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The Effect of Political Skill on Work Role Performance and Intention to Leave: A Moderated Mediation Model

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The effect of political skill on work role performance and intention to leave: A moderated mediation model

1. INTRODUCTION

Political skill has received extensive and growing attention in the past decade (e.g., McAllister, Parker, Perrewé, Ferris, & Hirsch, 2015). Political skill refers to “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). Research to date has focused on the relationship between political skill and individual outcomes (see Munyon, Summers, Thompson, & Ferris, 2015, for a meta-analytic revision). However, very little research has investigated the intermediate linkages between political skill and its outcomes (Kimura, 2015).

In this study, we analyze the mediating role of perceived organizational support (POS) in the relationship between employees’ political skill and two individual outcomes especially important for organizations: work role performance and intention to leave. Although previous studies (e.g., Bing, Davison, Minor, Novicevic, & Frink, 2011) have found a positive link between political skill and performance, according to Munyon et al. (2015), more analysis on “the theoretical mechanisms underlying these findings” (p. 10) is necessary. In addition, research that analyzes the relationship between political skill and intention to leave is very limited (Munyon et al., 2015), which has resulted in calls for future research (e.g., Banister, & Meriac, 2015; Bedi, & Skowronski, 2014).

POS is a central construct in the organizational support theory (OST; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Eisenberger, & Stinglhamber, 2011), which refers to “the extent to which employees perceive that their contributions are valued by their organization and that the firm cares about their well-being” (Eisenberger et al., 1986, p. 501). To date

research on the determinants of POS has mostly focused on actions by the organization and not until recently have employee characteristics received any attention (Eisenberger, & Stinglhamber, 2011). In this study, we follow the suggestion of Munyon et al. (2015) and we argue that political skill might influence POS, something that as far as we know has not been examined before.

In addition, according to OST (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger, & Stinglhamber, 2011) we propose that POS is positively related to work role performance and negatively associated with intention to leave.

The small effect sizes of POS on performance found by Kurtessis et al. (2017) meta-analytic evaluation of OST, “suggest the value of a theory-based examination of moderators” (p. 20). Similarly, it can be argued that the POS-intention to leave relationship may be affected by moderators. In this work, in line with resources conservation theory (COR, Hobfoll, 1989), we pose that the POS-work role performance and -intention to leave relationships are moderated by political skill, to the extent that political skill (i.e., a personal resource) may compensate the effect of low POS (i.e., an organizational resource) on these outcomes.

In sum, we propose a moderated mediation model that explains why and when political skill is related to work role performance and intention to leave. According to this model, political skill is indirectly related to work role performance and intention to leave through POS. In addition, we argue that these indirect relationships are moderated by political skill. The conceptual model is tested in a sample of engineers, an occupational group especially important in the current economy (UNESCO, 2010).

Our study makes four relevant contributions to the literature. First, we aim to shed some light to the political skill field (e.g., Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005a) by examining if politically skilled employees have an advantageous position in their relationship with the organization that helps them perceive more support. To our knowledge, no study has analyzed

this relationship. Second, we add to research on the performance repercussions of political skill (e.g., Bing et al, 2011) by examining whether political skill elicits performance behaviors important in the current, turbulent work environment, and identified by Griffin, Neal, and Parker (2007) in their new model of work role performance. Third, by examining the mediating role of POS in the political skill-work role performance and -intention to leave relationships, we respond to calls for research (e.g., Ferris, Treadway, Brouer, & Munyon, 2012; Kimura, 2015; Munyon et al., 2015) to improve understanding of the intervening mechanism between political skill and its outcomes. Forth, we contribute to extend OST by detecting under which conditions the relationship between POS and its outcomes is buffered or exacerbated.

2. THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. The mediating role of perceived organizational support in the political skill-outcome relationships

Organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger, & Stinglhamber, 2011) can help explain why political skill is related to performance behaviors that are especially relevant in the current work environment (proficiency, adaptivity, and proactivity; Griffin et al., 2007), and to intention to leave. According to OST, employee characteristics are potential antecedents of perceived organizational support. In this work we argue that individual differences in political skill may have an impact on POS.

Political skill is composed of four dimensions distinct but related: networking ability, apparent sincerity, interpersonal influence, and social astuteness (Ferris et al., 2005b). Employees skilled politically, through their networking ability, might establish and effectively utilize connections in the work environment, which would help them gain access to valued resources and, consequently, have success in their job and organization. Moreover, networking is a dyadic process that results in social capital, goodwill, and trust between partners (Porter, & Woo, 2015). The ability of interpersonal influence of politically skilled employees helps them

use their social capital and attain greater access to information. In addition, their apparent sincerity makes politically skilled employees seem like they have higher levels of sincerity and integrity, thus, resulting trust worthier (Lvina, Maher & Harris, 2017). Finally, their ability to read and understand how people work (social astuteness) allows them to appropriately adjust their behavior to different situational needs, which gives them a sense of control and self-confidence to navigate political arenas (Ferris et al., 2007).

Politically skilled employees are thus inclined to consider the environmental stimuli associated with interpersonal interactions as an opportunity rather than a threat (Perrewé et al., 2004). Due to their subtle and convincing personal style, politically skilled employees can obtain, from their interactions with other organization members, especially those in power, an advantageous position on resource distribution and impact important organization decisions. Consequently, political skill might lead to better treatment by the organization and a greater perception of support.

H1a: Political skill has a positive relationship with perceived organizational support.

OST posits that POS has important behavioral consequences. According OST (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger, & Stinglhamber, 2011), POS initiates a social exchange relationship signaling to employees that the organization appreciates their contributions, is concerned with their well-being, and wants more than a simple economic relationship with them. In addition, POS ensures employees that their increased efforts will be reciprocated by the organization and, by doing so, it invokes the reciprocity norm (Gouldner, 1960). Then, employees feel obligated to help the organization reach its objectives to reciprocate this POS. As a result, according to OST, POS should increase performance and actions favorable to the organization that go beyond assigned responsibilities. Specifically, employees will consider an improvement in their performance an appropriate way to reciprocate for social benefits granted by the company. Therefore, we argue that employees that perceive organizational support are more likely to

show work role performance, in other words, to be proficient, and shown adaptive and proactive behaviors.

Given that we have hypothesized a positive relationship between political skill and POS (i.e., Hypothesis 1a), we further propose the following:

H1b: Perceived organizational support mediates the positive relationship between political skill and work role performance.

OST also holds that POS helps fulfill socioemotional needs, such as those for esteem, affiliation, emotional support, and social approval (Eisenberger, & Stinglhamber, 2011). The fulfillment of these needs generates in employees an obligation to reciprocate, resulting in greater commitment to the organization (e.g., Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990) and leading to greater organizational identification with the company (Sluss, Klimchak, & Holmes, 2008). Moreover, POS may increase the employees' belief that the organization will help them when faced with high work demands, because POS implies that the organization cares about its employees' wellbeing. Consequently, employees should be less inclined towards withdrawing from the organization, i.e., should have lower intentions to leave. This negative relationship has been empirically supported (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Therefore, we pose that employees that perceive organizational support are less likely to have intention to leave the organization.

Hence, given that we have hypothesized a positive relationship between political skill and POS (i.e., Hypothesis 1a), and based on OST, the norm of reciprocity and previous research, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1c: Perceived organizational support mediates the negative relationship between political skill and intention to leave

2.2. Moderating effect of political skill on the relationship between perceived organizational support and individual outcomes

Despite the expected impact on work role performance and intention to leave of POS, we argue that other factors (i.e., political skill) may act to buffer these effects. This should deepen our insight into why POS does not necessarily culminate in higher work role performance and lower intention to leave.

Consistent with conservation of resources theory (COR, Hobfoll, 1989), we hypothesize that political skill moderates the POS-work role performance and -intention to leave relationships. COR theory identifies four classes of resources that employees may possess: objects, conditions, personal characteristics and energies. The core tenet of COR theory is that employees are driven to obtain, maintain, and protect valuable resources to meet the challenges of the environment. Personal resources refer to people's sense of having control over, and managing to successfully impact their environment (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003). Political skill has been described as a personal resource that has the potential to neutralize the effects of stressors because it provides employees with additional resources (both internal and external) that they use for coping with stressors (Ferris et al., 2007). Consequently, political skill might influence not only the amount to which employees perceive these stressors as threats, but also their degree of actual coping ability (Harvey, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2007).

An important component of COR theory is the replacement hypothesis (Hobfoll, 1989). According to this hypothesis, if one resource is low (e.g., POS), employees may use another resource (e.g., political skill) to compensate for it. Politically skilled individuals perform a more accurate assessment of their work context and are able to appropriately adapt their behavior to the situation (e.g., Ferris et al., 2005a; Ferris et al., 2012). Moreover, their ability to present the selected behaviors in a way that enables them to influence others, together with their networking ability, will help them acquire support and the needed resources to attain high work role performance even in low POS situations. Thus, political skill, by increasing the employees'

ability to navigate low POS environments, might compensate the effect of low POS on work role performance. On the contrary, employees with low political skill may need to perceive high POS to attain high work role performance. Therefore, the relationship between POS and work role performance may differ across different levels of employees' political skill.

Similarly, political skill is likely to compensate for lower degrees of POS in the case of intention to leave. COR theory suggests that if employees are able to substitute an organizational resource (i.e., POS) with another resource (i.e., political skill), they will have lower intentions to leave. Thus, the impact of POS on intention to leave can differ depending on political skill. Employees who have high political skill are more likely to experience less adverse effects in situations where they perceive low levels of organizational support and, consequently, the effect of POS on intention to leave will be weaker. Political skill then demonstrates a neutralizing effect on low POS situations because the additional resources possessed by those high in political skill render this situation as a non-threat. On the contrary, as low politically skilled employees perceive more threats, less control, and less security in their environments (Ferris et al., 2007), they will need more POS to experience lower intention to leave.

Hence, based on the aforementioned arguments, we suggest that political skill can lessen the effect of POS on work role performance and intention to leave.

H2a: Political skill moderates the relationship between POS and work role performance; namely, when political skill is higher, POS has less of an effect on employee's work role performance than when political skill is lower.

H2b: Political skill moderates the relationship between POS and intention to leave, namely, when political skill is higher, POS has less of an effect on employee's intention to leave than when political skill is lower.

In sum, we propose that employees' political skill is indirectly related to work role performance and intention to leave through POS. These indirect relationships are conditional on the level of political skill, due to its moderator effect on the links from POS to work role performance and intention to leave. As such, this moderated mediation model explains why and when political skill relates to work role performance and intention to leave. To test this model, we hypothesize that:

H3a: The indirect relationship between employees' political skill and their work role performance is mediated by POS and moderated by political skill, such that the indirect relationship is weaker when political skill is higher.

H3b: The indirect relationship between employees' political skill and their intention to leave is mediated by POS and moderated by political skill, such that the indirect relationship is weaker when political skill is higher.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample

The data for the study were collected from Spanish engineers. The selection of engineering professionals is based on two main reasons. First, according to the UNESCO (2010), engineers are an important professional group both for organizations and society and they are also scarce worldwide, which favors their mobility. Second, political skill and Griffin et al.'s (2007) measure of performance are particularly important for engineers. Trevelyan (2007) showed that the ability to work with and influence other people is a key characteristic of effective engineers. Knowing how to increase engineers' performance is key for companies where they form a substantial proportion of their staff because their work contributes significantly to organizational performance (García-Chas, Neira-Fontela, & Varela-Neira, 2015). Moreover, engineers have to meet the known expectations and requirements of their tasks; in addition, the "transformation of established industries by new information and communication technologies"

(Johri, 2011, p. 71) makes necessary for engineers to adopt adaptivity behaviors. Finally, as engineering involves significant uncertainty (Vincenti, 1990), engineers must anticipate and act upon the external environment in self-directed ways to achieve effective outcomes, i.e., they must carry out proactive behaviors.

In total, we contacted 250 firms from different industries and a substantial number of engineers in their staff. The final sample for this study consisted of 180 engineers, 47 supervisors and 25 companies. Matching questionnaires were distributed to engineers and their supervisors in each company. Supervisors rated engineers on the performance items and completed ratings for four engineers on average.

A cover letter accompanied the survey explaining the purpose of the project and the voluntary nature of participation. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and we offered HR managers the opportunity to receive general feedback. To maximize response rate, our contacts in the companies were contacted by phone or e-mail a week after the initial distribution of the survey.

In the sample of engineers, 73.9% were men and 26.1% were women. The average age was 35.17 years. In reference to job category, 92.1% were non-executive and 7.9% were executive. As far as engineering field is concerned, 27.4% were from industrial, 24.4% from telecommunications, 19.6% from civil engineering, 14.3% from marine, 11.3% were from computer systems and 3% from agricultural engineering.

3.2. Measures

All multi-item measures used in this study were translated into Spanish from previously validated and published instruments. Each item required a response on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Work role performance was measured using the nine-item scale developed by Griffin et al. (2007). This scale includes three dimensions of individual performance: proficiency (e.g.,

ensures core tasks are completed properly), adaptivity (e.g., adjusts to new equipment, processes, or procedures in core tasks), and proactivity (e.g., initiates better ways of doing core tasks). Each subscale is measured by three items. This measure was provided by the engineer and by the supervisor. By using the ratings of supervisor we reduced the possibility of common-method biases, since all the other measures were provided by the engineer and, consequently, measures of the predictor and criterion variables were obtained from different sources (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). We analyzed the fit of work role performance measure by building a second order factor from its dimensions, obtaining acceptable fit robust indices ($\chi^2(25) = 95.140$ ($p < .001$); CFI = .952; IFI = .952; RMSEA = .057). Moreover, in our study, the Cronbach's alpha consistency is .860.

Political skill was measured using the four-dimensional political skill's scale developed by Ferris et al. (2005b). The Political Skill Inventory (PSI) has been developed as a multidimensional measure of political skill which comprises four sub-scales: networking ability, apparent sincerity, social astuteness and interpersonal influence (Ferris et al., 2005b). We used the three original items of the apparent sincerity dimension. However, to shorten the survey, we employed the three items with highest factor loading in the Ferris et al. (2005b) study for the other three dimensions of political skill (networking ability, interpersonal influence, and social astuteness), to simplify the survey instrument and to save the respondents' time. Therefore, based on their original 18-item scale, a shortened 12-item version composed by the three items with highest factor loading for each dimension was used. After that, we carried out a separate second-order confirmatory factor analysis, in which all the items loaded onto their expected sub-dimensions and all four sub-dimensions loaded to an overall factor measuring political skill. Convergent validity was examined by investigating the item loadings and their significance. The analysis exhibited satisfactory fit statistics ($\chi^2(51) = 95.461$ ($p < .001$); CFI = .971; IFI = .972; RMSEA = .056; NNFI = .963) and all factor loadings were

significant. This provided evidence of the validity and reliability of the measurement instrument (Bollen, 1989). Moreover, in our study, the Cronbach's alpha consistency is .795.

POS was measured using the eight-item scale proposed by Eisenberger, Cummings, Armelo, and Lynch (1997). We had to eliminate one item after estimating the model because of validity problems. In our study, the Cronbach's alpha consistency is .897.

Intention to leave was measured using the scale proposed by Moore (2000), selecting the three items with greatest factor loading. In our study, the Cronbach's alpha consistency is .848.

Control variables. We included a number of control variables. Engineers' age and experience (in months) were included because previous research (Gainsburg, Rodríguez. Lluesma, & Bailey, 2010; Anderson, Courter, McGlamery, Nathans-Kelly, & Nicometo, 2010) has suggested that, in the case of engineers, most of the knowledge required to obtain high performance at work is provided by engineering practice, gender (0 = male; 1 = female) was included as a control variable because according to a recent meta-analysis females scored slightly higher than males on job performance measures (Roth, Purvis, & Bobko, 2012). Finally, job category (0 = executive; 1 = non-executive) and degree level (0 =bachelor and master degree; 1=bachelor degree), were included to control the potential heterogeneity among the engineers of our sample.

3.3. Analyses

As we have previously mentioned, first, we analyzed the fit of the political skill and individual work role performance measures by building second order factors from their dimensions, obtaining acceptable fit robust indices (political skill: $\chi^2 (51) = 95.461$ ($p < .001$); CFI= .971; IFI = .972; RMSEA = .056; work role performance: $\chi^2 (25) = 95.140$ ($p < .001$); CFI= .952; IFI = .952; RMSEA = .057).

After that, we performed a series of CFAs to examine the distinctiveness of the variables. We compared the fit of the hypothesized model where employee's political skill and supervisor's assessment of individual work role performance were treated as second order factors (χ^2 (471) = 846.993 ($p < .001$); CFI=.965; IFI=.965; RMSEA=.069; NNFI=.964) with three alternative models: a model where political skill and self-ratings of performance were treated as second order factors (χ^2 (471) = 822.449 ($p < .001$); CFI=.958; IFI=.958; RMSEA=.066; NNFI=.957), a model where political skill's dimensions correlate with supervisor's assessment of work role performance's dimensions (χ^2 (399) = 771.876 ($p < .001$); CFI=.907; IFI=.909; RMSEA=.075; NNFI=.892), and, finally, a model where political skill's dimensions correlate with self-ratings of work role performance's dimensions (χ^2 (404) = 819.795 ($p < .001$); CFI=.888; IFI=.886; RMSEA=.078; NNFI=.869). The best fit corresponds with the model where employee's political skill and supervisor's assessment of work role performance are treated as second order factors.

After having obtained support for the hypothesized model (where employee's political skill and supervisor's assessment of work role performance were treated as factors), we analyzed the constructs' reliability. All constructs manifest a composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) greater than the recommended threshold values of 0.6 and 0.5, respectively (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1999). With respect to validity, convergent validity is supported as all lambda parameters are significant and greater than 0.5. Discriminant validity is also supported as correlations among all the variables show confidence intervals that do not include the unit value and their squared value does not exceed the AVE. We include in the APPENDICES the psychometric properties of the scales.

Because of its nested nature, the study utilizes the intraclass correlations coefficients (ICC1 and ICC2) to assess the interdependence of data. ICC indices are the most appropriate

test in cases where non-independence due to group membership is expected. Even in those cases where the analyst is not interested in establishing criteria for aggregation, the concept of non-independence is important to multilevel analysis because of its key role in the analysis and interpretation of results from grouped data. When ICCs are calculated on the dependent variable, it is generally considered a measure of non-independence (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992; Kreft & DeLeeuw, 1998), whereas when ICCs are calculated on an independent variable, it is generally being used as a measure of reliability and to establish criteria for aggregation. The average ICCs for work role performance were $ICC1=.364$ and $ICC2=.655$ and for intention to leave were $ICC1=.277$ and $ICC2=.730$.

The ICC1 value may be interpreted as an effect size estimate revealing the extent to which the performance evaluation and intention to leave are affected by employees' membership of the organization (Bliese, 2000; Hofmann, Griffin & Gavin, 2000). Specifically, a value of .01 might be considered a "small" effect, a value of .1 might be considered a "medium" effect, and a value of .25 might be considered a "large" effect (Murphy & Myors, 1998). The ICC2 value provides an estimate of the reliability of the group means (Bartko, 1976; James, 1982). ICC1 and ICC2 are related to each other as a function of group size (Bliese, 2000; Glick, 1985). In the case of ICC2, the cutoff recommended by Glick (1985) is .60. Therefore, in the current study the values obtained are in line with those recommended, and permit us to conclude that the group affects the data. Due to the lack of independence, the current study tests the hypotheses using Multilevel Structural Equation Modeling (MSEM). A different approach to work with non-independent data is Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM), nevertheless, contrary to HLM, MSEM enables researchers to model the relationships among multiple independent and dependent constructs simultaneously. SEM permits complicated variable relationships to be expressed through hierarchical or non-hierarchical, recursive or non-recursive structural equations, to present a more complete picture of the entire model (Bullock

et al., 1994). MSEM, a synthesis of multilevel and structural equation modeling, is required for valid statistical inference when the units of observation form a hierarchy of nested clusters and some variables of interest are measured by a set of items of fallible instruments (Rabe-Hesketh, Skrondal & Zheng, 2007).

3.4. Results

We used Stata 13 to test our hypotheses. According to Rabe-Hesketh, and Skrondal (2008), Stata is a natural choice for multilevel modeling since it has gradually become perhaps the most powerful general-purpose statistics package for such models. This software is useful for handling multilevel data where individuals are nested within groups.

To assess the moderated mediation process, steps outlined by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007) were followed. Therefore, several MSEM analyses were carried out. As shown by table 1, political skill has a positive significant impact on the mediator, a positive significant impact on work role performance and a negative significant impact on intention to leave when the mediator is not included in the analysis. Moreover, POS has a significant positive impact on work role performance and a significant negative impact on intention to leave. Finally, the interaction of political skill with POS was significantly and negatively related to work role performance and intention to leave. This indicates a weaker positive relationship between POS and work role performance when political skill is high than when it is low, and a stronger negative relationship between POS and intention to leave when political is high than when it is low.

Insert Table 1 here

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the interaction between political skill and POS on intention to leave and work role performance. We plotted two levels of political skill: at 1 SD below mean and at 1 SD above the mean (Aiken & West, 1991). Figure 1 shows that the relationship between

POS and intention to leave is negative for both high and low political skill but the relationship is stronger for high than for low. This form of the interaction is against the hypotheses. The simple slopes for both high political skill ($b=-.711$, $t=-15.025^{***}$, $p<.001$) and low political skill ($b=-.585$, $t=-12.368^{***}$, $p<.001$) are significantly different from 0. Also the two slopes were significantly different from each other ($t=-2.184^{**}$, $p<.05$). Figure 2 shows that the relationship between POS and work role performance is positive for both high and low political skill but the relationship is stronger for low than for high. This form of the interaction is in line with the hypotheses. The simple slopes for both high political skill ($b=.921$, $t=8.417^{***}$, $p<.001$) and low political skill ($b=1.285$, $t=13.108^{***}$, $p<.001$) are significantly different from 0. Also the two slopes were significantly different from each other ($t=-3.109^{**}$, $p<.01$).

Insert Figures 1 and 2 here.

Finally, to establish the moderated mediation process the strength of the mediation via political skill must vary across different levels of the moderator. Hence, the significance of the indirect effects of political skill on work role performance and intention to leave via POS for engineers with low/moderate/high political skill was calculated using bootstrapped 95 percent CIs (see table 2). As the 95% confidence intervals do not include zero, political skill is positively and indirectly related to work role performance (via POS) when political skill is low (1 SD below the mean), moderate (mean) and high (1 SD above the mean). Moreover, the results also reveal that the positive indirect relationship between political skill and work role performance through POS is greater the lower the political skill of the engineer. Regarding intention to leave, political skill is negatively and indirectly related to intention to leave via POS when political skill is low, moderate and high, but this negative indirect relationship is greater the greater the political skill of the engineer.

Insert Table 2 here

Our previous analyses have used performance ratings of supervisors. Since engineers provided all the other measures, using ratings of supervisors reduces the possibility of common-method biases (Podsakoff et al., 2003). However, as it can be argued that politically skilled individuals may influence supervisor ratings of their work role performance (Bing et al., 2011), we also contrasted our model with self-ratings of engineers. As we previously showed, the alternative model has a good fit to our data ($\chi^2(363) = 631.374$ ($p < .001$); CFI = .966; IFI = .966; RMSEA = .065). The analysis shows that the paths are still significant: both political skill and POS have a positive path to work role performance (.847**; .536**). In addition, the moderating role of POS in the relationship between political skill and work role performance is also negative and significant (-.031**). Finally, regarding the indirect effects, the results also reveal that a positive indirect relationship between political skill and work role performance through POS that is greater the lower the political skill of the engineer (low = .116** [.067; .165]; moderate = .095** [.050; .136]; high = .073** [.030; .109]).

4. DISCUSSION

In this study, we extend research on political skill (e.g., Ferris et al., 2005a) and organizational support theory (e.g., Eisenberger, & Stinglhamber, 2011) and link two previously separated literatures. Based on OST, we respond to several calls to examine the intermediate mechanisms between political skill and its outcomes (e.g., Ferris et al., 2012; Kimura, 2015; Munyon, 2015) while also adding to the still scarce research that relates political skill to intention to leave. Moreover, using COR (Hobfoll, 1989) as a guiding framework, we examine the moderating role of political skill in the relationship between POS and two important outcomes: work role performance and intention to leave. Our findings, in a sample of engineers, supported most of our hypothesized model.

Specifically, our findings showed that engineers' political skill is positively related to their perception of organizational support. This finding is an important extension to the political

skill literature and organizational support theory since prior research has not considered the possibility that employees' political skill can be a predictor of situational variables such as POS. To date, research on the antecedents of POS has primarily focused on organizational variables but not on employee characteristics (Eisenberger, & Stinglhamber, 2011). To our knowledge, our study is the first to explore the antecedents of POS from the political skill perspective.

The second theoretical contribution of this study is the identification of POS as a mediator variable between political skill and two outcomes especially relevant to organizations: work role performance and intention to leave. We found that POS mediates the positive relationship between political skill and work role performance (assessed by the supervisor and the engineer). Nevertheless, political skill reduces the effect of POS on work role performance, hence, diminishing its indirect effect through POS. Moreover, we found that political skill has also a direct positive effect on work role performance after taking into consideration its effect through POS. Therefore; POS helps us understand why political skill is related to performance behaviors especially relevant in the current work environment.

In addition, we found that political skill has a direct and indirect relationship (through POS) with engineers' intention to leave. More specifically, the indirect relationship between political skill and intention to leave through POS is negative whereas the direct relationship is positive. This is a relevant finding since it highlights the need to carefully consider the different consequences of political skill in relation to intention to leave. Political skill increases the "movement ease" (March, & Simon, 1958) because it is associated with the generic human capital (no specific). Moreover, a characteristic of politically skilled employees is their ability for networking, and "employees' external networks enhance mobility" (Coff, & Kryscynski, 2011, p. 1433). Therefore, the higher perception of job alternatives by politically skilled employees can act as a "pull-to-leave" force (Burton, Holtom, Sablinski, Mitchell, & Lee, 2010) increasing their intention to leave. At the same time, political skill, by increasing their

opportunities to establish work relationship, to guarantee the means to achieve high performance, and to attain recognition by the organization, increases their perceptions of organizational support. These perceptions of organizational support can act as a “pull-to-stay” force that induces staying in the organization and counteracts the direct effect of political skill on intention to leave.

Third, previous research on moderator variables in the POS-outcomes relationships is scarce (Kurtessis et al., 2017), and no research, to our knowledge, has analyzed moderators in the POS-work role performance and -intention to leave relationships. Despite the direct relationship between POS and work role performance and intention to leave, we show that not all engineers have the same response to POS; they are also affected by their personal characteristics (i.e., political skill). In line with resources conservation theory, we demonstrate that political skill attenuates the relationship between POS and work role performance. In other words, engineers’ political skill, by giving them the means to perform successfully in their work, as well as the ability to influence others to obtain their goals and to get their performance to be positively evaluated by management, reduces their need for POS to achieve work role performance. In contrast, low politically skilled employees perceive the environment as more threatening; thus, they need to perceive that the organization provides them with the necessary resources to succeed to accomplish their work objectives.

Conversely, political skill intensifies the negative relationship between POS and intention to leave. We found that POS is negatively related to intention to leave and this relationship is stronger for employees with high political skill. In other words, engineers who are highly politically skilled are even more likely to want to stay (leave) in a high (low) POS situation. Although this result contradicts our hypothesis, we believe that this may be because political skilled engineers, in a high POS environment, are more likely to get what need, which should decrease their turnover intentions. On the other hand, as highly politically skilled

engineers have an astute understanding of their environment (Ferris et al., 2005), in a context of low POS they will be aware of their poor workplace situation and realize that their organization is unlikely to change. In this case, they will possibly consider leaving.

Furthermore, individuals high in political skill are adept at networking and social capital creation (Ferris et al., 2005b). As the direct positive effect of political skill on intention to leave shows, political skilled engineers, who are likely to have many connections outside their current company, have more intentions to leave probably because of their perception of desirable external positions. Having opportunities on the outside increases the expectations on the current situation in the organization (Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979). If these expectations are not fulfilled, because of the engineers' low perception of organizational support, they are more likely to have greater intentions to leave; on the contrary, if these expectations are fulfilled, as it may happen in a high POS environment, their turnover intentions will probably decrease. By analyzing the moderating role of political skill on the relationships between POS and its individual outcomes we answer the call for further research on potential moderators of Riggle, Edmondson and Hansen (2009). Moreover, we show that those with the ability to make greater contributions in terms of work role performance (i.e., highly politically skilled engineers) will have greater intentions to leave if they perceive low POS, whereas highly politically skilled engineers, in a high POS environment, will have lower turnover intentions. This highlights the relevance for organizations of getting engineers to perceive that their contributions are valued and that they worry about their wellbeing.

6.1. Managerial implications

These results have important managerial implications. Perhaps most immediately, we would emphasize the importance of making efforts to measure political skill and select or promote those with high scores in this construct. Managers should seek candidates who possess some level of political skill, as these engineers may be more likely to present better work role

performance and also lower intentions to leave (the positive direct effect is lower than the negative indirect effect between political skill and intention to leave).

Managers could also develop engineers' political skill. Evaluation techniques could identify those engineers in greater need of political skill building, and design programs to better develop these talents. Characterizations of political skill have depicted it as part dispositional and part developmental, and according to some researchers it can be developed through self-knowledge, learning techniques and periodic assessment (Ferris et al., 2000). For these researchers, the first step to develop political skill must be a deep reflection by the person about himself or herself, in which the use of self-assessment questionnaires, or even 360° assessment instruments, may be useful. This first stage of personal knowledge is important because there are some people who are unaware that their behavior is seen as brusque and offensive.

The next step would consist of developing political skill by such means as role-playing, coaching, exercises to develop communication skills, etc. Blass and Ferris (2007) suggested that mentoring can be the principal means of developing employees' political skills. Implementation of a mentoring program can, furthermore, help to develop and share knowledge within the organization. Ferris, Anthony, Kolodinsky, Gilmore and Harvey (2002) also suggested ways to develop political skill through process-focused techniques, such as drama-based training, developmental simulations, and behavior modeling. Such training and development efforts for political skill are complex and need to be established carefully and effectively and evaluated systematically.

Although increased investment in mentoring and socialization programs to formally address the political nature of the workplace can have the potential to generate the results demanded of today's human resources professionals, according to Bing et al. (2011), "a selection approach might be more feasible than training, given the amount of time such training programs would require and their associated costs" (p. 573).

As well as considering engineers' political skill in selection processes and introducing programs to develop it, opportunities should be sought to apply it. For example, to help engineers develop new networks, managers could encourage them to attend training seminars, stimulate their joint participation in leisure activities, create ex-employee networks, and motivate them to participate in professional networks. Bing et al. (2011) also recommended that organizations should attempt to ensure that this skill is used for the benefit of the organization through reward systems.

The results of the study also pointed to the relevance of POS in organizations because of its mediating effect on the relationships tested. Thus, organizations should try to strengthen in engineers the belief that they are committed to them, emphasizing on the one hand the discretionary and benevolent nature of their intentions to contribute to their welfare, and on the other hand the external restrictions that limit their possibilities of improving their working conditions. To achieve this, organizations may increase the support given to engineers through actions related to training, remuneration, flexibility or work-family balance. Managers may also improve POS through programs that send signals indicating that the company values employees' contributions. Having a voice, or the opportunity to give input to the decision making of the organization, and autonomy in carrying out one's job responsibilities, were found to be two of the most highly related antecedents of POS (Rhoades, & Eisenberger, 2002).

For companies with a substantial number of engineers in their staff, the results show the importance of seeking professionals not only with technical value but also with political skill because this skill will result in greater performance.

6.2.Limitations and future research directions

Despite the strengths of this study, in particular, a more complete view of relationships between political skill and outcomes and, from a methodological perspective, the use of dyadic data and the assessment of work role performance by two sources, this study presents two

limitations that future studies should consider. First, given the use of cross-sectional data, we cannot definitively establish a causal direction from political skill to engineers' outcomes. Consequently, we encourage researchers to test longitudinal designs. Second, despite the fact that the occupational group-specificity of our research helps rule out possible superfluous factors connected with different occupations, we may not know the generalizability of the findings to different groups of employees. Future research might replicate the tested model with others occupational groups to prove its validity through different occupations.

Moreover, the analysis of other mediator variables might provide additional light on the relationship between political skill and individual outcomes. In this respect, investigation on organizational politics is particularly relevant. Kapoutsis, Papalexandris, Nikolopoulos, Hochwarter, & Ferris (2011) examine the moderating role of organizational politics in the relationship between political skill on job performance, but it is also possible to argue a mediating effect, although with opposite effects to those in our investigation (political skill will negatively influence organizational politics and organizational politics will negatively influence work role performance, and positively intention to leave).

Finally, future research could analyze the differential effects of political skill on the generation of internal and external networking, as well as the effects of internal and external networking on intention to leave.

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APPENDIX 1. MEASUREMENT SCALES USED AND PROPERTIES

Appendix 1. Measurement scales used and properties

CONCEPTS	Standard Loading (λ)*
Networking ability. (AVE=.500; CR=.749)	
I spend a lot of time and effort at work networking with others.	.650
At work, I know a lot of important people and am well connected.	.724
I am good at using my connections and networks to make things happen at work.	.744
Apparent sincerity. (AVE=.599; CR=.816)	
It is important that people believe I am sincere in what I say and do.	.749
When communicating with others, I try to be genuine in what I say and do.	.876
I try to show a genuine interest in other people.	.684
Social astuteness. (AVE=.704; CR=.877)	
I always seem to instinctively know the right thing to say or do to influence others.	.778
I have good intuition or savvy about how to present myself to others.	.899
I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others.	.836
Interpersonal influence. (AVE=.693 CR=.871)	
It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people.	.769
I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me.	.883
I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others.	.842
Political skill. (AVE=.595; CR=.853)	
Networking ability.	.734
Apparent sincerity.	.645
Social astuteness	.796
Interpersonal influence.	.890
POS. (AVE=.619; CR=.917)	
My organization cares about my opinions.	.864
My organization really cares about my well-being.	.938
My organization strongly considers my goals and values.	.916
Help is available from my organization when I have a problem.	.814
My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part.	.555
My organization shows very little concern for me.	.639
My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor.	.701
Intention to leave. (AVE=.688; CR=.864)	
How likely is that you will be working at the same company this time next year?	.587
How likely is that you will take steps during the next year to secure a job at a different company?	.932
I will probably look for a job at a different company in the next year.	.922
Individual task proficiency (AVE=.759; CR= .904)	
Carried out the core parts of his/her job well.	.906
Completed his/her core tasks well using the standard procedures.	.848
Ensured his/her tasks were completed properly.	.858
Individual task adaptivity. (AVE=.789; CR=.918)	

Adapted well to changes in core task.	.915
Coped with changes to the way he/she has to do his/her core tasks.	.940
Learned new skills to help him/her adapt to changes in his/her core tasks.	.803
Individual task proactivity. (AVE=.858; CR=.948)	
Initiated better ways of doing his/her core tasks.	.911
Came up with ideas to improve the way in which his/her core tasks are done.	.928
Made changes to the way his/her core tasks are done.	.940
WORK ROLE PERFORMANCE. (AVE=.723; CR=.886)	
Individual task proficiency.	.791
Individual task adaptivity.	.913
Individual task proactivity.	.842

(*) All standardized loadings are significant (p<.01)

Appendix 2. Discriminant validity: AVE and squared correlations among variables.

	Political skill	POS	Intention to leave	Work role performance
Political skill	AVE=.619			
POS	.029	AVE=.599		
Intention to leave	.000	.179	AVE=.688	
Work role performance	.173	.141	.007	AVE=.723