, 1982; Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Wayne & Liden, 1995). In this study, we chose to focus on Jones and Pittman's (1982) impression management taxonomy. Jones and Pittman identified five impression management tactics: self-promotion, ingratiation, intimidation, supplication, and exemplification. In brief, self-promotion involves exaggerating or highlighting one's accomplishments and abilities so as to be seen as competent, ingratiation involves doing favors or giving flattery in the hopes of being seen as likable, intimidation involves acting threateningly or intimidatingly to colleagues so they will view you as forceful or dangerous, supplication involves broadcasting one's shortcomings in an attempt to be viewed as needy, and exemplification involves making others perceive your actions as exemplary and worthy of serving as a role model (Jones & Pittman, 1982). Jones and Pittman's taxonomy is the most appropriate for our study for two reasons. First, it is the only impression management framework with an empirically validated measure (Bolino & Turnley, 1999). Second, it encompasses a wide variety of impression management behaviors.

Impression Management Tactics

Supplication and intimidation. Research findings suggest that, in general, employees engage in impression management with the goal of creating an image that will result in positive outcomes such as high performance evaluations (e.g., Ferris, Judge, Rowland, & Fitzgibbons, 1994; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). However, for certain tactics, the positive outcomes gained by the impression manager may not result in similarly positive gains for the targets. For instance, an impression manager may use supplication to convince others that she or he is incapable of performing a task to escape a distasteful chore. Although the end result is positive for the impression manager who ducks the unpleasant task, the same cannot be said for the person who actually completes the task. Similarly, intimidation is used to create an image of danger (Jones, 1990). Again, individuals who are dealt with in such a forceful manner will most likely not view the outcome as positive. However, if the tactic results in positive results for the intimidator, such as getting out of unpleasant work duties, the outcome would be considered positive.

Little empirical work has been performed on supplication and intimidation, and the cumulative results have been inconsistent, as these tactics have produced both positive and negative effects on performance ratings (e.g., Bolino & Turnley, 2003; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Wayne & Liden, 1995). These conflicting effects suggest that previous empirical efforts are not uncovering the process by which these tactics work.

Ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification. Unlike supplication and intimidation, the impression management tactics of ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification can produce positive outcomes for all involved (Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003). However, as with the tactics of supplication and intimidation, at present researchers could support arguments that high levels of ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification can lead to either positive or negative outcomes. If the employee is able to use these tactics to develop a reputation for being a strong performer (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Turnley & Bolino, 2001), the supervisor is likely to view the employee as a competent professional. On the other hand, an employee who engages in high levels of these tactics but does so in an indiscriminate or unpolished manner is likely to be seen as less competent by a supervisor (Crant, 1996).

Incorporating the skill with which the influencer engages in the various behaviors associated with impression management may help explain the inconsistent results discussed above. Social influence theory (Levy et al., 1998) suggests that individuals who are skilled at engaging in impression management behaviors are more likely to be successful in their impression management efforts than those who are less skilled. Thus, we reason that the ability to influence is dependent on the particular dynamics of the relationship between the influencer and the influenced. Therefore, presumably the impression manager has to have an understanding of the relationship dynamics and be able to use that knowledge to his or her advantage. This reasoning led us to consider the contribution of political skill to the impression management literature.

Political Skill

Political skill is a relatively new construct that taps an individual's ability in influence situations (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005). Formally defined, political skill is "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004, p. 311). At first glance, political skill may sound similar to other social effectiveness measures such as self-monitoring, social intelligence, or social skill. However, political skill has been shown to be conceptually distinct from these constructs, as it relates specifically to interactions at work. Other social effectiveness constructs relate to more general skills and social interactions in all aspects of a person's life. Political skill also has been demonstrated as empirically distinct; for example, correlations have been reported between .13 and .33 for political skill and self-monitoring (Ferris et al., 1999; Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005). Thus, political skill is a more precise construct, appropriate for examining workplace interactions and the ability an individual has to use his or her understanding of other people at work to his or her advantage.

Since its recent operationalization, there has been limited research on the construct, most of which measures direct relationships with political skill and outcomes. Ahearn et al. (2004) found that leader political skill was positively related to team perfor-

mance. Similarly, Treadway et al. (2004) found that leader political skill positively predicted trust and job satisfaction and negatively predicted organizational cynicism through its positive relationship with perceived organizational support. Finally, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, and Ferris (2004) found that political skill was curvilinearly related to job satisfaction and job tension. Cumulatively, these studies provide tentative empirical evidence that political skill plays an important role in directly influencing workplace outcomes. Further exploring this notion, Ferris, Davidson, and Perrewé (2005) discussed a number of areas in which political skill is at play in the workplace. Although many of these studies and discussions have involved political skill as a main effect, social influence theory suggests that political skill also may play the role of a moderator between various impression management tactics and work outcomes to the extent that it serves as a way of separating those who look sincere (high politically skilled) from those who look manipulative (low politically skilled; Levy et al., 1998; Liden & Mitchell, 1988).

Effect of Political Skill on Impression Management–Outcome Relationships

The relationships between impression management tactics and outcomes are more complicated than the main effects that have been investigated in previous studies indicate. In particular, researchers have called for studies that take into account not only the frequency of tactic usage but also the style or ability of the individual doing the influencing (e.g., Higgins et al., 2003; Turnley & Bolino, 2001). In their meta-analytic review of social influence behaviors, Higgins et al. (2003) stated that "the style used by influencers likely contributes substantially to the effectiveness of influence tactics because of the influencer's ability to disguise ulterior motives of manipulation, and instead contribute to positive motives and intentions being perceived" (p. 103). This reasoning is consistent with social influence theory (Levy et al., 1998), which suggests that the ability of the influencer to understand and manage the dynamics of his or her relationship with the target is critical for success. Political skill may operationalize this ability. An individual high in political skill is able to use social cues to understand people. He or she is then able to use that understanding to tailor his or her own behavior to effectively influence others. This suggests that individuals high in political skill are able to consciously manage their own behavior to effectively influence their relationship partners. On the flipside, individuals low in political skill have less understanding of people and as a result are less able to consciously manage their workplace behaviors to effectively influence others.

Applied to impression management, social influence theory (Levy et al., 1998) suggests that the direct relationship between employee use of impression management and supervisor-rated performance outcomes will be moderated by political skill. Specifically, we argue that political skill provides the impression manager with the skill to enact impression management tactics for a positive outcome. An individual who impression manages his or her colleagues or subordinates and is politically skilled will be able to effectively mask the negative side of supplication and intimidation tactics from his or her supervisor as well as to capitalize on the positive outcomes associated with ingratiation, self-promotion, and exemplification. Possessing a high degree of political skill in

this situation implies that impression managers will be aware of both their colleagues' and their supervisors' perceptions (the two primary targets for impression management behaviors) and understand how to manipulate those perceptions to produce positive performance evaluations. In contrast, employees who frequently engage in impression management but are not politically skilled will likely receive lower performance ratings from their supervisors, as the impression managers will not have the skill to effectively manage the dynamics of the relationships in question.

On the basis of this reasoning, we offer the following hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 1(a–e):* Political skill will moderate the relationships between use of impression management (a) self-promotion, (b) ingratiation, (c) intimidation, (d) supplication, and (e) exemplification and supervisor-rated performance, such that the relationships will be positive when political skill is high and negative when political skill is low.

Method

Sample

The sample comprised 204 (94% response rate) full-time employees who studied environmental issues for a state agency. These individuals, who were primarily college educated, worked in a number of groups that focused on different aspects of environmental health. Some of the biggest areas of concern for this agency include the cleanliness of water, radiation controls, and the relationships between technology and the environment. Employees at the state agency complete some work individually but are required to interact with both their coworkers and their supervisors to effectively complete all aspects of their jobs. The demographic makeup of this sample included 118 (58%) men and 122 (60%) nonminorities with an average age of 46.1 years and an average organizational tenure of 10.88 years. In addition to gathering data from the employees, we also obtained data from each of their supervisors. Out of a possible 56 supervisors, we received responses from 52 (92% response rate).

Procedure

Data were collected over a 3-week period. One week prior to the beginning of the data collection, the director of the agency sent an e-mail to the division members introducing the study and requesting their participation. This e-mail was followed by a personalized one from the researchers that explained the goals of the study, their rights according to human subjects requirements, and a link to a Web site that housed the survey. Respondents were asked to follow the link and complete the survey at their earliest convenience, but before the end of the 3-week window. At the same time we e-mailed the respondents, we also e-mailed the respondents' supervisors asking for a number of ratings on each of their subordinates. Supervisors were provided the option of completing the survey either online or in a more convenient and less time-consuming pen-and-paper version, which was set up as a matrix so that supervisors only had to read a question once and then rate all of their subordinates on that question. All 52 supervisors chose the pen-and-paper option.

Measures

Unless otherwise noted, all of the scales were measured on 5-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The items in each scale were summed and then averaged to arrive at an overall value for the scale. Higher scores represent higher levels of each of the constructs.

Impression management. Bolino and Turnley's (1999) 22-item measure of impression management was used to capture employees' usage of the five impression management tactics. The items for all five of the impression management behaviors used the same opening phrase, "How often do you behave this way . . . " The anchors for this scale were 1 (*never behave this way*) to 5 (*often behave this way*). Self-promotion was measured with 4 items ($\alpha = .92$). A sample behavior was "Make people aware of your accomplishments." Ingratiation was measured with 4 items ($\alpha = .91$). A sample behavior was "Compliment your colleagues so they will see you as likable." Intimidation was measured with 5 items ($\alpha = .84$). A sample behavior was "Let others know you can make things difficult for them if they push you too far." Supplication was measured with 5 items ($\alpha = .93$). A sample behavior was "Act like you need assistance so people will help you out." We measured exemplification with 4 items ($\alpha = .76$). A sample behavior is "Stay at work late so people will know you are hardworking."

Political skill. We tapped political skill by having employees complete Ahearn et al.'s (2004) unidimensional six-item measure. A sample item was "I am good at getting others to respond positively to me." The internal consistency for this scale was .79.

Supervisor evaluation of performance. Supervisors rated their subordinates' job performance using 10 items. The 10 items were from three established scales: Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell's (1993) 3-item measure of subordinate competence (e.g., "This subordinate is highly competent at completing his/her job"), Liden and Maslyn's (1998) 3-item scale on employee professionalism (e.g., "I am impressed with this subordinate's knowledge of his/her job"), and Wayne et al.'s (1997) 4-item measure of interpersonal skills (e.g., "This subordinate's communication skills are excellent"). High correlations (.80, .86, and .74, respectively) among the scales encouraged us to explore using them as a single scale. Because these items were validated as separate performance scales, it was necessary to examine the factor structure of the items before combining them into a single measure. Confirmatory factor analyses indicated generally good model fit for a single performance factor: $\chi^2(35) = 196.46$, comparative fit index (CFI) = .96, normed fit index (NFI) = .95, standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR) = .05, whereas a three-factor model yielded only marginal improvement in model fit: $\chi^2(32) = 86.74$, CFI = .98, NFI = .97, SRMR = .04. Additionally, the alpha reliability for this 10-item scale was .94. On the basis of these analyses, we concluded that the use of a single performance dimension was justified.

Control variables. On the basis of theory and prior research (e.g., Bolino & Turnley, 2003; Thacker & Wayne, 1995), race, age, gender, and organizational tenure were included as demographic control variables in our analyses. We controlled for race and gender because previous research has shown that Caucasians receive higher performance ratings than non-Caucasians (e.g., Roth, Huffcutt, & Bobko, 2003) as well as the existence of some promale biases in performance ratings (Bowen, Swim, & Jacobs, 2000). Sturman (2003) conducted a meta-analysis and found that both age and organizational tenure are curvilinearly related to job performance. Thus, we controlled for these variables to eliminate noise and the potential for spurious relationships. Race was coded with 1 = Caucasian and 2 = non-Caucasian. Age was measured in years. Gender was dichotomously coded (1 = male, 2 = female). Finally, organizational tenure was measured in terms of years and months on the job and then transformed into the total number of months. Additionally, to eliminate supervisor-level effects in our analyses, we also controlled for average supervisor performance ratings (see the *Analysis Approach* section below).

Analysis Approach

Participants in this study were generally nested within supervisors (i.e., supervisors typically provided performance ratings for more than one employee). To account for supervisor-level or nonindependence effects, we used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, &

Congdon, 2004) and included the average supervisor's evaluation of all employee participants as a Level 2 control in the analyses. Missing data, deletion of two influential observations, and two single-supervisor cases reduced the sample size to 173 employees nested within 43 supervisors, resulting in an effective response rate of 85% for employees and 77% for supervisors. The average number of subordinate ratings per supervisor was 4.02 (range = 2–14). The HLM analysis included four steps. Controls were entered in Step 1, the five impression management dimensions were entered in Step 2, political skill was entered in Step 3, and the interaction term (Impression Management Tactic × Political Skill) was entered on the final step.

Results

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for, and correlations among, the variables in this study. The HLM results are shown in Table 2. A null HLM equation (i.e., with no predictors) shows that there is systematic between-supervisor variation in performance ratings, $\chi^2(1, N = 173) = 215.95$, $p < .000$. An intraclass correlation coefficient (see Hofmann, Griffin, & Gavin, 2000) shows that 51% of the variance in performance ratings resides between supervisors and 49% resides within supervisors, lending credence to the decision to control for supervisor-level effects.

The tests of our hypothesis are referred to as *means as outcomes* analyses in HLM (e.g., Raudenbush et al., 2004). The Level 1, Level 2, and mixed-model equations are available on request. As shown in the column labeled Model 1 in Table 2, among the control variables only the Level 2 supervisor control (i.e., the average of a supervisor's performance ratings) was a significant predictor of individual job performance ratings. Model 2 shows that the main effects of impression management tactics were not consistent predictors of job performance, as only supplication ($\gamma = -0.10$, $p < .05$) was a significant predictor. The main effect of political skill was also not significant in Model 3 ($\gamma = 0.05$, *ns*). Models 4–8 contain the hypothesis tests. Model 4 includes the interaction of political skill with self-promotion. The interaction was significant ($\gamma = 0.17$, $p < .05$), with a 95% confidence interval ranging from .01 to .33. Using the formula from Hofmann et al. (2000), we calculated that the interaction explained 4% of the residual Level 1 variance (i.e., ΔR^2 Level 1 model). The interactions in Models 5–8 were also significant, with explained variance estimates ranging from 2% to 5%: Political Skill × Ingratiation ($\gamma = 0.18$, $p < .01$; 95% confidence interval [CI] = .05–.31; ΔR^2 Level 1 model = .05), Political Skill × Intimidation ($\gamma = 0.19$, $p < .05$; 95% CI = .01–.37; ΔR^2 Level 1 model = .02), Political Skill × Supplication ($\gamma = 0.20$, $p < .01$; 95% CI = .05–.34; ΔR^2 Level 1 model = .03), and Political Skill × Exemplification ($\gamma = 0.20$, $p < .01$; 95% CI = .07–.32; ΔR^2 Level 1 model = .03). Plots of the significant interactions, split by low (–1 *SD*) and high (+1 *SD*) levels of political skill, are shown in Figure 1 (A–E). These figures reveal support for the hypothesis.

Providing partial support for Hypothesis 1a, the relationship between self-promotion and job performance was significant and negative when political skill was low but not significant (an essentially flat slope) when political skill was high (Figure 1A). Hypothesis 1b (Ingratiation × Political Skill interaction) was supported. The relationship between ingratiation and performance was positive when political skill was high and negative when political skill was low (Figure 1B). Partially supporting Hypothesis

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlation Matrix

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Race	1.83	0.31	—											
2. Age	46.25	8.59	.19**	—										
3. Gender	1.61	0.49	.23**	.03	—									
4. Organizational tenure	131.24	68.90	.07	.28**	.18*	—								
5. Average supervisor evaluation of job performance (control)	4.14	0.50	.07	.00	.13	.01	—							
6. Self-promotion	2.68	0.89	.23**	.09	.17*	−.01	.11	—						
7. Ingratiation	2.55	0.97	.28**	.09	.09	.06	.07	.58**	—					
8. Intimidation	1.52	0.60	.12	.08	.24**	.09	.02	.40**	.29**	—				
9. Supplication	1.43	0.67	.12	.09	.18*	−.02	−.03	.37**	.34**	.63**	—			
10. Exemplification	1.75	0.42	.06	−.11	−.01	−.03	.03	.46**	.57**	.41**	.51**	—		
11. Political skill	3.75	0.56	−.01	−.10	.04	−.05	.02	.04	.04	−.14	−.16*	−.02	—	
12. Job performance	4.16	0.64	.12	.06	.15	.10	.77**	−.02	.04	.01	−.11	−.04	.02	—

Note. $N = 173$.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

1c, intimidation was positively related to performance when political skill was high, as expected, but the relationship was not significant when political skill was low (Figure 1C). Hypothesis 1d—the political skill interaction with supplication—was largely supported. There was a strong negative relationship between supplication and performance when political skill was low and a slightly positive, though not significant, relationship when political skill was high (Figure 1D). Hypothesis 1e was supported. Exemplification and performance were positively related when political

skill was high and negatively related when political skill was low (Figure 1E).

Discussion

The current study sought to examine how political skill influenced the relationships between five different impression management behaviors and supervisor evaluations of job performance. Overall, the results from this research provided support for the

Table 2
Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results

Variable	Supervisor evaluation of performance							
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Controls								
Race	0.14	0.14	0.15*	0.15*	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.15
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Gender	0.06	0.06	0.09	0.09	0.11	0.07	0.05	0.08
Organizational tenure	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Average of supervisor performance ratings	0.97**	0.98**	0.97**	0.96**	0.97**	0.96**	0.97**	0.96**
Independent variables								
Self-promotion		−0.11	−0.13*	−0.13*	−0.13*	−0.12	−0.11	−0.13*
Ingratiation		0.04	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.05	0.03	0.03
Intimidation		0.08	0.08	0.08	0.10	0.10	0.08	0.10
Supplication		−0.10*	−0.08	−0.08	−0.09	−0.10*	−0.08	−0.08
Exemplification		−0.01	−0.01	−0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Moderator								
Political skill			0.05	0.05	0.08	0.04	0.04	0.07
Interactions								
Self-Promotion × Political Skill				0.17*				
Ingratiation × Political Skill					0.18**			
Intimidation × Political Skill						0.19*		
Supplication × Political Skill							0.20**	
Exemplification × Political Skill								0.20**

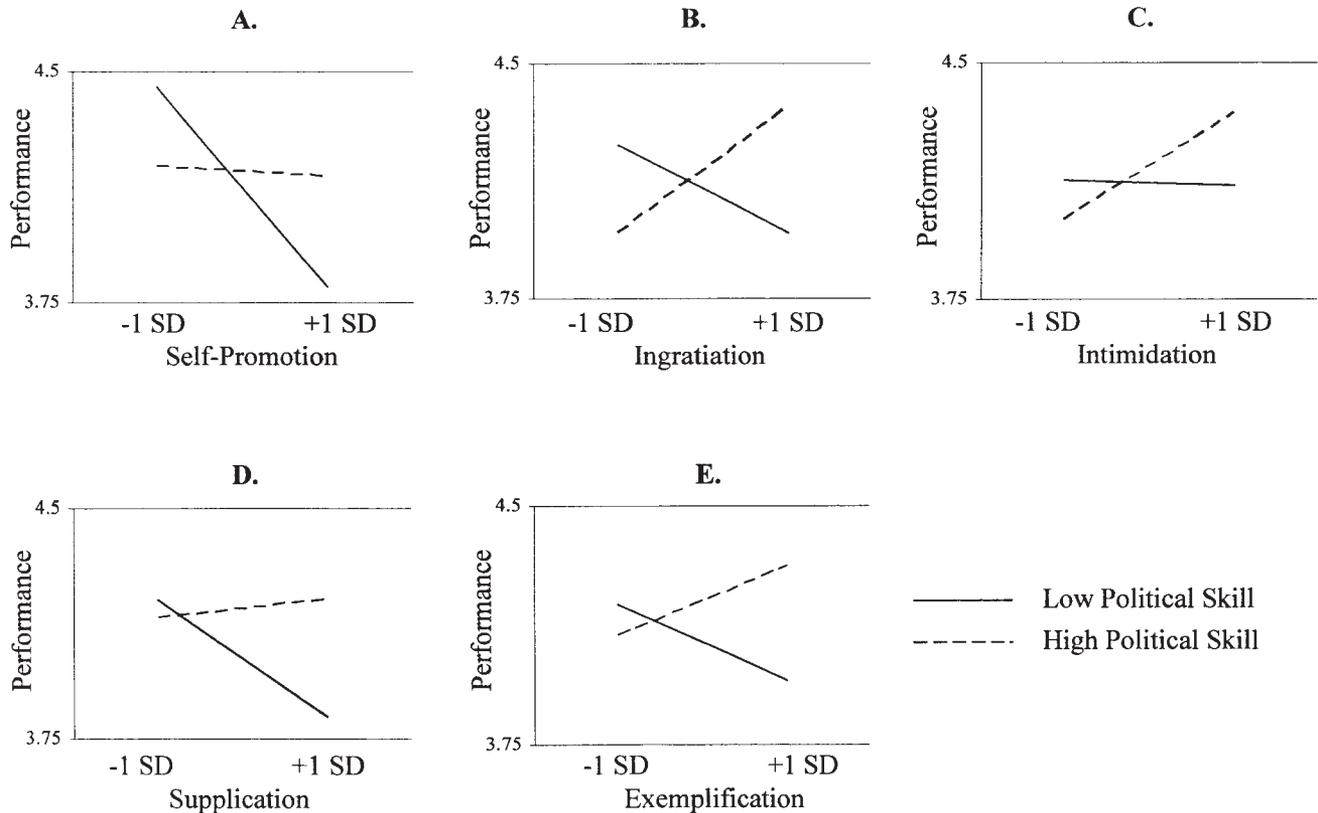*Note.* $N = 173$.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Figure 1. Interactions between impression management tactics and political skill on supervisor evaluation of performance.

notion that individuals who engage in higher levels of impression management were more likely to be seen as better performers when they were high in political skill. In contrast, individuals low in political skill who engaged in impression management more frequently were seen less positively.

Returning to social influence theory (Levy et al., 1998), the likely reason for these findings is that those who are politically skilled are able to use these tactics appropriately given the particular dynamics of their relationships with the target(s). The politically skilled appear able to understand the targets of their behaviors and use that knowledge in combination with specific impression management behaviors to influence them. Thus, as hypothesized, impression management behavior alone is not enough; for impression management to be successful, it must be matched with a high level of political skill.

Additionally, the results of this study are consistent with an earlier research effort by Turnley and Bolino (2001). In their study, Turnley and Bolino found that an individual's level of self-monitoring affected the relationships between impression management tactics and outcome variables. However, their study involved undergraduate student participants in semester work groups, whereas this study investigated individuals working in a corporate setting involved in ongoing (permanent) relationships. Thus, the consistent results between this study and Turnley and Bolino's (2001) provide support for the generalizability of the importance of measuring the skill of the influencer in determining if and why

impression management behaviors lead to desired or undesired outcomes.

Limitations of the Present Study

There are limitations in the present study that should be acknowledged to properly interpret our results. A first limitation is that we measured only general impression management attempts, as opposed to those behaviors directed toward specific individuals. Because theory and research have shown that impression management strategies differ on the basis of the direction and objective (e.g., Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Yukl & Tracey, 1992), future studies should focus on more specific impression management behaviors. A second limitation is our dependent variable. We designed our study to have three different outcome variables, but they correlated at such high levels (between .74 and .86) that it did not make practical sense to keep them separate. Although the CFAs and the alpha reliability provided evidence of the soundness of our combined dependent variable, it has not been used in any previous studies.

Additionally, the main effects of the impression management behaviors were generally not significant predictors of supervisor evaluations of job performance. Although these results were surprising and contradicted some of the previous research (e.g., Gordon, 1996; Higgins et al., 2003), the focus of the study was on the interaction terms that did explain between 2% and 5% of

the overall variance. A final limitation was our measure of political skill. More recent research on this construct has found it to be multidimensional (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005). However, correlational results ($r = .78$) comparing the unidimensional scale we used with the multidimensional scale Ferris, Treadway, et al. developed provide empirical evidence that our political skill measure is adequately measuring the construct of political skill.

Practical Implications

Our results reveal several practical implications. From the employee perspective, individuals who desire to create a favorable image in the eyes of their supervisors would benefit from knowing how best to achieve this goal. To these individuals, we submit that using any of the five impression management tactics can lead to either positive or negative impressions depending on an individual's political skill. Individuals who are high in political skill have the ability to create better supervisor impressions when they use these tactics frequently. On the flipside, individuals who engage in high levels of impression management are likely to be viewed less favorably when they are low in political skill and should avoid using impression management tactics (Crant, 1996). Thus, employees may benefit from political skill training (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005) or similar exercises to increase these skills.

From the organizational perspective, decision makers should be cautious in how individuals are evaluated, as evaluation accuracy can be affected by an individual's impression management ability. More specifically, if supervisor evaluations are used as the basis for key organizational decisions (i.e., pay, promotions, training, more visible roles), there is the potential for individuals to receive desired outcomes because of their use of impression management behaviors in combination with high levels of political skill rather than more job-related criteria. Thus, managers need to be cautious and evaluate the extent to which their recruitment, selection, and compensation practices reward impression management over skills of greater importance.

Directions for Future Research

We offer four potential areas for future research. First is additional replication. The current study used a matched sample from a state agency, with the majority of respondents holding white-collar positions. Replicating these findings with data from workers in areas such as service, military, and manufacturing would add confidence and help determine the generalizability of our results. Second, future studies should examine other impression management behaviors. In this study, we examined the five impression management tactics in the Jones and Pittman (1982) taxonomy. However, it would be fruitful for future studies to examine the interaction of impression management tactics from other taxonomies (Kipnis et al., 1980; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984; Wayne & Ferris, 1990) and political skill.

Another area for future research is to examine other moderators of the impression management–outcome relationships. The majority of previous studies have investigated direct relationships, which, although telling, do not necessarily reflect the complexities of the real world. Further, previous findings have found inconsistent results related to many of the tactics including self-promotion

(Judge & Bretz, 1994; Stevens & Kristof, 1995) and ingratiation (Gordon, 1996). A likely reason for these findings is that they did not account for moderators such as leader or coworker-rated political skill, self-monitoring, leader–member exchange quality or other aspects of the supervisor–subordinate relationship, sincerity, dyadic tenure, and gender. Finally, future researchers should extend our results related to the use of these impression management behaviors by investigating how these tactics result in different outcomes when rated by their coworkers, subordinates, or others. These different foci of impression management tactics are both interesting and important, as previous studies investigating impression management behaviors have found differential results based on the directions and ultimate objectives of the influence (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Yukl, Guinan, & Sottolano, 1995; Yukl & Tracey, 1992).

As competition for scare resources in the workplace becomes more fierce, better understanding the processes by which individuals can influence others' perceptions of them becomes imperative for employees and supervisors alike. The results of this study suggest that employees who engage in impression management may do well to finely hone their political skill. Similarly, supervisors responsible for appraising the performance would do well to make a concerted effort to look beyond impression management behaviors to true performance indicators, even when those behaviors are well cloaked by political skill. However, whether employees or supervisors heed this advice, one thing is clear: Impression management and political skill are alive and well in today's organizations.

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