**Political Skills at Work: The Case of Outstanding Employees**

# Abstract

Studies have suggested that political skills are an invaluable work asset. Yet, research on the underlying mechanism that integrates political skills with outstanding performance and personality traits is scarce. The present study addresses this gap. Our paired sample consists of 980 participants, 288 employee–supervisor dyads, and a control group of 202 employee–supervisor dyads. The results show that in their supervisors’ evaluation, outstanding employees score higher on apparent sincerity compared to other employees. In addition, outstanding employees who score high on extroversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability also score high on political skills. We infer from this that employees’ political skills should be organizationally enhanced because of their extensive practical implications. Accordingly, employees who score high on political skills should be given opportunity to enrich and cultivate those skills. This may help them advance at work and then transfer their knowledge to colleagues, thereby enhancing their organizations’ success. It is also possible that employees lacking political skills may be trained to acquire and develop them.

*Keywords:* political skills, personality traits, performance, organizational citizenship behavior, outstanding performance, exchange theory

# Practitioner Notes

**What is currently known**

* The area of political skills is one of the most fruitful research concepts to have emerged in the context of the employee performance discussion.
* Clarifying the interaction of political skills, personality traits, and outstanding employees is crucial for understanding what outstanding employees and their supervisors should do to improve organizational performance and benefit from politically constructed relationships.

**What this paper contributes**

* Outstanding employees score high on apparent sincerity.
* Outstanding employees score high on extroversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability.

**Implications for practitioners**

* The model presented in this paper suggests that outstanding employees should be trained in political skills to improve their political actions in the workplace and to contribute to improved organizational outcomes.
* Human resources management (HRM) should analyze the political skills and personality traits profiles of their outstanding employees to better formulate political skills training programs.

**Political Skills at Work: The Case of Outstanding Employees**

Human resource management practices regarding performance remain ineffective unless they take account of organizational politics. These represent the unofficial or informal actions or behaviors that employees carry out to promote their personal goals (Rughoobur-Seetah, 2021). The issue of organizational politics has been the subject of intensive research over the last two decades (Andrews et al., 2009), and political skills is one of the most productive concepts to have emerged from this scholarship (Yates & Hartley, 2021). Political skills represent the ability to understand others at work and to employ this knowledge to effectively influence them to act in specific ways (Jabid et al., 2021). The notion of political skills was first introduced by Pfeffer (1981) in theorizing on those interaction abilities with which employees understand, influence, manage, and control others. These skills, Pfeffer contended, enable employees to achieve personal or organizational goals as required by differing circumstances (Pfeffer, 1981). Since Pfeffer’s work, many scholars have established that political skills play a major role in personal career development (Robert, 2013), as they are positively correlated with performance (Chen et al., 2021). Thus, it is invaluable for scholars and organizations alike to understand how political skills are acquired or enhanced (Yates & Hartley, 2021).

Research on political skills has grown over the last decade (Chen & Gao, 2020). However, most studies have focused on supervisors and the impact of their political skills on their subordinates’ outcomes; studies on the complementary role played by the political skills of subordinates are scarce (Wei et al., 2010). Scholars agree that the absence of these skills may lead to difficulties in attaining positive outcomes, such as high job performance and positive supervisor assessment (Bağış Öztürk & Emirza, 2021). Accordingly, clarifying the interaction of political skills and positive outcomes is crucial for understanding how outstanding employees and their supervisors can improve organizational performance and benefit from politically constructed relationships.

Studies have shown ‎that political skills interact with two of the personality traits in the well-known five-factor model (FFM) of personality traits: ‎extroversion and agreeableness (Blickle, 2008, as cited in ‎Kranefeld et al., 2020). In this context, the present research has two innovative ‎goals. First, it clarifies the relationship between political skills and the traits of openness to experiences, neuroticism, and conscientiousness. Second, it identifies how the intersection of political skills and the FFM ‎affects performance and, more specifically, the performance of outstanding employees. ‎Our model can be used by human resource management (HRM) professionals to improve strategic decision-making, including in relation to managers’ long temporal orientation perspective of managers (Lin et al., 2019).

# Theoretical Background

Organizational politics is a widely studied phenomenon (Ferris et al., 2019). Organizations are unquestionably political environments, thereby compelling employees to develop political skills and engage in political behavior in the workplace. When effectively employed, political skills can significantly contribute to career development (Sunindijo & Maghrebi, 2020), as they have been shown to have a favorable impact on organizations and individuals (Hochwarter, 2018; Park & Lee, 2020). More concretely, individuals who score high in the area of political skills are likely to emphasize interpersonal interactions in the workplace. Studies have defined political skills as an interpersonal effectiveness construct in which social understanding and the purposive capacity to adjust one’s behavior are combined (Wei et al., 2010). In addition, political skills involve the social ability that allows employees to effectively harness influence mechanisms to obtain organizational power (Sunindijo & Maghrebi, 2020).

Moreover, political skills are the strongest predictor of job performance (Ferris et al., 2019), their effectiveness proving greater than that of emotional intelligence, leadership, self-efficacy, and self-monitoring (Kranefeld et al., 2020). In addition, competency in political skills influences supervisors’ subjective perception and appreciation of employee job performance, which then also contribute to real performance differences (Blickle et al., 2012). In this context, politically skilled individuals are perceived as highly genuine persons with integrity, which enables them to gain the confidence of their colleagues and to shape reality accordingly (“Political Skills in Organizations: Do Personality and Reputation Play a Role?,” 2008). Thus, this study deepens the understanding of outstanding performance and political skills in the workplace by clarifying how supervisors’ appreciation of their subordinates’ political skills compares to and contrasts with the subordinates’ self-reports of their political skills and performance.

## Performance

The notion of performance defines the way employees fulfill their job duties (Desa & Asaari, 2020; Habeeb, 2020; Motowidlo & Kell, 2012; Sanchez et al., 2019) along with the expected outcomes of their work behavioral attitudes (Van Laethem et al., 2019). More concretely, performance is a complex construct, as different employees may exhibit different performance-related behaviors at different times and in different situations (Harzer et al., 2021). Thus, performance can be measured (Desa & Asaari, 2020; Sanchez et al., 2019) according to individual or organizational criteria (Habeeb, 2020), which entails identifying behavioral patterns that directly affect and improve the production of services and goods (Diamantidis & Chatzoglou, 2019) along with quantity and quality output rates (Widodo & Wiardi, 2019). Consequently, performance is a key factor that allows organizations to distinguish between average and outstanding employees, keep track of past and future achievements (Bellé et al., 2017; van der Hoek et al., 2018), obtain regular feedback, revise and reformulate goals (Belardinelli et al., 2018; Micheli & Pavlov, 2020), and predict future employee performance.

The present study makes use of Motowidlo et al.’s (1997) model, which subdivides performance into task and contextual performance. *Task performance* represents in-role conduct leading to required outcomes and behaviors that represent specific organizational policies and goals. It reflects how employees accomplish different duties related to their jobs (Motowidlo et al., 1997; Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994). *Contextual performance*refers toextra-role behaviors, among which may be included assisting others or volunteering (Motowidlo et al., 1997), as well as engaging in different kinds of interpersonal situations that extend beyond the specific functions of one’s position (Motowidlo et al., 2018). The notion of contextual performance was expanded by Organ et al. (2006) with their concept ‎of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), which defines discretionary acts of ‎cooperation and helpfulness, such as continuously promoting effective organizational functioning and performance (Yaakobi & Weisberg, 2020). OCB is subdivided into organizational citizenship behavior toward organizations (OCB-O) and organizational citizenship behavior toward individuals (OCB-I) (Williams & Anderson, 1991). Whereas OCB-O refers to behavior that helps organizations to improve, OCB-I represents helping one’s colleagues to solve problems or suggesting options for their development (de Geus et al., 2020).

### Performance of Outstanding Employees

It is recognized that outstanding employees make effective use of their human capital to contribute to the improvement of general organizational performance (Eshet & Harpaz, 2021). Outstanding performance synthesizes abilities, personality qualities, and multiple attitudes (Elliot, 2005), including performing one’s duties with excellence (van Loon et al., 2018). As a result, outstanding employees score high on task and contextual performance (Eshet, 2020), and knowledge and contextual skills predict OCB (Motowidlo et al., 1997). More specifically, individuals who possess high self-efficacy skills are more likely to engage in adaptive behavioral strategies. They are often acquainted with the type of citizenship behavior that best suits a specific workplace situation and know how to plan meticulously and deploy this knowledge effectively (Yaakobi & Weisberg, 2020). In this context, one may argue, performance is the most suitable parameter for assessing effectiveness and efficiency at the individual and organizational levels. Based on the above, we hypothesize:

###### *‎H1: Outstanding employees score high on performance compared to average employees.*

## Personality

The FFM is a comprehensive scientific tool designed to measure ‎psychological behavior (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Dimitriadis et al., 2017; Eshet & Harpaz, 2021) and identify relevant predictors of job performance (Harzer et al., 2021). Scholarly studies have shown that there ‎are positive correlations between the FFM and political skills (Blickle et al., 2008). In this context, ‎cross-sectional studies focusing on the FFM have provided evidence that political skills are also a significant ‎predictor of overall job performance ratings (Blickle et al., 2010).‎

The FFM divides personality into five dimensions. The first is openness to experiences. Individuals possessing this trait are characterized by their quest for novelty and new experiences, for which flexibility and curiosity are crucial. The second dimension is conscientiousness, which involves a person’s level of self-discipline, dutifulness, deliverability, responsibility, and goal achievement. The third dimensions of extroversion entails the psychological inclination to be sociable, assertive, and energetic; extroverted individuals tend to take initiatives that lead to change. The fourth dimension of agreeableness encompasses individuals who are compliant, sympathetic, altruistic, trusting, cooperative, and show prosocial attitudes. Emotional stability (the positive counterpart of neuroticism) is the fifth dimension. Emotionally stable individuals are calm, exhibit low levels of stress, and are characterized by ‎their confidence and optimism in challenging situations**‎**.

### Personality Traits and Outstanding Performance

As noted above, performance the key to measuring effectiveness and efficiency, both individually and organizationally. Motivation and personality are among the many factors that influence performance (Benuyenah, 2021). In this context, OCB is better predicted on the basis of personality traits than on the basis of characteristic individual differences (Pletzer et al., 2020). More specifically, conscientiousness and agreeableness (albeit to a lesser degree) are sound predictors of OCB. Whereas agreeableness is a consistent predictor of OCB-I, conscientiousness is a consistent predictor of OCB-O (e.g., Borman et al., 2001; Hurtz & Donovan, 2000; Ilies et al.) Moreover, research has shown that emotional stability is substantially linked to task performance, OCB-I, and OCB-O (Chiaburu et al., 2011). However, neither extroversion nor openness to experiences displays any noticeable relationship with either form of OCB (Chiaburu et al., 2017), Thus, based on the above, we posit:

###### *H2: Outstanding employees will show higher levels of personality trait rates in performance that do average employees.*

## Political Skills

As noted earlier, organizations are political settings (Blickler et al., 2018; Mintzberg, 1985; Waggoner, 2020) in which internal politics are commonly accepted and socially functional (Vigoda-Gadot & Yuval, 2003). Accordingly, political behavior is a genuine and indispensable feature that determines broadly construed organizational dynamics (Oade & Oade, 2009). Politically skilled employees know how to understand social cues and elicit specific political and influential behaviors (Treadway et al., 2005). More specifically, what distinguishes these employees is how well they get along with their fellow workers. Employees who possess political skills know how to adjust effortlessly to political settings, and this enables them to make competent use of their social abilities to motivate colleagues or subordinates. An additional factor in the success of political skillful employees is their ability to feel comfortable in their work environment, which has a positive impact on their performance (Siddiqui et al., 2021). Accordingly, political skills are an essential resource for employees in reaching higher levels of success (Waggoner, 2020).

In this study, the political skills model is subdivided into four major categories (Crawford et al., 2019; Kranefeld et al., 2020). The subdivision draws on the Political Skill Inventory (PSI) (Ferris et al., 2005), which has been widely validated across many different countries and cultures (González et al., 2020; Setyorini et al., 2020).

*Social astuteness* refers to the ability to perceive ‎others keenly and successfully and to self-consciously adjust oneself to different social settings and circumstances (Shi et al., 2011). Research has shown (Ferris et al., 2005) that social astuteness predicts job performance ‎much more efficiently than do the other dimensions of political skills (Shi et al., 2011).‎

*Interpersonal influence* presumes that the behavioral style of politically ‎skilled individuals is strongly influential and allows them to adjust to different settings ‎and circumstances with the intention of eliciting favorable behaviors and responses from others (Ferris et al., 2007; Guo et al., 2020; Kimura, 2015).‎

*Networking ability* is found in highly politically skillful individuals who have ‎acquired the ability to identify and establish friendship connections or alliances (Ferris et al., 2007; Kimura, 2015). Studies have shown that informal workplace relationships have a significant impact on employee performance (Wei et al., 2012).

*Apparent sincerity* applies to highly politically skillful ‎individuals, as they possess the ability to appear genuine (Ferris et al., 2007; Kimura, 2015). As a result, they are evaluated positively by their colleagues and are perceived as ‎trusted individuals (Guo et al., 2020; Sunindijo & Maghrebi, 2020). More concretely, their behaviors are not considered manipulative, which leads others to have expectations about their future intentions and motivations (H. Chen et al., 2021).

## Outstanding Performance, Personality Traits, and Political Skills

There is little existing research showing positive correlations between political skills and the FFM (Kranefeld et al., 2020; Ohlsson et al., 2017). Ohlsson et al. (2016) established that extroversion is associated with political skills, which, in turn, affect team performance. Blickle et al. (2008, 2010) showed that individuals who score high on both agreeableness and political skills exhibit greater overall job performance than those who score low on either or both traits (Kimura, 2015). Other researchers (Ohlsson et al., 2017) have focused primarily on openness and conscientiousness to establish a relationship among these traits, performance, and political skills. In addition, research dealing with extroversion and political skills has indicated that their interaction determines the performance levels of employees who score high on political skills (Ohlsson et al., 2017). Likewise, scoring low on political skills has been shown to have a negative effect on the performance of extroverted employees (Blickle et al., 2010). Thus, we posit:

*H3:High levels of political skills influence outstanding performance.*

### Political Skills and Outstanding Performance

Empirical studies have shown that political skills are associated with supervisor-rated performance (Kimura, 2015) and that they can predict managerial ratings of performance (Ferris et al., 2005), as politically skilled employees know how to interact effectively with others and promote organizational and individual interests (Kimura, 2015). In this context, the four subcategories of political skills discussed above allow managers and entrepreneurs to regulate different political skills behaviors strategically according to situationally divergent and dynamic demands (Kranefeld et al., 2020). Accordingly, it can be concluded that political skills are a key performance component.

Furthermore, politically skilled employees excel as negotiators in ambiguous and conflicting environments, thereby contributing to their organization’s success (Ferris et al., 2005). They influence people around them persuasively and purposively (Kolodinsky et al., 2007), while promoting personal and organizational objectives (Treadway et al., 2013). In addition, individuals who score high on political skills are likely to avoid engaging in self‐reported ingratiating behavior with their supervisors, which often leads to high performance ratings (Breland et al., 2017). Thus, on the basis of the research literature, we posit:

###### *H4: Political skills mediate the correlation between the performance and personality traits of outstanding employees.*

# Materials and Methods

## Research Model

On the basis of the literature discussed above, the research model in Figure 1 presents the influence of personality traits and political skills on outstanding performance.‎

## Insert Fig. 1 here.

A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability and validity of the research tools. The sample included 136 employees and 123 managers. The average time taken by an employee to complete the questionnaire was 16 minutes. The content validity of the pilot study was assessed using factor analysis. To obtain orthogonal factors, the default settings were initially used in the analysis. Subsequently, the rotated matrix of loadings (varimax rotation) was used. Factor loadings were defined to be no less than 0.4. In addition, a multicollinearity test was conducted to detect high correlation coefficients between independent variables. No multicollinearity was found between the independent variables. (All VIF values were lower than 2.5).

In the full study, the innovative paired sample consisted of a total of 940 participants, including 288 pairs of outstanding employees and their supervisors, and 202 pairs of average employees and their supervisors as a control group. The sample was selected from the finalists of the Excellent Worker Prize of Israel sponsored by *Ma’ariv*, a daily Israeli newspaper. In this competition, outstanding employees were selected by a committee consisting of 18 experienced professional members and led by the president of the National Labor Court. As a first step, department managers in each organization were asked to choose their best employees. A committee consisting of the human resources manager, the chairperson of the employees’ union or workers’ council, and the organization’s director general selected the most outstanding worker in their organization. Thus, each organization selected its top-performing employees, who were contacted by phone and invited to participate in the current study. After their permission was obtained, the questionnaire was sent to each of these employees via email. The employees and their direct supervisors completed the questionnaires separately. In addition, each supervisor selected one average subordinate employee and evaluated his or her overall performance. The dropout rate was 38%.

As shown in Table 1, most of the outstanding employees were married with children (86%) and were members of a labor union (67%). About half of them were men (52%), and half received an academic education (51%). The average age of the outstanding employees was 54.5 years (*SD* = 9.12), and their average tenure in the workplace as a public administration employee was 23 years (*SD* = 8.76). Cramér’s V shows a medium correlation between outstanding employees and the gender, education level, marital status, and labor union membership status of their supervisors.

**Insert Table 1 here**

## Measures

Seven-point Likert scales were used for all survey items, with anchors of 1 (strongly ‎disagree) and 7 (strongly agree).

### Performance

*Task performance* was measured using the seven-item scale of Williams and Anderson (1991; sample item, “The employee adequately completes assigned duties”). Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was used to measure the reliability of the scale, and the value of alpha was 0.88 (Jawahar & Ferris, 2011). ‎*Contextual performance* was measured using the ten-item scale of Moorman and Blakely (1995; sample item, “Goes out of his/her way to help coworkers with work-related problems”). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was 0.91.

### Political Skills

We employed the four categories of the PSI developed by Ferris et al. (2005). The questionnaire consisted of 18 items, and the validity of the scale for ‎supervisors’ ratings was confirmed by Blickle et al. (2011). An example of ‎a question measuring supervisors’ reports on employees and ‎employees’ self-reports on PSI is “I spend a lot of time and effort creating work networks with others.” The Cronbach’s ‎alpha coefficients were 0.90 for employees and 0.89 for supervisors.‎

### Personality

The Ten-Item ‎Personality Inventory (TIPI) developed by Gosling et al. (2003) for assessing the Big Five ‎personality factors was used in this study to measure personality traits. Employees provided self-reports on their ‎personality traits regarding the positive and negative aspects of each. ‎Examples of items measuring the positive aspect of each trait include: extroversion, “Extroverted, enthusiastic”; agreeableness, “sympathetic, warm”; ‎conscientiousness, “Dependable, self-disciplined”; emotional stability, “Calm, ‎emotionally stable”; and openness to experiences, “Open to new experiences, ‎complex.” ‎The value of Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for this questionnaire was 0.72.‎

## Data Analysis

We analyzed the data using correlation tests and t-tests via SPSS version 2‎‏5‏‎, and ‎structural equation modeling (SEM) via AMOS version 25‎.

## Procedure

A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability and validity of the research tools translated into Hebrew. This sample consisted of 136 employees and 123 managers. The average time taken by an employee to complete the questionnaire was 16 minutes. The content validity of the pilot study was assessed using factor analysis. To obtain orthogonal factors, the default settings were used initially in the factor analysis. Subsequently, a rotated matrix of loadings (varimax rotation) was used. Factor loadings were defined as no less than 0.4. In addition, a multicollinearity test was conducted to detect high correlation coefficients between independent variables. No multicollinearity was found between the independent variables (all VIF values were lower than 2.5).

We contacted the HRM of each organization with outstanding employees mentioned in the Excellent Worker Prize of Israel and invited them to participate in the study. In addition, we asked managers to report on each pair of employees, one outstanding and the other average. All questionnaires were sent via email after obtaining the permission of the participants (the outstanding employees, the average employees, and their managers). The questionnaires were completed separately by the employees and their direct supervisors using the online survey tool Qualtrics. All the employees were asked to complete the PSI and TIPI questionnaires. The managers were asked to complete the following questionnaires regarding their employees: the seven-item scale of Williams and Anderson (1991), the ten-item scale of Moorman and Blakely (1995), and the PSI. In addition, all employees and their managers were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire.

# Results



**Insert Table 2 here** Table 2 reports bivariate correlation coefficients among all the study variables and descriptive statistics for outstanding and average employees. No multicollinearity was found between the independent variables; all correlation coefficients were lower than 0.7. The results indicate that for outstanding employees, performance on OCB-I had a significant but weak positive correlation with the political skills of social astuteness (*r*= 0.119, *p* < 0.05). For average employees, OCB-I had a significant but weak positive correlation with the personality traits of agreeableness (*r* = 0.164, *p* < 0.05) and openness to experiences (*r* = 0.262, *p* < 0.001), as well as with all four subcategories of political skills, namely social astuteness (*r* = 0.299, *p* < 0.001), interpersonal influence (*r* = 0.175, *p* < 0.05), networking ability (*r* = 0.285, *p* < 0.001), and apparent sincerity (*r* = 0.201, *p* < 0.01). Our results also show that the OCB-O of outstanding employees had a significant but weak negative correlation with the personality trait of extroversion (*r* = -0.193, *p* < 0.001). The OCB-O of average employees had a significant but weak positive correlation with the political skill of networking ability (*r* = 0.172, *p* < 0.05).

In addition, the results indicate that there is a significant difference between outstanding and average employees regarding three personality traits (H2). Outstanding employees scored significantly higher than did average employees for extroversion [*t*(488) = 2.78, *p* < 0.01], conscientiousness [*t*(488) = 2.57, *p* < 0.05], and emotional stability [*t*(488) = 2.24, *p* < 0.05]. There was a significant difference between outstanding and average employees in political skills (H3). Outstanding employees scored significantly higher than did average employees for apparent sincerity [*t*(488) = 11.46, *p*< 0.001]. There is also a significant difference between outstanding and average employees in performance, with outstanding employees scoring significantly higher for OCB-O [*t*(488) = 3.15, *p* < 0.01] and task performance [*t*(488) = 2.84, *p* < 0.01], which partially confirms H1.



Insert Table 3 here Table 3 reports the results of the paired samples t-test for the political skills dimensions of the employees and their supervisors. The social astuteness of outstanding employees was evaluated at a higher level by the employees (*M* = 5.57) than by their supervisors (*M* = 5.35), and this result was significant (*t*(285) = 2.89, *p* < 0.01). In contrast, apparent sincerity was evaluated at a lower level by the employees (*M* = 5.33) than by their supervisors (*M* = 5.52); again, the result was significant (*t*(285) = -2.53, *p* < 0.05). The interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity of average employees were all evaluated at a lower level by the employees than their supervisors, and these results, too, were significant.

The performance variable was modeled according to the variables ‎of task performance, OCB-I, and OCB-O, as well as the latent variable of ‎personality traits (measured ‎‎by extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experiences, and emotional ‎stability), mediated by the latent variable of ‎‎political skills (‎‎measured as social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity) (H4).‎ The data fit ‎the employee performance ‎model marginally well (χ2 = 214.511, N = 156, *df* = 102, *p* < 0.001, ‎CFI = 0.916, GFI = 0.931, ‎RMSEA = 0.048). The structural model of performance for the sample of outstanding employees is shown in Figure ‎‎2.‎

**Insert Figure 2 here**

The results of the analysis indicate that there is a significant impact of personality traits on political skills (β = 0.42, *p* < 0.01). That is, the higher the scores of outstanding employees for extroversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability, the higher their level of political skills (although no effect was found for conscientiousness in the outstanding employee sample). In addition, political skills had a significant impact on performance (β = 0.90, *p* < 0.01). Essentially, the higher the scores of outstanding employees on one skill (social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, or apparent sincerity), the higher their level of performance. No mediation path was found between personality traits, political skills, and outstanding employee performance. H4‎ is therefore not supported.

**Insert Figure 3 here**

The results indicate that there is a significant impact of personality traits on the political skills of average employees (β = 0.78, *p* < 0.001). That is, the higher the levels of agreeableness, openness to experiences, neuroticism, and extroversion for average employees, the higher their political skills. However, no direct effect of political skills on performance was found in the average employees sample (β = 0.28, *p* > 0.05), which confirms H3. Outstanding employees have higher levels of political skills, and the results show a significant difference between outstanding employees ‎and average employees (NFI Delta−1 = 0.045, CMIN = 66.51, *df* = 12, *p* < 0.01), which confirms H1‎.

# Discussion

This paper contributes to the research literature on political skills and outstanding performance. It determines how the similarities and differences between the two factors provides deeper insights into the general phenomenon of politics in the workplace. It also clarifies the extent to which supervisors’ ratings of their subordinates’ skills reflect the subordinates’ self-reports. This finding is of key importance, as previous research has established differences between supervisors’ reports and subordinates’ self-reports, particularly in relation to OCBs (Donia et al., 2016). In this context, a recent study has shown that although employees who score high on political skills tend to receive higher performance evaluations, managers often adjust their assessments by applying fairness criteria. As a result, the performance of employees who have better political skills is often underestimated (H. Chen et al., 2021). Moreover, research has shown that political skills have a positive outcome impact on employee–supervisor relationships (Bağış Öztürk & Emirza, 2021). Studies employing multiple data sources have hypothesized about similar relationships regardless of their reporting sources (O’Brien & Allen, 2007).

Drawing on the research literature (Eshet & Harpaz, 2021), our results establish that outstanding employees score significantly higher than average employees on OCB-O, which confirms H1. The reason for this may be that extra-role behavior is a strategy-based behavior that enables improvements in individual and organizational performance (Sumarmi & Tjahjono, 2021), which is associated with political skills (Chelagat et al., 2020). Individuals who score high on political skills are astute and savvy, and characterized by their ‎ability to acknowledge the needs and interests of other people. They create the ‎impression that they possess the means that others need to succeed, which captures ‎attention and interest (Jabid et al., 2021).

Moreover, our results show that outstanding employees score significantly higher than average employees on extroversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability, which partially confirms H2. This may be explained by these employees’ tendency and commitment to fulfill organizational needs. More specifically, these traits are connected to the psychological inclination to be sociable (extroversion), compliant, sympathetic, cooperative (agreeableness), and confident and optimistic when faced with challenging situations‎ (emotional stability).

In addition, our findings confirm that outstanding employees rate themselves higher on social astuteness than their supervisors rate them (H3). This may be because social astuteness boosts their personal ability to build ties within organizational environments (Guo et al., 2020), thereby influencing their workflow and understanding their peers’ needs and intentions (Bağış Öztürk & Emirza, 2021), which is connected to OCB. On the other hand, supervisors consider the apparent sincerity of outstanding employees to be higher than the employees’ self-reports suggest. This may be explained by the commitment of these employees to performance and the sincerity of their connection with their supervisors (Bağış Öztürk & Emirza, 2021), which potentially creates confidence between them (Guo et al., 2020).

Our results do not support H4. Accordingly, there is no mediation path between personality traits, political skills, and outstanding employee performance‎. This may be explained by the fact that the main concern of outstanding employees is job performance per se; they are less interested in organizational politics and their own political skills. In other words, political skills may be dispensed with as a measure of the performance of outstanding employees.

## Practical Implications

Empirical studies have shown that scoring high on political skills benefits supervisors, employees, and workplaces (Bağış Öztürk & Emirza, 2021). Success at work requires individuals to apply and develop these competences (Ferris et al., 2002). Accordingly, a lack of these competences may lead to difficulties in achieving positive outcomes, such as high job performance and positive supervisor assessments (Bağış Öztürk & Emirza, 2021). Moreover, political skills lead to positive performance outcomes at both the personal and organizational levels; it is therefore important to nurture them. Consequently, supervisors and HRMs must consider either evaluating the personality traits and political skills of potential employees during the recruitment and selection process or nurturing those skills during the course of their employment. An additional practical recommendation supported by the findings of this study is that development programs focusing on political skills should be implemented for both managers and employees.

In summary, our study shows that employees’ political skills should be organizationally enhanced because of their extensive practical implications. Theoretical studies have indicated that political skills are a malleable asset (Hochwarter, 2018). Accordingly, employees who lack those skills can and should be trained to develop them. Likewise, employees who score high on political skills should be given the chance to further enrich and cultivate those skills. Accordingly, consideration should be given to professional development opportunities in the form of workshops or guided studies that make use of interpersonal influence.

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**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics for Employees and Supervisors*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | | Outstanding  employees | | | Average  employees | | | Supervisors | | Correlation |
| Gender | Female | 136 | 48% | | 151 | | 75% | 118 | 41% | 0.27\*\*\* |
| Male | 150 | 52% | | 51 | | 25% | 170 | 59% |
| Education | High school | 71 | 25% | | 32 | | 16% | 17 | 6% |  |
| Tertiary | 67 | 24% | | 62 | | 31% | 31 | 11% |  |
| Bachelor | 62 | 22% | | 104 | | 52% | 86 | 30% | 0.43\*\* |
| Master | 72 | 25% | | 3 | | 2% | 104 | 36% |  |
| PhD/MD | 12 | 4% | | 0 | | 0% | 31 | 11% |  |
| Marital status | Single | 13 | 5% | | 113 | | 56% | 20 | 7% |  |
| Married, no children | 2 | 1% | | 18 | | 9% | 0 | 0% |  |
| Married, children | 244 | 86% | | 66 | | 33% | 242 | 84% | 0.64\*\* |
| Divorced | 17 | 6% | | 5 | | 3% | 21 | 7% |  |
| Widowed | 8 | 3% | | 0 | | 0% | 5 | 2% |  |
| Labor union | Member | 193 | 67% | | 40 | | 20% | 154 | 57% | \*\*\*0.46 |
| Not a member | 94 | 33% | | 157 | | 80% | 118 | 43% |  |

*Note*. Outstanding employees and their supervisors, N = 288; average employees and their supervisors, N = 202. \* *p* < 0.05, \*\* *p* < 0.01, \*\*\* *p* < 0.001.

**Table 2**

*Pearson Correlations and T-test Results*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variables |  | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** | **9** | **10** | **11** | **12** |
| Personality  traits | 1. Extroversion | == | .263\*\*\* | .015 | .147\* | .024 | -.001 | -.051 | .016 | .034 | -.110 | .047 | -.079 |
| 2. Agreeableness | .298\*\*\* | == | .150\* | -.008 | .177\* | .323\*\*\* | .148\* | .336\*\*\* | .101 | -.066 | .164\* | .034 |
| 3. Conscientiousness | .016 | -.022 | == | .133 | -.040 | .142\* | .031 | .062 | .068 | -.132 | .059 | -.031 |
| 4. Emotional stability | .272\*\*\* | .207\*\*\* | -.043 | == | -.217\*\* | -.099 | -.248\*\*\* | -.126 | -.243\*\* | -.072 | .023 | -0.73 |
| 5. Openness to experiences | -.244\*\* | -.091 | -.061 | -.177\*\* | == | .265\*\*\* | .219\*\* | .283\*\*\* | .069 | .016 | .262\*\*\* | .084 |
| Political  skills | 6. Social astuteness | .241\*\*\* | .264\*\*\* | .010 | .145\* | .103 | == | .550\*\*\* | .683\*\*\* | .199\*\* | .082 | .299\*\*\* | .124 |
| 7. Interpersonal influence | .290\*\*\* | .118\* | -.042 | .095 | .071 | .670\*\*\* | == | .600\*\*\* | .228\*\* | .052 | .175\* | .124 |
| 8. Networking ability | .333\*\*\* | .183\*\* | .055 | .114 | .014 | .653\*\*\* | .683\*\*\* | == | .180\*\* | .004 | .285\*\*\* | .172\* |
| 9. Apparent sincerity | .201\*\*\* | .293\*\*\* | .006 | .100 | -.052 | .341\*\*\* | .290\*\*\* | .370\*\*\* | == | .124 | .201\*\* | .135 |
| Performance | 10. Task performance | -.078 | -.007 | -.028 | .075 | .047 | .023 | -.002 | .014 | -0.26 | == | .286\*\*\* | .572\*\*\* |
| 11. OCB- I | -.013 | -.003 | -.033 | .077 | .101 | .119\* | .052 | .077 | -.033 | .512\*\*\* | == | .375\*\*\* |
| 12. OCB-O | -.193\*\*\* | .078 | .021 | .016 | .059 | .002 | -.056 | -.034 | -.010 | .627\*\*\* | .486\*\*\* | == |
| Outstanding employees | Mean | 4.39 | 4.88 | 4.39 | 4.28 | 5.32 | 5.57 | 5.96 | 5.32 | 5.46 | 6.11 | 5.49 | 5.83 |
| Standard deviation | 1.09 | .84 | .82 | .85 | 1.12 | .92 | 0.93 | 1.09 | 1.06 | .74 | 1.09 | .83 |
| Average employees | Mean | 4.14 | 4.75 | 4.21 | 4.11 | 5.42 | 5.54 | 5.94 | 5.20 | 4.54 | 5.92 | 5.56 | 5.60 |
| Standard deviation | .84 | .86 | .67 | .76 | .99 | .82 | .86 | .96 | .71 | .71 | .74 | .77 |
| Independent t-test | | 2.78\*\* | 1.57 | 2.57\* | 2.24\* | -1.06 | 0.26 | 0.19 | 1.24 | 11.46\*\*\* | 2.84\*\* | -0.86 | 3.15\*\* |

*Note*. Outstanding employees and their supervisors, N = 288; average employees and their supervisors, N = 202. \* *p* < 0.05, \*\* *p* < 0.01, \*\*\* *p* < 0.001. Correlations above the diagonal refer to average employees, and correlations below the diagonal refer to outstanding employees. The answer responses range from 1 to 7.

**Table 3**

*Paired Samples T-test Results for Political Skills of Employees and Supervisors*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | | Employee type | Employees | | | Supervisors | | | Correlation | | T-test | |
| *M* | *SD* | *M* | | *SD* |  | |  | |
| Social astuteness | Outstanding | | 5.57 | 0.93 | 5.35 | | 1.07 | 0.145\* | | 2.89\*\* | |
| Average | | 5.54 | 0.82 | 5.58 | | 0.81 | 0.342\*\*\* | | -0.51 | |
| Interpersonal influence | Outstanding | | 5.95 | 0.93 | 5.98 | | 1.06 | 0.225\*\*\* | | -0.31 | |
| Average | | 5.94 | 0.86 | 6.15 | | 0.78 | 0.303\*\*\* | | -3.13\*\* | |
| Networking ability | Outstanding | | 5.46 | 1.06 | 5.50 | | 0.91 | 0.179\*\* | | -0.48 | |
| Average | | 4.54 | 0.71 | 4.68 | | 0.66 | 0.342\*\*\* | | -2.43\* | |
| Apparent sincerity | Outstanding | | 5.33 | 1.12 | 5.52 | | 1.12 | 0.249\*\*\* | | -2.53\* | |
| Average | | 5.20 | 0.96 | 5.57 | | 0.81 | 0.428\*\*\* | | -5.53\*\*\* | |

*Note.* \* *p*< 0.05, \*\* *p* < 0.01, \*\*\* *p* < 0.001.

**Figure 1**

*Research Model*

**Figure 2**

*Structural Model for Determinants of Outstanding Employees’ Performance*

