

Political Skill Dimensions and Transformational Leadership in China

Robyn L. Brouer, Chia-Yen (Chad) Chiu, and Lei Wang

Abstract

Purpose

This study explores the relationship between the sub-dimensions of political skill and transformational leadership, arguing that in a Chinese sample, social astuteness, networking ability, and interpersonal influence will have a stronger impact than apparent sincerity. Additionally, transformational leadership is argued to mediate the relationship between leader political skill and subordinate job performance.

Design

This study used a dyadic, cross-sectional design where all data were collected at a single point in time and supervisors were matched to their followers.

Findings

Our results support that transformational leadership mediates the relationship between leader political skill and follower performance. Additionally, social astuteness was positively related to leader charisma, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation; whereas, interpersonal influence was related to leader charisma and intellectual stimulation. Apparent sincerity was not related to perceptions of transformational leadership.

Practical Implications

The findings imply that we might be able to design more customized training to reduce the costs of leadership development programs. Specially, in China, focus should be paid to increasing social astuteness and interpersonal influence only.

Originality

This study is one of the few to examine the relationship between the sub-dimensions of political skill and transformational leadership. This is especially noteworthy in the context of the Chinese sample employed, as most political skill research has been done in western contexts.

Keywords: Political Skill, Transformational Leadership, China

****This paper has been accepted by Journal of Managerial Psychology****

Transformational leadership, a leadership style motivating followers to transcend their self-interests for the greater good (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006), has been reported to benefit multiple organizational outcomes (see Wang, Oh, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011, for a meta-analysis). By creating visionary messages, transformational leaders inspire subordinate commitment to a shared vision and greater effort to task completion; more importantly, transformational leadership is suggested to be one of the most effective leadership styles across cultures (Wang & Gagne, 2012). Therefore, it is important to understand the antecedents of transformational leadership for the purpose of leadership training and development.

As China gradually becomes an economic superpower, knowing what constitutes successful leadership in China is crucial (Andriessse & van Helvoirt, 2010). However, while previous studies have documented the effectiveness of transformational leadership in China, what could assist Chinese managers to be seen as transformational has received far less research attention (Zhang, Wang, & Pearce, 2014). In this study, we argue that politically skilled managers, who possess an understanding of the work environment and those acting within it (Ferris et al., 2007), will be more likely to inspire transformational leadership perceptions from their followers. However, we argue that the way in which political skill impacts transformational leadership perceptions in China will be incongruent with the findings of political skill in the mainly United States samples in which it has been studied (e.g., Ewen et al., 2013).

Political skill has been reported to be significantly associated with leadership in the United States (e.g., Brouer, Douglas, Treadway, & Ferris, 2013). However, researchers have cautioned the function of its dimensionality (Snell, Tonidndel, Braddy, & Fleenor, 2014), and its role in Chinese cultures (Wei, Liu, Chen, & Wu, 2010), have not been comprehensively explored. Political skill is a multidimensional construct composed of four distinct facets, and

they may not function identically in predicting leadership (Snell et al., 2014). Given that individuals' preferences about leadership is usually influenced by social norms (Lee, Scandura, & Sharif, 2014), it might be reasonable to expect certain political skill dimensions are superior to the others (e.g., being flexible vs. being sincere) in predicting transformational leadership perceptions under different cultural contexts.

In the present study, we investigate whether the four sub-dimensions of political skill are effective in predicting transformational leadership in the Chinese context. More specifically, we argue that in China, expressing sincerity will be less appreciated. Chinese leaders should be more sensitive to their social interactions and thus respond to others appropriately. Being sincere is not sufficient for enhanced leadership perceptions if managers do not pay attention to and adapt to their social context (Zhang, Everett, Elkin, & Cone, 2012). Further, while being sincere to personal true feelings is regarded as a virtue in the West (especially individualistic cultures), it is considered as a sign of personal immaturity or selfishness in collectivist cultures (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Traandis, 1998). Therefore, we argue that the three political skill components emphasizing improving social awareness (social astuteness), interactions (networking ability), and behavioral flexibility (interpersonal influence) are valued as important leadership attributes in China, but Chinese employees may appreciate apparent sincerity (e.g., being true to self) less when they assess their supervisor's transformational leadership quality.

Theory and Hypotheses Development

Political Skill

Political skill refers to a social ability to influence others to achieve desired goals and is thought to be critical to personal success (Ferris et al., 2005). Ferris and colleagues (2007) indicated that political skill operates at an intra-psychic and interpersonal level. Brouer,

Badaway, Gallagher, and Haber (2014) argued that social astuteness and networking ability operate at the intra-psychic level, while interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity function at the interpersonal level.

Intra-psychic processes are a cognitive function of political skill that aid in opportunity recognition and goal creation (Brouer et al., 2014). Therefore, *social astuteness*, which provides one with an understanding of the environment and those acting within it, gives the politically skilled the awareness of possible goals and who to influence in order to achieve those goals. Social astuteness aids people in opportunity recognition by giving them a passive alertness to the environment while also predisposing them to more active searching for opportunities to achieve success (McAllister, Ellen, Perrewe, Ferris, & Hirsch, 2015). *Networking ability* also impacts the recognition of opportunities due to the information availability and resources available through vast networks (McAllister et al., 2015). Networking ability is argued to be a strategic understanding of how to build networks that will result in the most personal resource and information gain (Brouer et al., 2014). Therefore, individuals high in networking ability are able to build networks that give them access to diverse and important information that they can then use to better understand others and the environment, as well as to alert them to opportunities.

At the interpersonal level, *interpersonal influence* and *apparent sincerity* impact our interactions with others (Ferris et al., 2007). Interpersonal influence, which encourages successful behavioral flexibility, only comes into play when others are around to see the execution of influence attempts. Further, apparent sincerity, or exerting effort to appear genuine, is only necessary when others are present and is used to ensure that influence attempts are not seen as manipulative (Brouer et al., 2014). At the intra-psychic level, once knowledge and understanding of the environment and others has been gained through social astuteness and

networking ability, it is a politically skilled person's interpersonal influence and apparent sincerity that allow successful engagement of behaviors to exploit this knowledge (McAllister et al., 2015) to affect others.

Political Skill and Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders are believed to motivate their followers to do more than originally expected, and it consists of three dimensions (Piccolo & Colquitt, 2006): Leader *charisma* refers to a leader's ability to encourage followers to transform their self-interests into collective benefits and faithfully commit to the leader. *Intellectual stimulation* is the extent to which a leader can persuade followers to challenge existing assumptions, take risks, and actively provide suggestions. Last, *individualized consideration* provides an understanding of the unique needs of each follower and enables individualized support.

Politically skilled leaders are powerful and dependable, and have a better capacity to respond to subordinate needs (Ferris et al., 2007). Popper and Mayselless (2003) argued that consistent responsiveness and psychological security are critical to transformational leadership. To be perceived as this type of leader, supervisors should be sensitive to followers' signals and clearly show a willingness to respond to their requests and obtain a variety of resources to satisfy the subordinates' needs. Politically skilled leaders, because of their awareness of others and ability to gain resources, are able to provide subordinates what they need, thus augmenting transformational leadership perceptions.

While political skill has been found to directly increase performance at the individual level (Blickle et al., 2008), less work has examined the role of supervisor political skill and subsequent subordinate performance. One notable exception found that subordinates who view their manager as politically skilled in an environment perceived as political were more likely to

have higher job performance (Brouer, Harris, & Kacmar, 2011). Thus, manager political skill acted as an antidote to a negative environment. In this study, we argue that leader political skill will increase subordinate perceptions of transformational leadership. These perceptions of transformational leadership will encourage followers to do more than they might be expected otherwise, resulting in higher performance (Wang et al., 2011).

Hypothesis 1: Perceived transformational leadership mediates the relationship between leader political skill and follower performance.

Impact of Political Skill Dimensions

When we combine the dimensions of political skill with transformational leadership, it becomes clear that a contextual understanding of the environment and those acting within it are vital to leader charisma, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003). However, understanding the social environment alone is not enough to be seen as transformational; there is a requirement that one act upon their understanding. To be seen as charismatic and intellectually stimulating, leaders need the ability to influence and persuade their followers (Brown & Moshavi, 2005).

Intra-psychoic effects of political skill. The intra-psychoic dimensions of political skill – networking ability and social astuteness – give leaders two distinct benefits (Brouer et al., 2014): [1] being able to identify opportunities and organizational resources and how best to use them, and [2] better success at interpreting social cues and understanding the social surroundings others in the environment. Because of this, socially astute managers equipped with the networking ability are more likely to be perceived as charismatic leaders with the exceptional capacity of stimulating intelligence and offering individualized consideration.

Charismatic leaders are those who can clearly communicate their collective vision with

the followers and encourage follower confidence directed toward achieving their vision (Galvin, Waldman, & Balthazard, 2010). Socially astute leaders who are well networked are more likely to have the ability to recognize opportunities through their contextual awareness and information gleaned from networks, ultimately enabling them to identify successful ideas on which to build more compelling goals (McAllister et al., 2015). Better goals are more likely to be seen as appealing and motivating to subordinates, which promote perceptions of leader charisma.

Additionally, stimulating intelligence asks followers to challenge the existing assumptions and norms, and it requires sufficient supervisory support and knowledge of their followers (Liaw, Chi, & Chuang, 2010). The same understanding that gives socially astute and networked leaders opportunity recognition will aid their understanding follower fears, motivations, and vulnerabilities. This enables the leader to understand the unique needs of their followers (i.e., individualized consideration), and the leaders will use this information to motivate their subordinates to take risks and work toward superordinate goal, increasing perceptions of individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. Socially astute leaders are sensitive to the reactions of followers and usually interpret them correctly. In preliminary support for this Brouer and colleagues (2013) reported that at the composite level, politically skilled leaders are more likely to understand their subordinates, and thus more likely to build effective relationships with them by catering to their needs. Therefore,

Hypothesis 2: Social Astuteness and networking ability are positively related to subordinate perceptions of a) leader charisma, b) individualized consideration and c) intellectual stimulation.

Interpersonal effects of political skill. While the intra-psychic components focus on the personal ability of understanding (i.e., the target is the *self*), the interpersonal dimensions emphasize the capacity to effectively use influence tactics and target *others* (Ferris et al., 2007).

Transformational leaders need to demonstrate inspirational actions and use influence to gain support from their subordinates (Ewen et al., 2013). For leaders who try to promote shared visions and encourage follower creativity, the choice of influence tactics becomes extremely important (e.g., Charbonneau, 2004). Interpersonal influence enables leaders to demonstrate the “flexibility” to use personal power and the ability to set others at ease, which makes them more persuasive in communicating the shared vision; as a consequence, these leaders are more likely to be seen as charismatic (Ferris et al., 2007). Interpersonally influential leaders have an easy way of communicating with others and can use a wide variety of influence tactics successfully (McAllister et al., 2015) making their goals and vision stand out to followers, as well as providing the persuasion necessary to encourage subordinates to take risks and challenge assumptions (c.f., Galvin et al., 2010). In preliminary support for this, Charbonneau (2004) found that some influence tactics were more successful than others in increasing perceptions of transformational leadership.

Hypothesis 3: Interpersonal Influence is positively correlated to a) leader charisma and b) intellectual stimulation.

Interestingly, in a US sample, we also would expect apparent sincerity to impact the behavioral components of transformational leadership, and thus be related to leader charisma and intellectual stimulation (e.g., Brouer et al., 2014). However, cultures represent an information system guiding individuals to interpret and give meaning to observed leadership behaviors. A behavior could be seen as a valuable leader-like act by followers in one culture but not in other cultures. For instance, Suh and colleagues (1998) pointed out that “(w)hereas authenticity to one’s inner felling is often regarded as a virtue in individualist cultures, in many cases, it is constructed as a sign of personal immaturity or selfishness in collectivist cultures” (pp. 483).

Thus, we expect that being sincere might be viewed as a less salient prototypical leadership behavior in China. Zhang and colleagues (2012) posited that personal authenticity is not sufficient for leaders to become fully authentic in China unless they consider their social environments. They further argued that successful leadership in China requires “leaders to transcend their own values, aligning more appropriately with the given context, through self-regulation and self-cultivation” (pp. 599). Accordingly, the political skill dimensions focusing on understanding and building social relationships with others as well as adjusting behavior situationally (i.e., social astuteness, networking ability, and interpersonal influence) might be more critical than expressing sincerity when followers assess their supervisors.

Hypothesis 4: In China, apparent sincerity is less correlated with a) leader charisma and b) intellectual stimulation when compared to social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and networking ability.

Method

Participants

Data were collected in four medium-sized manufacturing and hotel firms located in South China. With the support of management, we recruited employees from all departments, and they received a letter that introduced this study and ensured data confidentiality. To increase participation, we provided an overall report to the organizations, as well as individual feedback to participants upon request. Five hundred and seventy-eight questionnaires were distributed and 511 were collected on site, a response rate of 88%. After removing questionnaires that had unmatched responses and missing data, our sample consisted of 312 subordinates nested within 114 supervisors, and leaders rated on average 2.74 followers. Subordinates were 48% male, with an average age of 31.04 years and an average relational tenure of 3.53 years. These subordinates held a broad range of jobs, such as web administrators, accounting, and salespeople. The

supervisors were 63% male with an average age of 33.75 years ($SD = 7.85$).

Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional dyadic data design where all data were collected at a single point in time and supervisors were matched to their followers. The Chinese versions of the instruments were translated following the back-translation procedures described by Brislin (1980). Supervisors were asked to complete the Political Skill Inventory, subordinate performance, and basic demographic information. Subordinates reported their supervisor's transformational leadership and basic demographic information.

Measures

Transformational Leadership. The 16-item transformational leadership scale of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)—Short Form 5X (Avolio & Bass, 2004) was used to measure transformational leadership behaviors ($\alpha = .93$). Participants responded to each item using a 5-point scale from 0 (“not at all”) to 4 (“frequently, if not always”). One example question was “I treat others as individuals rather than just as a member of a group”.

Given the multilevel nature of the transformational leadership scores, we employed the procedures by Geldhof, Preacher and Zyphur (2014) to calculate the alpha reliability at both within (subordinate) and between (supervisor) levels. With regard to individualized consideration, the alpha was .68 at the within level and .86 at the between level. For intellectual stimulation, the alpha was .80 at the within level and .94 at the between level. As to charisma, the alpha was .89 at the within level and .96 at the between level. Last, the within-level alpha coefficient was .92 for the whole scale, while its between-level alpha coefficient was .97.

Leader Political Skill. Supervisors rated their own political skill using the 18-item multidimensional scale validated by Ferris et al. (2005) on a 7-point scale ranging from 1

(“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). This scale measures four dimensions of political skill: network building ($\alpha = .78$), interpersonal influence ($\alpha = .74$), social astuteness ($\alpha = .70$), and apparent sincerity ($\alpha = .77$). Sample items from each dimension are as follows: “At work, I know a lot of important people and am well connected” (networking ability), “I am good at getting people to like me” (interpersonal influence), “I always seem to instinctively know the right thing to say or do to influence others” (social astuteness), and “When communicating with others, I try to be genuine in what I say and do” (apparent sincerity). Notably, the alpha reliability of the apparent sincerity dimension was not satisfactory ($\alpha < .60$). Therefore, we removed one item (i.e., “I try to show a genuine interest in other people”), yielding an acceptable alpha reliability ($\alpha = .77$).

Subordinate Performance. Subordinate performance was assessed by the immediate supervisor using three items developed by Howell and Hall-Merenda (1999). For example, the supervisors were asked to evaluate the statement, “The accomplishment of quantitative objectives related to corporate strategic goals,” on a scale ranging from 1 (“below expectations”) to 3 (“exceptional contribution”). The reliability of this scale is .76. Given the multilevel nature of performance evaluation scores, we also calculated its multilevel alpha reliability. The alpha was .74 at the within level and .84 at the between level.

Control Variables. The current study controlled for supervisor–subordinate relational tenure, so as to avoid the effects of familiarity on subordinate attitudes toward the leader (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) and evaluations of subordinate performance (Sturman, 2003). In addition, demographic variables of both supervisors and subordinates (i.e., age and gender) were controlled to minimize the potential confounding effects that may influence the associations between variables.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all individual-level and leader-level variables.

Insert Table 1

Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was applied to examine the distinctiveness of the two individual-level variables (i.e., transformational leadership and subordinate performance) with AMOS 16.0 (Arbuckle, 2007). The hypothesized model (Model 1) treated transformational leadership as a single second-order factor, represented by three dimensions distinct but correlated to another first-order factor, subordinate performance. The hypothesized model was compared with a series of alternative models. Model 2 was a four-factor model in which the three dimensions of transformational leadership and subordinate performance were four distinct but correlated factors. Model 3 was a two-factor model in which all items that measured transformational leadership loaded on a factor and the three items that measured subordinate performance loaded on the other factor. The two factors were correlated. Model 4 was a single-factor model in which all items loaded on one single factor. Results of CFA indicated that one item measuring individualized consideration had a factor loading less than .40 on its respective first-order factor and was removed from further analyses (Stevens, 2002).

Table 2 shows the results of the model fit comparisons. The hypothesized model shows a satisfactory fit ($\chi^2 = 289.82$, $df = 131$, $p < .01$, CFI = .94, TLI = .93, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .04) and, indeed, provides a significantly better fit than Model 3 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 54.15$, $\Delta df = 3$, $p < .01$) and

Model 4 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 284.33, \Delta df = 4, p < .01$). Moreover, in the hypothesized model, all items had significant and substantive loadings (standardized regression weights $> .40$) on their respective factors. The hypothesized model, however, was not significantly better than Model 2, the alternative four-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = -9.69, \Delta df = 2, p < .05$), indicating that it is appropriate to analyze transformational leadership at the sub-dimensional level.

Insert Table 2

Between-Group Variance

Given the nested nature of our data, we used the hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) procedures suggested by Bryk and Raudenbush (1992) to analyze both leader-level and individual-level variances simultaneously (using the HLM 6.0 statistical software). We first ran null models with subordinate performance, perceived transformational leadership, and the three dimensions of perceived transformational leadership as dependent variables. This analysis yielded a significant variance of all variables across leaders ($\chi^2 = 230.65, p < .01, ICC = .27$, for subordinate performance; $\chi^2 = 192.66, p < .01, ICC = .21$, for perceived transformational leadership; $\chi^2 = 166.87, p < .01, ICC = .15$, for individualized consideration; $\chi^2 = 167.18, p < .01, ICC = .16$, for intellectual stimulation; $\chi^2 = 220.34, p < .01, ICC = .26$, for leader charisma), indicating that at least 15% of variance existing across leaders could be explained in terms of these five variables. Thus, we used HLM procedures to test the hypothesized relationships.

Hypothesis Testing

Using procedures suggested by Zhang, Zyphur, and Preacher (2009), we first performed HLM analysis on the main effects of leader political skill on perceived transformational leadership, as well as on subordinate performance. Because political skill dimensions were

measured at the leader level, we put them into the model as Level 2 predictors. Then, we tested the mediating effect of perceived transformational leadership in the relationship between leader political skill and subordinate performance by adding group-centered perceived transformational leadership at Level 1, the group mean of perceived transformational leadership at Level 2, and leader political skill at Level 2. Last, we tested the main effects of the four dimensions of leader political skill on the three dimensions of perceived transformational leadership (Hypotheses 2 to 4), using leader political skill dimensions as the Level 2 predictors. Because Hypotheses 2 to 4 focus solely on main effects, we followed the regular HLM procedures (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). Except for gender, all Level 1 predictors were group-centered, while all Level 2 predictors were grand-centered.

Insert Table 3

Hypothesis 1. First, we found that leader political skill had a significant relationship with perceived transformational leadership—the mediator ($\gamma = .17, p < .05$). Next, we examined the impact of both leadership political skill and perceived transformational leadership on subordinate performance (see Model 5; $\gamma = .07$, n.s., for leader political skill’s effects on subordinate performance; $\gamma = .11, p < .01$, for perceived transformational leadership’s effects on subordinate performance). The coefficient of leader political skill on subordinate performance did not change in terms of its magnitude after adding the mediator at both levels. This result supported the mediation between leader political skill and subordinate performance through perceived transformational leadership.

In addition, we tested the significance of the mediation effect (Zhang et al. 2009). We calculated the product of the coefficient of leader political skill on transformational leadership perceptions ($\gamma = .17, SE = .07$) and the coefficient of transformational leadership perceptions on

subordinate performance ($\gamma = .11$, $SE = .04$, for within-group relationship; $\gamma = .02$, $SE = .07$, for between-group relationship). The results of Sobel's (1982) test on the indirect effects are marginally significant ($z = 1.82$, $p = .07$) at the within-group level, supporting the within-group mediation effect; however, the between-group mediation effect was not supported ($z = .28$, *n.s.*).

Hypotheses 2 and 3. We tested our hypothesized relationships among the facets of political skill and transformational leadership, and summarized the results in Table 4a-4c. As per our hypothesis 2, we found that as expected, social astuteness was significantly related to leader charisma ($\gamma = .18$, $p < .01$; see Table 4a), intellectual stimulation ($\gamma = .15$, $p < .05$; see Table 4b), and individualized consideration ($\gamma = .14$, $p < .05$; see Table 4c). However, networking ability did not significantly relate to any of the facets of transformational leadership ($p < .05$), partially supporting hypothesis 2. For hypothesis 3, as argued, we found that interpersonal influence significantly associated with leader charisma ($\gamma = .13$, $p < .05$; see Table 4a) and intellectual stimulation ($\gamma = .15$, $p < .05$; see Table 4b).

Hypothesis 4. As shown in Table 4a, we found that apparent sincerity was not significantly related to leader charisma ($\gamma = -.11$, *n.s.*), yet social astuteness remained significant ($\gamma = .22$, $p < .01$). Similarly, the effect of apparent sincerity did not reach a significant level ($\gamma = -.07$, *n.s.*) when interpersonal influence ($\gamma = .15$, $p < .05$) was considered. Similar results were found for intellectual stimulation while social astuteness ($\gamma = .15$, $p < .05$) was significant when apparent sincerity was not. However, neither interpersonal influence nor apparent sincerity were significant ($p > .05$). Thus, hypothesis 4 is particularly supported.

Insert Table 4a, 4b, & 4c

Discussion

At the composite level, we found that leader political skill is positively related to followers' perceptions of their leaders' transformational leadership. This finding confirms the proposition made in previous research that political skill benefits not only leadership emergence (e.g., Ewen et al., 2013), but also leadership effectiveness (e.g., Snell et al., 2014). According to our analysis, politically skilled leaders are able both to convince their followers to pursue their proposed vision and to provide individualized support, which ensures that their leadership is seen as more transformational. With the commitment to the proposed shared vision and personalized assistance from their transformational leaders, the followers have higher performance.

Our results indicate that social astuteness was associated with leader charisma, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. However, we found that networking ability, the other intra-psycho component was only marginally related to leader charisma. This result confirms our prediction that the intra-psycho components of political skill will make unique contributions to perceptions of transformational leadership. It seems that in a Chinese sample, social astuteness, rather than networking ability, imbues leaders with the capacity to understand their environment and those within it and this is what can be used to sell a compelling vision, understand follower needs, and create a safe, risk taking environment.

For the interpersonal components, our results suggest that demonstrated behavioral flexibility (interpersonal influence) impacts both leader charisma and intellectual stimulation. Because politically skilled leaders have interpersonal influence, they are flexible and can provide individualized and growth-related support. Further, they can successfully use a wide array of influencing tactics to sell their vision as well as encourage followers to be creative and take risks. Moreover, we argued and found support that in China, apparent sincerity, or the ability to seem genuine and trustworthy would not predict perceptions of leader charisma and intellectual

stimulation. Unlike individualist cultures, such as the United States, collectivist cultures (i.e., China) place far less value and importance on sincerity (Suh et al., 1998). Thus, this behavioral component of political skill becomes unimportant to perceptions of charisma and intellectual stimulation.

Contributions and Implications

The most prominent contribution of the current study is its examination of the relationship between political skill dimensions and perceived transformational leadership in the Chinese context. Viewing political skill as an important leadership antecedent, we investigated the associations between the sub-dimensions of leader political skill and transformational leadership perceptions. Of the four dimensions of political skill, apparent sincerity is not related to transformational leadership in a Chinese context. This finding confirms the proposition made by Ferris and associates (2008), who suggest that each facet of political skill has a unique impact in organizations.

In addition to making theoretical contributions, the current paper has merit in providing suggestions for practice. Our study emphasizes the importance of leaders' social effectiveness skills. When equipped with higher levels of political skill, leaders can be very influential in their organizations. Given that skills can be trained and developed, programs geared toward the development of transformational leadership might be well advised to add corresponding training in political skill. Our findings imply that, once the weaknesses and strengths of political skill sub-dimensions are diagnosed, we might be able to design more customized training (e.g., to improve social astuteness only) to reduce the costs of leadership development programs. Specially, in China, focus should be paid to increasing social astuteness and interpersonal influence rather than networking ability and apparent sincerity.

Research Limitations

This study has its limitations that should be noted. We asked supervisors to self-report their political skill, but others might more appropriately evaluate apparent sincerity. Future studies should work to refine the political skill measure, perhaps creating an ability test or a dual-source measure, rather than relying on self-assessments. A further limitation of this study is the lack of a comparison United States sample. Moving forward, researchers should consider examining one company operating in both the United States and China, allowing for more concrete comparisons. Moreover, we collected data dyadically in order to overcome common method bias, but future studies should consider a triadic design.

References

- Andriessse, E. H. S., and van Helvoirt, B. J. (2010), "Regional business systems and private sector development in Southeast Asia", *Asia Pacific Business Review*, Vol. 16, pp. 19–36.
- Arbuckle, J. L. (2007), *Amos 16.0 User's Guide*, SPSS Inc, Chicago, IL.
- Avolio, B. J., and Bass, B. M. (2004), *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire: Manual and Sampler Set* (3rd ed.), Mind Garden, Redwood City, CA.
- Blickle, G., Meurs, J.A., Zettler, I., Solga, J., Noethen, D., Kramer, J. and Ferris, G.R., (2008). Personality, political skill, and job performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 72, pp.377–387.
- Brislin, R. W. (1980), "Translation and content analysis of oral and written materials". In H. C. Triandis & J. W. Berry (Eds.), *Handbook of Cross-cultural Psychology*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA, Vol. 2, pp. 137–167.
- Brouer, R. L., Badaway, R. L., Gallagher, V. C., and Haber, J. A. (2014), "Political skill dimensionality and impression management choice and effective use", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 30, pp. 217–233.
- Brouer, R. L., Douglas, C., Treadway, D. C., and Ferris, G. R. (2013), "Leader political skill, relationship quality, and leadership effectiveness: A two-study model test and constructive replication", *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, Vol. 20, pp. 185–198.
- Brouer, R. L., Harris, K. J., and Kacmar, K. M. (2011). The moderating effects of political skill on the perceived politics–outcome relationships. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 32, pp. 869–885.
- Brown, F. W., and Moshavi, D. (2005), "Transformational leadership and emotional intelligence: A potential pathway for an increased understanding of interpersonal influence", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 26, pp. 867–871.
- Bryk, A. S., and Raudenbush, S. W. (1992), *Hierarchical linear models: Applications and data analysis methods*, Sage, Newbury Park, CA.
- Charbonneau, D. (2004), "Influence tactics and perceptions of transformational leadership", *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 25, pp. 565–576.
- Ewen, C., Wihler, A., Blickle, G., Oerder, K., Ellen, B. P. III, Douglas, C., and Ferris, G. R. (2013), "Further specification of the leader political skill–leadership effectiveness relationships: Transformational and transactional leader behavior as mediators", *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 24, pp. 516–533.
- Ferris, G. R., Blickle, G., Schneider, P. B., Kramer, J., Zettler, I., Solga, J., and Meurs, J. A. (2008), "Political skill construct and criterion-related validation: A two-study

- investigation”, *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 23, pp. 744–771.
- Ferris, G. R., Treadway, D. C., Kolodinsky, R. W., Hochwarter, W. A., Kacmar, C. J., Douglas, C., and Frink, D. D. (2005), “Development and validation of the political skill inventory”, *Journal of Management*, Vol. 31, pp. 126–152.
- Ferris, G. R., Treadway, D. C., Perrewé, P., Brouer, R. L., Douglas, C., and Lux, S. P. (2007), “Political skill in organizations”, *Journal of Management*, Vol. 33, pp. 290–320.
- Galvin, B., Waldman, D., and Balthazard, P. (2010), “Visionary communication qualities as mediators of the relationship between narcissism and attributions of leader charisma”, *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 63, pp. 509–537.
- Geldhof, G. J., Preacher, K. J., and Zyphur, M. J. (2014). “Reliability estimation in a multilevel confirmatory factor analysis framework”, *Psychological Methods*, Vol. 19, 72–91.
- Howell, J. M., and Hall-Merenda, K. E. (1999), “The ties that bind: The impact of leader–member exchange, transformational and transactional leadership, and distance on predicting follower performance”, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 84, pp. 680–694.
- Lee, K., Scandura, T. A., and Sharif, M. M. (2014), “Cultures have consequences: A configural approach to leadership across two cultures”, *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 25, pp. 692–710.
- Liaw, Y. J., Chi, N. W., and Chuang, A. (2010), “Examining the mechanisms linking transformational leadership, employee customer orientation, and service performance: The mediating roles of perceived supervisor and coworker support”, *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 25, pp. 477–492.
- Mael, F., and Ashforth, B. E. (1992), “Alumni and their alma mater: A partial test of the reformulated model of organizational identification”, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 13, pp. 103–123.
- Mandell, B., and Pherwani, S. (2003), “Relationship between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership style: A gender comparison”, *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 17, pp. 387–404.
- McAllister, C. P., Ellen, B. P., Perrewé, P. L., Ferris, G. R., and Hirsch, D. J. (2015), “Checkmate: Using political skill to recognize and capitalize on opportunities in the ‘game’ of organizational life”, *Business Horizons*, Vol. 58, pp. 25–34.
- Piccolo, R. F., and Colquitt, J. A. (2006), “Transformational leadership and job behaviors: The mediating role of core job characteristics”, *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 49, pp. 327–340.
- Popper, M., and Maysel, O. (2003), “Back to basics: Applying a parenting perspective to transformational leadership”, *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 14, pp. 41–65.
- Snell, S. J., Tonidandel, S., Braddy, P. W., and Fleenor, J. W. (2014), “The relative importance of

- political skill dimensions for predicting managerial effectiveness”, *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, Vol 23, pp. 915–929.
- Sobel, M.E., (1982). Asymptotic confidence intervals for indirect effects in structural equation models. *Sociological Methodology*, Vol. 13, pp. 290–312.
- Stevens, J. P. (2002). *Applied Multivariate Statistics for the Social Sciences (4th ed.)*. Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ.
- Sturman, M. C. (2003), “Searching for the inverted U-shaped relationship between time and performance: Meta-analyses of the experience/performance, tenure/performance, and age/performance relationships”, *Journal of Management*, Vol. 29, pp. 609–640.
- Suh, E., Diener, E., Oishi, S., and Triandis, H. C. (1998). “The shifting basis of life satisfaction judgments across cultures: Emotions versus norms”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 74, pp. 482–493.
- Wang, Z., and Gagne, M. (2012), “A Chinese-Canadian cross-cultural investigation of transformational leadership, autonomous motivation, and collectivistic values”, *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, Vol. 20, pp. 134–142.
- Wang, G., Oh, I. S., Courtright, S. H., and Colbert, A. E. (2011), “Transformational leadership and performance across criteria and levels: A meta-analytic review of 25 years of research”, *Group & Organization Management*, Vol. 36, pp. 223–270.
- Wei, L. Q., Liu, J., Chen, Y. Y., and Wu, L. Z. (2010), “Political skill, supervisor–subordinate guanxi and career prospects in Chinese firms”, *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 47, pp. 437–454.
- Zhang, H., Everett, A. M., Elkin, G., and Cone, M. H. (2012). “Authentic leadership theory development: theorizing on Chinese philosophy”, *Asia Pacific Business Review*, Vol. 18, pp. 587–605.
- Zhang, W., Wang, H., and Pearce, C. L. (2014), “Consideration for future consequences as an antecedent of transformational leadership behavior: The moderating effects of perceived dynamic work environment”, *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 25, pp. 329–343.
- Zhang, Z., Zyphur, M. J., and Preacher, K. J. (2009), “Testing multilevel mediation using hierarchical linear models problems and solutions”, *Organizational Research Methods*, Vol. 12, pp. 695–719.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
<i>Level 1 Variables</i>																
1. Age	31.04	8.17	—													
2. Gender	0.48	0.50	.05	—												
3. Relation tenure	3.53	4.39	.45**	.04	—											
4. Transformational leadership	2.24	0.83	.12*	.09	.20**	—										
5. Individualized consideration	2.04	0.94	.13*	.12*	.23**	.91**	—									
6. Intellectual stimulation	2.37	0.89	.03	.01	.14*	.92**	.75**	—								
7. Charisma	2.31	0.87	.16**	.10	.19**	.91**	.72**	.78**	—							
8. Subordinate performance	2.04	0.46	.09	.04	.19**	.17**	.22**	.13*	.10	—						
<i>Level 2 Variables</i>																
9. Leader age	33.75	7.85	.54**	.06	.35**	.16**	.16*	.08	.20**	.08	—					
10. Leader gender	0.63	0.48	.05	.33**	.07	.12*	.14*	.07	.12*	.04	.25**	—				
11. Leader political skill	5.22	0.64	.09	.02	.05	.19**	.17**	.17**	.19**	.16**	.09	.13	—			
12. Social astuteness	5.01	0.80	.12*	-.06	.05	.18**	.14*	.16**	.19**	.07	-.03	-.02	.81**	—		
13. Apparent sincerity	6.04	0.78	.06	.08	.20**	.11	.12*	.10	.06	.10	.20*	.13	.60**	.36**	—	
14. Interpersonal influence	5.29	0.85	.10	-.07	.00	.16**	.11	.16**	.17**	.17**	.05	.04	.79**	.57**	.31**	—
15. Networking ability	4.56	0.99	-.01	.09	-.08	.15**	.15**	.09	.16**	.14*	.05	.20*	.77**	.50**	.21*	.47**

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Two-tailed test.

Table 2. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analyses for Transformational Leadership and Subordinate Performance

Models	χ^2	<i>df</i>	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
1. Hypothesized model	289.82	131		.94	.93	.06	.04
2. Four-factor model	280.13	129	-9.69 (2)	.94	.93	.06	.05
3. Two-factor model	343.97	134	54.15 (3)	.92	.91	.07	.05
4. Single-factor model	574.15	135	284.33 (4)	.84	.81	.10	.08

Table 3. Results of HLM Analysis: Unidimensional

	Perceived Transformation Leadership				Subordinate Performance					
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>
Intercept	2.13**	.10	2.14**	.10	2.02**	.06	2.03**	.06	1.99**	.06
<i>Level 1 Controls</i>										
Age	-.01	.01	-.01	.01	-.01*	.01	-.01*	.01	-.01*	.01
Gender	.05	.10	.06	.10	.00	.06	.00	.06	.00	.06
Relational tenure	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02**	.01	.02**	.01	.02**	.01
<i>Level 1 Predictor</i>										
Transformational leadership									.11**	.04
<i>Level 2 Controls</i>										
Leader age	.01	.01	.01	.01	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Leader gender	.14	.13	.12	.13	.02	.08	.02	.07	.02	.08
<i>Level 2 Predictors</i>										
Leader political skill			.17*	.08			.08	.05	.07	.05
Mean transformational leadership									.02	.06
χ^2	179.80**		170.92**		236.85**		225.99**		234.41**	

Note: Unstandardized estimates are reported. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Two-tailed test. Individual $n = 312$; Leader $n = 114$.

Table 4a. Results HLM Analysis: Political Skill Dimensions and Leader Charisma

	Leader Charisma															
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8	
	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>
Intercept	2.17**	.11	2.17**	.11	2.20**	.11	2.18**	.11	2.16**	.11	2.16**	.11	2.19**	.11	2.17**	.11
<i>Level 1 Controls</i>																
Age	-.00	.01	-.00	.01	-.00	.01	-.00	.01	-.00	.01	-.00	.01	-.00	.01	-.00	.01
Gender	.09	.11	.10	.11	.08	.11	.10	.11	.09	.11	.11	.11	.08	.11	.11	.11
Relational tenure	.01	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02
<i>Level 2 Controls</i>																
Leader age	.02*	.01	.02*	.01	.02*	.01	.02*	.01	.02*	.01	.02**	.01	.02**	.01	.02**	.01
Leader gender	.14	.14	.13	.13	.11	.14	.13	.13	.15	.14	.14	.13	.12	.13	.13	.14
<i>Level 2 Predictors</i>																
Social astuteness			.18**	.07							.22**	.08				
Networking ability					.10	.06							.11	.06		
Interpersonal influence							.13*	.06							.15*	.07
Apparent sincerity									-.01	.07	-.11	.09	-.04	.08	-.04	.08
χ^2	199.68**		185.56**		192.36**		189.82**		199.93**		181.54**		191.88**		199.93**	

Note: Unstandardized estimates are reported. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Two-tailed test.

Table 4b. Results HLM Analysis: Political Skill Dimensions and Intellectual Stimulation

	Intellectual Stimulation															
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6		Model 7		Model 8	
	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>
Intercept	2.32**	.11	2.32**	.11	2.33**	.11	2.33**	.11	2.33**	.11	2.32**	.11	2.33**	.11	2.33**	.11
<i>Level 1 Controls</i>																
Age	-.01	.01	-.01	.01	-.01	.01	-.01	.01	-.01	.01	-.01	.01	-.01	.01	-.01	.01
Gender	-.05	.11	-.04	.11	-.05	.11	-.05	.11	-.05	.11	-.04	.11	-.05	.11	-.03	.11
Relational tenure	.01	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02
<i>Level 2 Controls</i>																
Leader age	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.00	.01	.00	.01
Leader gender	.12	.14	.12	.13	.11	.14	.10	.13	.12	.14	.12	.13	.11	.14	.11	.10
<i>Level 2 Predictors</i>																
Social astuteness			.15*	.07							.15*	.08				
Networking ability					.04	.06							.03	.06		
Interpersonal influence							.14*	.06							.14	.07
Apparent sincerity									.06	.07	.00	.08	.05	.07	.01	.08
χ^2	163.33**		155.07**		161.41**		157.15**		161.86**		155.12**		160.66**		157.04**	

Note: Unstandardized estimates are reported. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Two-tailed test.

Table 4c. Results HLM Analysis Political Skill Dimensions and Individualized Consideration

	Individualized Consideration									
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>	γ	<i>SE</i>
Intercept	1.88**	.11	1.88**	.11	1.90**	.11	1.88**	.11	1.89**	.11
<i>Level 1 Controls</i>										
Age	-.01	.01	-.01	.01	-.01	.01	-.01	.01	-.01	.01
Gender	.12	.12	.13	.12	.12	.12	.13	.12	.12	.12
Relational tenure	.04*	.02	.04*	.02	.04*	.02	.04*	.02	.04*	.02
<i>Level 2 Controls</i>										
Leader age	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01	.01
Leader gender	.17	.14	.16	.14	.15	.14	.16	.14	.16	.14
<i>Level 2 Predictors</i>										
Social astuteness			.14*	.07						
Networking ability					.09	.06				
Interpersonal influence							.09	.07		
Apparent sincerity									.08	.07
χ^2	154.57**		148.43**		149.81**		152.40**		152.81**	

Note: Unstandardized estimates are reported. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. Two-tailed test.