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What are They Saying About Your Head Coach?

The Relationship Among Political Skill, Reputation, and Effectiveness

Minjung Kim
Janelle E. Wells
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Abstract

Influential leaders in competitive sport fields effectively use political skill to enhance their reputation, gain followers, and obtain support from organizations. In this study, a structural model was tested to determine the mediating role of leader reputation in the relationship between leader political skill and leader effectiveness. A total of 248 NCAA Division I assistant coaches were recruited for participation in a survey on their head coaches' political skill, reputation, and perceived team-unit and leader-unit effectiveness. The results supported an indirect effect of head coaches' reputation on their political skill and effectiveness, rather than a direct effect of political skill on leader effectiveness. On this basis, it was concluded that the strong and positive reputation that politically skilled head coaches build facilitates leader effectiveness in collegiate sports.

Keywords: *political skill, leader reputation, leader effectiveness, intercollegiate sports*

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An individual who establishes and maintains a favorable reputation is regarded by others as more competent and trustworthy (Gioia & Sims, 1983; Ostrom, 2003). In an organizational context, a leader of credible stature retains a higher level of subordinate trust and implements more stringent accountability standards than does a disreputable leader (Ammeter, Douglas, Gardner, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2002). A strong leader reputation not only reflects positively on an entire organization but also favorably influences the attitudes and behaviors of a leader's followers. Leader reputation, which arises from how people perceive the identity of a leader, can generally serve as a key construct in the measurement of leader effectiveness because it influences the trust formation among subordinates, the attributions of motives, and the performance of organizations (Hall, Blass, Ferris, & Massengale, 2004). Recognizing the importance of leader reputation, Blass and Ferris (2007) argued that politically skilled leaders are more likely to have a positive and strong reputation than those who are not as adept at wielding political influence.

Political skill is a principal concept of social influence, wherein individuals strategize to inspire others to maximize their self-interests (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989). Subordinates perceive politically skilled leaders as influential and these politically skilled leaders tend to facilitate interactions among the members of an organization, inspire excellence in people, demonstrate extensive knowledge of relevant domains, and exhibit well-developed communication skills (Brouer, Douglas, Treadway, & Ferris, 2013). Leaders can use political skill to develop trust, motivate their followers, build a solid reputation, and maximize the potential of their subordinates (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005). Although the politically skilled behavior of leaders is critical to exploring leader reputation and leader effectiveness, a majority of management studies have centered on the effects of leadership style overlooking the influence of political skill. Research in sport management is no exception.

Given that the success of sport organizations is evaluated on the basis of athletic accomplishment, Zhang (2004) maintained that the ultimate goal of competitive sports is to improve team or individual performance, especially in college athletics. The leadership exercised by coaches plays a significant role in guaranteeing high-level athletic performance. Coaches are a source of motivation for athletes; they affect the attitudes of athletes; and they build trust not only in team leaders but also among teammates. With respect to the leadership effectiveness of sports coaches, research has thus far been concentrated in identifying the most effective leadership styles in coaching and continues to overlook the significance of leader reputation formed by the politically skilled behaviors of coaches. In particular, research on coaches' political skill and its effectiveness is lacking. Such behavior is even more essential to maintaining the superior reputation of a leader and a team because of the dramatic development in the manner by which the mass media covers sport events. In a broader sense, the analysis of political skill is necessary to

open new directions for scholarship on human resource management in a sport setting.

In competitive sport fields, leaders endeavor to build a solid reputation and use various political skills for the benefit of their teams (Magnusen, Kim, & Perrewé, 2014). Although political skill and reputation present promising potential as avenues from which to improve leader effectiveness in different sport contexts, research on the influence of these attributes is lacking. To explain how political skill contributes to the development of strong teams, this study analyzed the role of reputation in the relationship between leader political skill and leader effectiveness. The two-fold purpose of this study was (1) to empirically examine the effect of leader political skill on leader effectiveness, and (2) to investigate the mediating function of leader reputation in the association between political skill and leader effectiveness in a sport setting.

Theoretical Background

According to the rational perspective on organizations, people with the highest qualifications always exhibit the best performance and are therefore preferentially promoted (Ferris & Treadway, 2012). The problem with this rational perspective is that it easily fails to explain the complex phenomena that occur on a day-to-day basis in today's organizations. Shifting from this rational view, practitioners and scholars began directing attention toward organizational politics, which is argued as one of the possible factors that affects organizational effectiveness (Ferris & Treadway, 2012). Among three focal constructs of organizational politics—perceptions of organizational politics, political behavior, and political skill—the third is a relatively new construct in organizational science.

Key Characteristics of Political Skill

In an organizational setting, one's political skill helps explain the “how” rather than the “what” of influence (Ferris et al., 2007). Political skill pertains to the adjustment of behavior for the purposes of inspiring and controlling others, understanding each organizational member's situation, and recognizing the circumstances essential to increasing performance (Ferris et al., 2005). By extension, a politically skilled coach not only adeptly adjusts his/her behaviors, but effectively deals with internal and external demands for accomplishing personal and team goals.

In the field of organizational behavior, Pfeffer (1981) was the first researcher to articulate the concept of political skill. The author maintained that such ability is one of the most essential components for organization success. Shortly after Pfeffer's study, Mintzberg (1983) presented a positive perception of political skill, describing it as an effective interpersonal style that contributes to adeptness in persuading and negotiating. To conceptualize political skill, Ferris and his colleagues (1999) developed the Political Skill Inventory (PSI) (Ferris et al., 1999) and extended this assessment instrument into a multidimensional version in 2005

(Ferris et al., 2005). The multidimensional PSI comprises four related but distinct dimensions of political skill: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity.

Social astuteness. Astuteness refers to the degree to which keen observers perceive internal and external environments (Ferris & Treadway, 2012). Politically skilled individuals thoroughly understand social interactions and accurately interpret their own behaviors and those of others. Put differently, such individuals possess the social astuteness that enables them to develop superior self-awareness and sensitivity required to effectively influence others. Socially astute individuals have the ability to ingeniously deal with others, particularly for the purpose of satisfying their personal interests. In collegiate sports, for example, a head coach's efforts to use influencing strategies in recruiting a prospective athlete positively affect recruitment outcomes through positive recruitment fit perceptions. (Magnusen, Kim, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2014).

Interpersonal influence. Interpersonal influence indicates the extent of one's "flexibility," which involves behavioral adjustment to meet others' unique and different needs (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004). An individual with interpersonal influence is often described as one who has the capacity to subtly influence other people's behaviors through communicative proficiency. Such individuals can also appropriately adapt to different situations, thereby enabling them to achieve goals in various contextual conditions and despite differences in targets of influence. In collegiate sports, a coach's political skill plays a crucial role in the future of student-athletes because a coach physically and mentally interacts with players (Magnusen et al., 2014). In this respect, a politically skilled head coach can exert a powerful influence on student-athletes and assistant coaches by adapting to different situations.

Networking ability. Networking ability refers to the proficiency with which politically skilled individuals identify, develop, and maintain important social connections that ultimately advance information sharing and resource exchange (Ferris, Treadway, Brouer, & Munyon, 2012). Effectively resolving conflicts in organizations necessitates a well-developed network, which is particularly beneficial during negotiations. Individuals can generate opportunities and achieve goals by capitalizing on the political leverage that is created through networking (Pfeffer, 1981). For instance, a coach who is a savvy networker is more likely to inspire comfort and a sense of genuineness in others (Magnusen et al., 2014).

Apparent sincerity. Apparent sincerity is defined as the genuineness perceived from how individuals communicate and conduct themselves (Ferris et al., 2012). This attribute enables politically skilled individuals to successfully influence others because sincerity prevents people from interpreting actions as manipulative or coercive. Capitalizing on perceived trust allows politically skilled individuals to more easily achieve their personal goals. Together, in our context, a politically skilled coach is good at understanding diverse social situations (i.e.,

social astuteness), adapting to different situations (i.e., interpersonal influence), managing their vast networks (i.e., networking ability), and exhibiting genuineness (i.e., apparent sincerity).

Leader Political Skill and Leader Effectiveness

Political skill enables leaders to involve themselves in important organizational changes, but no specific theory has thus far been developed to elucidate the effects of such ability on subordinates and organizations (House & Aditya, 1997). Accurately describing leaders who use various influential tactics is difficult because political skill is not simply a product of personality but of formal and informal interactions among individuals. Despite the fact that explaining the nature of various political strategies in organizations has been a focus of research, the effects of political skill have yet to be comprehensively explored (Treadway et al., 2004). To delineate the relationship between leader political skill and leader effectiveness, Yammarino and Mumford (2012) developed a conceptual framework for understanding the long- and short-term outcomes of a leader's skill and network. According to this proposed conceptual framework, leader characteristics (e.g., speaking skills and network) and organizational political dimensions (e.g., communication and positioning) are key to achieving successful outcomes for both leaders and their teams.

Researchers recently used leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Brouer et al., 2013) as basis in emphasizing the role of relationship quality in the effects of leader political skill on leader effectiveness. The scholars concluded that when a leader exploits his/her well-developed political skill, followers are more likely to trust this leader, have positive attitudes toward the leader's reputation, and work more productively. Political skill theorists maintained that recognizing the crucial role of political skill in individual and organizational outcomes is necessary because this ability increases organizational power, heightened interpersonal reputation, and enables greater organizations to reap great rewards (Ammeter et al., 2002). Understanding this influence necessitates probing into the impressions of followers regarding their leaders in relation to the political skill-leader effectiveness dynamic, we argue that leader reputation potentially serves as a vehicle for exercising political skill and plays a mediating role in the association between leader political skill and leader effectiveness.

The Role of Leader Reputation

Individuals and organizations strive to establish good reputations because success stories depend, to a certain extent, on personal and organizational stature (Treadway et al., 2014). Individuals who hold important positions have an inherent need to influence others; this need stems from the desire to guarantee the achievement of organizational goals and the effectiveness of organizational operations (Yukl & Falbe, 1990), as well as from the desire to build a solid personal reputation.

In an organizational context, personal reputation was defined as a “complex combination of salient personal characteristics and accomplishments, demonstrated behavior, and intended images presented over some period of time” (Ferris, Blass, Douglas, Kolodinsky, & Treadway, 2003, p. 213). Because reputation is built through reciprocal relationships (Hall et al., 2004), individuals use social influence strategies (e.g., political skill) to establish a credible stature. Thus, personal reputation is not only a desired outcome of various social influence strategies but also a good predictor of individual and organizational effectiveness.

Political Skill, Reputation, and Effectiveness of Coaches

Sport studies have paid attention primarily to the relationship between the leadership styles of coaches and the performance of athletes. In this respect, researchers describe a leader's behavior (e.g., training and instruction, social support, positive feedback, democratic behavior, and autocratic behavior; Chelladurai & Saleh, 1980) and categorize a leader's characteristics according to leadership styles, such as charismatic leadership (House, 1977), transformational leadership (Bass, 1990), and authentic leadership (Gardner, Avolio, & Walumbwa, 2005). Nevertheless, what is lacking here is to thoroughly understand the process behind leader effectiveness by examining a coach's political skill.

Using a management perspective as a lens from which to analyze the association between political skill and leader effectiveness, Ferris and his colleagues (2005) highlighted the critical role that political skill plays in sport contexts. To demonstrate the successes that can be gained from exercising political skill, authors used Bobby Bowden as an example. Bowden, the former head coach of the football team of Florida State University, not only exhibited a comprehensive grasp of football team of effectively but also used his political skill to advance the team's interests. Bowden masterfully interacted with officials (e.g., the president or athletic department director), the community (e.g., boosters or fans), regional and national media, and student-athletes. Under his guidance, the Florida State University football team won 411 games—victories that are attributed, in part, to Bowden's proficiency in exploiting his political skill.

Leaders who effectively use political skill can serve as key drivers of organizational success, especially when change is needed to achieve this success. The same applies to the modern sports industry, which is a highly competitive sector. The sport context is also characterized by ambiguity and change, thus compelling coaches to be flexible and effective in managing the external environment (Blass & Ferris, 2007). To overcome unexpected challenges, the head coach of a sport team should be able to proficiently wield political influence because this skill is a crucial component in guiding subordinates, such as assistant coaches and student-athletes. Because every sport season is characterized by a year-round selection, recruitment, and development; a head coach and his/her staff must help align the attitudes and behaviors of team members with team objectives through constant

communication and inspiration (Robbins, 2003). This alignment is critical to organizational/team success. Lele Forood, long-time head coach and former assistant coach of the Stanford Women's Tennis Team, shared the following insights (2005):

The assistant coach always walks that fine line between the team and the head coach. Therefore, it is imperative that the assistant coach relate strongly to both sides. The assistant can make or break a great rapport within the group structure, and it is her job to relate to the team members as well as support the head coach. (p. 157)

This study evaluated leader political skill, reputation, and effectiveness from the perspective of assistant coaches by using a "target version" (Douglas & Ammeter, 2004).

Research hypotheses. House and Aditya (1997) indicated that leader behavior contributes to people's interpretation of such behaviors subsequently influences leader effectiveness. Extending House and Aditya's discussion, Treadway and his colleagues (2004) argued that political skill is the most appropriate and useful predictor of leader effectiveness in politically charged organizations. A positive leader reputation depends principally on the use of political skill. In the model for developing leader reputation (Blass & Ferris, 2007), political skill not only forms people's impressions but also enhances the perception of one's ability to adapt (i.e., social astuteness). In this respect, the impressions formed by individuals and the adaptability of leaders contribute to the establishment of a positive reputation. With these ideas in mind, we posit that a coach with higher strong political skill has a positive leader reputation.

H₁: A head coach's political skill positively influences his/her reputation.

Given that a favorable reputation allows individuals to effectively influence others (Hochwarther, Ferris, Zinko, Arnell, & James, 2007), a leader's reputation is one of the most important predictors of leader effectiveness. Individuals with a strong reputation are expected to facilitate social inclusion (de Cremer & Tyler, 2007), which can create powerful unity in a team, with the head coach as the central figure. In sport teams, a head coach's external and internal reputation can influence trust that assistant coaches and student-athletes confer to the coach. It can also create strong attachment between the head coach and his/her subordinates. These observations lead us to hypothesize that a head coach with a positive reputation exhibits high leader effectiveness through his ability to inspire and motivate coaching staff and student-athletes.

H₂: Assistant coaches who hold strong perceptions of a head coach's reputation highly regard their leader's effectiveness.

The two direct relationships hypothesized above highlight the role of a head coach's reputation in the relationship between leader political skill and leader ef-

fectiveness. In particular, politically skilled head coaches are advantageously positioned to develop a solid reputation, thereby enabling them to offer competitive qualifications in their performance evaluation (Blass & Ferris, 2007). We contend that a head coach's political skill operates on leader effectiveness through others' perceptions of the head coach—a mechanism that has not been directly measured in previous research. The current study thus seeks to understand the role of leader reputation as a mediator of the relationship between a head coach's political skill and his/her effectiveness as a leader.

H₃: The reputation of a head coach mediates the relationship between his/her political skill and effectiveness.

Methods

Participants and Procedures

This study explored the influences of leader political skill in collegiate sports. More precisely, the mediating role of leader reputation was examined in the relationship between political skill and effectiveness in the NCAA Division I context. To recruit participants for the online survey, the email addresses of NCAA Division I assistant coaches were obtained from the staff inventory published on each athletic department's official website. After retrieving the addresses, 1,651 invitations were sent to the prospective respondents. Two days following the initial invitation, 1,584 valid emails were sent, and the rest were considered invalid emails for reasons ranging from incorrect email addresses or changes in position. Each week for two weeks, a reminder email was sent to the participants, and a total of 248 NCAA Division I assistant coaches completed the online survey. This composition amounts to a response rate of 17.93%.

Among 248 survey respondents, 102 participants were female (41.1%) and 146 were male (58.9%), who reported to 69 female (27.8%) and 179 male (72.2%) head coaches. Most participants were between the ages of 26 and 45 (64.5%) and had been in the coaching profession for an average of 12.26 years ($SD = 9.56$). Their working relationships with their current head coaches had spanned an average of four years ($SD = 4.18$). Additionally, among the sample, 69.4% identified themselves as white ($n = 172$), 23% classified themselves as African-American ($n = 57$), and 7.6% identified themselves as belonging to others ($n = 19$). In terms of a sport team coached, the highest number of assistant coaches worked for the football team (27.4%), followed by the track and field ($n = 33$, 13.3%), basketball ($n = 28$, 11.3%), volleyball ($n = 28$, 11.3%), and other sport (e.g., baseball, golf, soccer, softball, tennis, and wrestling) ($n = 94$, 38.0%) teams.

Measures

Through literature review and a panel review by experts composed of two sport scholars and two NCAA Division I assistant coaches, we developed a final

questionnaire that comprised three sections: (1) a section that focuses on perceptions regarding a head coach's political skill and reputation, (2) a section designed to determine perceived team-unit and leader-unit effectiveness, and (3) a section on the professional and demographic information. The items for political skill, leader reputation, and leader effectiveness were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The final questionnaire items for each construct, as well as factor loadings, Chronbach's α coefficient, and average variance extracted (AVE) values are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Factors, Items, Factor Loadings (β), Chronbach's Alpha Coefficient (α), and Average

Factors	Items	β	α	AVE
Political Skill				
Networking Building	My head coach is good at building relationships with influential people	0.87	.93	.77
	My head coach has developed a large network of colleagues and associates at work	0.88		
	My head coach spends a lot of time developing connections and networking with others	0.86		
	My head coach is good at using connections and networks to make things happen at work	0.90		
Interpersonal Skill	My head coach is able to communicate easily and effectively with others	0.87	.93	.76
	My head coach is good at getting people to like him/her	0.86		
	My head coach understands people very well	0.91		
	My head coach tries to show a genuine interest in other people	0.86		
Leader Reputation				
	People see the head coach as a person of high integrity	0.87	.94	.76
	People regard my head coach as someone who gets things done	0.88		
	My head coach has a reputation for producing results	0.88		
	People expect my head coach to consistently demonstrate the highest performance	0.86		
	If people want things done right, they ask my head coach to do it	0.84		
Leader Effectiveness				
Team-unit Performance	Our team meets or exceeds expectations	0.93	.87	.75
	Our team does excellent work	0.94		
	Our team's performance is improving	0.72		
Leader-unit Performance	My head coach is effective in representing our team	0.90	.95	.86
	My head coach is effective in meeting the job-related needs of team members	0.93		
	My head coach is effective in meeting the needs of the team	0.95		

To measure political skill, eight items were drawn from Douglas and Ammeter's (2004) leader political skill scale. The authors modified the PSI developed by Ferris and his colleagues (1999) from a self-report version into a target version and developed a two-dimensional target political skill measure through a series of

factor analyses. The two dimensions were networking building and interpersonal skills, each consisting of a four-item measure. The authors modified each item to focus on a head coach's political skill from assistant coaches' view. Example items included "My head coach is good at building relationships with influential people (networking building)" and "My head coach is able to communicate easily and effectively with others (interpersonal skill)."

The participants' perceptions regarding the reputation of their head coaches were determined with a five-item measure, which we adapted from Hochwarter and his colleagues' (2007) personal reputation scale for application in a sport context. Finally, the participants were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of their head coaches on the basis of the two dimensions used in the present study, namely, team-unit and leader-unit performance. With the adaptation of Douglas and Ammeter's (2004) leader effectiveness scale, each coach effectiveness dimension comprised a three-item measure.

Data Analysis and Results

A series of tests using structural equation modeling (SEM) such as confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and testing of the full structural model indicates that the ratio of cases to observed variables was 13.1:1. No problems in terms of outliers and missing data patterns, which could influence the results of data analysis, were detected. In the data analysis, missing values were replaced with predicted scores in Mplus Version 7. Prior to conducting a CFA, the coefficients of correlation among five sub-constructs were verified (Table 2). The sub-constructs were significantly correlated with one another at .01 alpha levels. Because all the correlation coefficients did not exceed the .85 cutoff (Kline, 2005), we verified the values and found no extreme multicollinearity or singularity relationships in the dataset.

Table 2

Correlations among the Latent Constructs

	Networking Building	Interpersonal Skill	Leader Reputation	Team-unit Performance	Leader-unit Performance
Networking Building	1				
Interpersonal Skill	.78*	1			
Leader Reputation	.67*	.73*	1		
Team-unit Performance	.47*	.47*	.77*	1	
Leader-unit Performance	.58*	.67*	.81*	.68*	1

$p^* < .001$

Measurement Model

Due to the violation of the multivariate normality assumption for our data, the Satorra-Bentler (1994) scaling method was used for the SEM analyses. The measurement model was tested to evaluate the constructs and global fit indices, such as the chi-square value, comparative fit index (CFI), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and the root mean square error of approximations (RMSEA). The measurement model provided a reasonable fit ($\chi^2 = 400.481$, $df = 142$, $p < .01$, CFI = .953, SRMR = .034, RMSEA = .079) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Along with CFA, Cronbach's α coefficient values and AVE values were calculated for internal consistency and construct reliability, respectively (Table 1). The Cronbach's α coefficients ranged from .86 to .93, and the AVE values ranged from .75 to .86, indicating good internal consistency and construct reliability of the data (Kline, 2005). To provide evidence for discriminant validity, χ^2 difference tests of unity between all pairs of constructs were examined (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The unconstrained model was significantly shown better compared to the constrained model.

Full Structural Model

The hypothesized structural model was tested (Figure 1). This full structural model was also designed to examine the effects of a head coach's political skill on leader effectiveness and the role of leader reputation as a mediator of the relationship between the two constructs. In the path analysis model (see Figure 1), political skill as a second order construct was measured on the basis of networking ability and interpersonal influence, whereas leader effectiveness was reflected by two first-order constructs, namely, working-unit and leader-unit performance. The hypothesized structural model included three direct effects among three second-order factors and one indirect effect of political skill on leader effectiveness via leader reputation.

The results of the test on the full structural model (see Figure 1) indicated a reasonable fit ($\chi^2 = 407.621$, $df = 145$, $p < .01$, CFI = .952, SRMR = .035, RMSEA = .079) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Supporting H_1 , the path from political skill to leader reputation was positive and significant (standardized $\gamma = .792$, S.E. = .031, $p < 0.01$). Supporting H_2 , the path from leader reputation to leader effectiveness was also positive and significant (standardized $\gamma = .759$, S.E. = .076, $p < 0.01$). In addition, the indirect path from political skill through leader reputation to leader effectiveness was positive and significant (standardized $\gamma = .601$, S.E. = .065, $p < 0.01$). The direct path from political skill to leader effectiveness was positive, but nonsignificant (standardized $\gamma = .161$, S.E. = .083, $p = 0.051$). Taken together, these results indicate that leader reputation fully mediated the effect of political skill on leader effectiveness, supporting H_3 . Specifically, the mediating effect of leader reputation accounted for 78.8% of the variance in leader effectiveness.

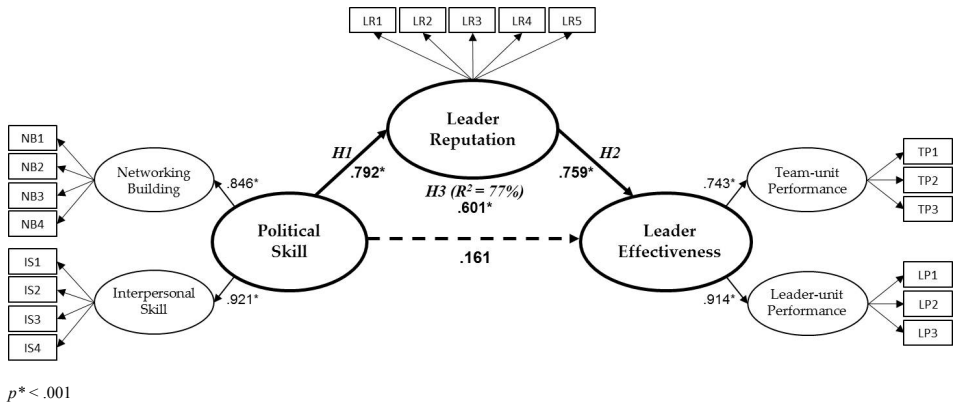


Figure 1. The Full Structural Model

Discussion

In sport, highly competent leaders are people who tend to have extensive networks and excellent interpersonal skills, which they develop from recruiting talented athletes and participating in media interviews. The leaders of sport teams are required to possess superior political skill because people interpret leader attitude and behavior by relating these to team performance. Advancements in media technology have highlighted the importance of a sport leader's reputation in leader effectiveness. Despite the sport sector's recognition of the essentiality of political skill and reputation, the effects of these constructs have not been exhaustively examined. To fill this gap, the current study used empirical data on the assistant coaches of collegiate sports teams to demonstrate that politically skilled head coaches are perceived as being highly effective leaders because of their favorable reputation.

Interpersonal qualities, including political skill, are key to achievement of a leader's individual goals (Ammeter et al., 2002). The results of this study, however, indicate that a direct relationship between leader political skill and leader effectiveness is difficult to support without a consideration of leader reputation in a NCAA Division I context. This work contributes to the literature on sport leadership and political skill by comprehensively explaining how head coaches' political skill improves their effectiveness. Although Magnusen and his colleagues (2014) described the political skill of women's soccer head coaches and examine its effectiveness in helping the coaches recruit student-athletes, this type of study is still in initial stages. Applying the concept of political skill in a sport context opens a new direction for scholarship in sport management considering the fact that a great amount of studies has hitherto focused on various leadership styles on their effectiveness. Furthermore, articulating the mechanism by which a leader's political skill influences leader effectiveness through an analysis of the mediating

role of leader reputation advances our understanding of the importance of political skill and reputation in organizational or team success.

Several findings are worth highlighting. First, politically skilled head coaches tend to build a positive reputation through networking building and interpersonal skills. People evaluate others' behavior through interactions, and such evaluations reflect their collective impressions within a specific network (Hall et al., 2004). As an influencing factor, political skill positively forms perception about a leader, thereby paving the way for the development of a favorable reputation. Politically skilled head coaches are proficient at adjusting their behavior in accordance with the type of athlete and team situation that they are dealing with. Ultimately, this adjustment advances team performance and the management of important social connections. The end result is that such coaches are able to build a strong internal and external reputation.

Second, a strong leader reputation positively influences leader effectiveness. Head coaches of credible standing facilitate social inclusion and create strong attachment between a team and assistant coaches and athletes. The ability to advance such attachment, in turn, improves leader effectiveness. Hall and his colleagues (2004) specified the process that underlies the manner by which leader reputation influences perceptions about leader performance and effectiveness. As indicated in their conceptual model (p. 517), leader reputation is indispensable to increasing leader effectiveness through improvement of accountability and trust in a leader. In the context of sport, when a head coach possesses a strong and positive internal and external reputation, the assistant coach of the team tends to form favorable perceptions of the head coach's effectiveness.

Third, taken together, our results indicate that assistant coaches under the direction of a politically skilled head coach perceive a high level of leader effectiveness—a perception that stems from the head coach's strong reputation. A leader's political skill contributes to perceptions regarding this leader, and the perceptual identity drives people to regard the leader as an excellent performer. Several studies (Douglas & Ammeter, 2004; Smith, Plowman, Duchon, & Quinn, 2009; Treadway et al., 2004; Treadway et al., 2014) supported this argument, with researchers maintaining that a leader's political skill positively affects leader effectiveness. Nevertheless, no clear explanation of the relationship between these two constructs has been provided. To address this gap, the current study elaborated the bridging role of leader reputation in the political skill—effectiveness association by examining the indirect effect of leader reputation as a mediator in the aforementioned relationship.

Finally, this study provides another point of expansion for sport leadership literature by categorizing political skill as one of the behavioral requirements, rather than as a component of leadership style, for effective leadership. Although our data analysis does not show a direct effect of political skill on leader effectiveness, a head coach's political abilities (e.g., networking building and interpersonal skills)

enhanced his/her effectiveness by enabling the coach to leverage this skill in building a good reputation. In this sense, the concept of political skill satisfactorily explains the role a sport leader's informal behavior in improving leader effectiveness.

Practical Implications and Future Directions

From a theoretical standpoint, this study advances the understanding of the influence of political skill and leader reputation on leader effectiveness. Although we developed a model specific to a collegiate athletic context, this model should be tested further to determine its applicability in other sport fields and in business sectors. The relationship among the model variables may change depending on context. Additionally, responding to the call to examine the important role of political skill in the sport context (Ferris et al., 2005), we moved beyond traditional research on political skill and leader behavior, thereby discovering that leader reputation mediates the relationship between political skill and leader effectiveness. Theoretically, this mediating effect can be more salient in a context where reputation is instrumental to one's current position or career path, although future research is needed to examine this proposition. More complete political skill models that incorporate a wider array of variables should be developed. The models should feature other social effectiveness constructs (Ferris, Perrewé, & Douglas, 2002) and employee positions (e.g., supervisors, peers, and subordinates).

In terms of practice, intercollegiate athletic departments should understand not only performance indicators but the roles that political skill and reputation play in a coach's effectiveness in recruiting student-athletes and representing the brand of the institution. As NCAA Division I athletic institutions continue to infuse financial investments (Upton, Gillum, & Berkowitz, 2010) into securing national recognition, and ultimately, into winning competitions (Siegel, 2004), the recruitment, selection, and retention of collegiate coaches has become instrumental to the success of athletic departments. Such departments would benefit from rising to Witt's (1995) call for increased managerial development efforts that focus on building skills sets that enable individuals to effectively deal with politics in work environment; this endeavor can be initiated through the implementation of program for political skill training and development (Ahearn et al., 2004; Ferris et al., 2005; Todd, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2009). Specifically, such programs may help coaches and athletic administrators develop strong relationships with stakeholders (e.g., student-athletes, boosters, faculty, and board of trustees) who differ by age, gender, ethnicity, education, religion, and sexual orientation.

Limitations and Conclusion

Similar to other studies, this research presents limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the focal point of the investigation into leader effectiveness was the relationship between leader political skill and leader reputation. As previous researchers have suggested, however, leadership style is central to predicting leader effectiveness. Future studies should therefore take into account the association

between political skill and leadership style to ascertain the influence of political skill on leader effectiveness from a broader perspective.

Second, the interpreted data in the current work represents only the perceptions of assistant coaches in NCAA Division I institutions. Samples need to be expanded to determine whether a similar dynamic among political skill, reputation, and leader effectiveness emerges in other domains, such as professional sports, youth sports, or other NCAA divisions (e.g., Division II and III). Aside from examining the issue in relation to different sporting levels, researchers can analyze the political skill of individuals who coach different types of sports. Choosing one specific sport or comparing results across various sports can produce meaningful results and effectively strengthen our understanding of political skill in the context of sport. For instance, Magnusen and his colleagues (2014) selected the context of NCAA women's soccer to examine the role of a head coach's political skill on recruiting outcomes. The authors were able to objectively analyze recruiting outcomes and achieved a good response rate (41%).

Third, based on the study of Douglas and Ammeter (2004), not all the four sub-constructs of political skill were included in the hypothesized research model. Douglas and Ammeter (2004) tested the target version of original four dimensions of political skill construct—network building, interpersonal skill, social astuteness, and sincerity—and they found support for only two of the dimensions—networking building and interpersonal skill. In spite of the fact that we used only two dimensions of political skill reflecting their study in 2004, it should be noted that there were some limitations in their study. Most of all, they employed the perceptions of leader effectiveness which was a subjective outcome. Also, respondents in their study were drawn from only one organization in an educational setting – a public school district located in the Midwestern United States. Hence, it is important for scholars to conduct future studies on the target version of original four dimensions of political skill construct employing the objective measures in sport settings.

Fourth, this study used the self-report method as the sole means of data collection in order to test a series of hypotheses. As several studies indicated (e.g., Avolino, Yammarino, & Bass, 1991; Spector & Jex, 1991), the sole employment of self-report methods may increase measures of covariation, producing percept-percept inflation in announced correlations due to 1) similarity in the language of self-report items (Spector, Chen & Brannick, 1990); 2) respondents' inclinations to give apparently intelligent answers to peculiar questions, especially when true conditions are ambiguous (Salanicik & Pfeffer, 1978); 3) respondents' beliefs about reality and the cognitive consistency rooted from such beliefs (Staw, 1975); 4) halo effects and horn effects (negative halo effects) (Spector, Dwyer, & Jex, 1988); and 5) common method variance (Spectator, 1987, 1992). While there have been many debates on existing percept-percept inflation in organizational studies that used self-report questionnaire methods (e.g., Podsakoff & Organ, 1986; Stone & Porter,

1978), through a meta-analysis of an extensive sample of published correlations, Crampton and Wagner (1994) concluded that domain-specific research on self-report methods should be continued to identify those areas of research that are especially susceptible inflationary effects. This is because the results of their study implied that some areas of organizational research (e.g., research on job satisfaction, turnover intentions, personality, ability, turnover, role characteristics, performance appraisal, and leader initiation of structure) appear more susceptible to percept-percept inflation than others. Because there have been no studies that examine the susceptibility of inflationary effects in the domain of political skill, the vulnerability of this study to percept-percept issue should not be ruled out.

Our study offers an initial picture of how political skill factors in leader effectiveness in the contexts of sports. We developed, tested, and confirmed our research hypotheses, which were generated from issues that point to the importance of sport leaders' political skill and reputation. The results support the notion that a politically skilled head coach is perceived as a highly effective leader through his/her strong and positive personal reputation. In summary, both leader political skill and leader reputation are important factors for team-unit and leader-unit performance in the context of sports.

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