Front. Bus. Res. China 2015, 9(3): 400–419
DOI 10.3868/s070-004-015-0016-0

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Political Skill, Gender, and Social Network Positioning of Chinese Employees

Abstract We collected data from 156 Chinese hospital employees to investigate how political skill and gender affect their advice and friendship network positioning. We found employees with high levels of political skill are more likely to proactively seek friendship ties, while political skill does not affect employees' advice networks overall. In addition, results show that for men, those with high levels of political skill have lower in-degree centrality in advice and friendship networks than those with less political skill. Political skill does not affect women's network positions.

Keywords political skill, gender, social networks, Chinese organizations

1 Introduction

Social networks are important for employees' career development and various outcomes in organizations. This is evidenced by the prominence of social networks in job acquisition (e.g., Granovetter, 1995, Ioannides and Loury, 2004; Montgomery, 1992), leader effectiveness (Balkundi, Barsness, and Michael, 2009), and job performance (Balkundi and Harrison, 2006). As the outcomes of social network positioning have been well studied, an equally, if not more, important question, has received surprisingly less attention. That is, what individual characteristics acting as antecedents help the actors to effectively embed themselves within these networks (Kilduff and Brass, 2010, for a review)? Beyond previous studies on how demographic similarities (Klein, Lim, Saltz, and

Received March 9, 2015

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Mayer, 2004) and self-monitoring (Mehra, Kilduff, and Brass, 2001) affect employees' social networks, little is known about how individual characteristics affect employees' network positions in an organization. To address this gap, the current study attempts to further investigate how a different type of individual characteristics, specifically, political skill as a measurement of an individual's social effectiveness, together with gender, affects employees' social network positions in advice and friendship networks.

Political skill is defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ferris, Treadway, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, and Frink, 2005, p. 127). Ferris and his colleagues have asserted that "individuals with political skill are adept at identifying and developing diverse contacts and networks of people. People in these networks tend to hold assets seen as valuable and necessary for successful personal and organizational gains" (Ferris, Treadway, Perrewe, Brouer, Douglas, and Lux, 2007, p. 292). This suggests that politically skilled employees should be more capable of advantageously positioning themselves within social networks in the workplace, yet no empirical assessment of this relationship exists. Furthermore, politically skilled individuals should be more adept at gaining power in organizations (Ferris et al., 2005).

In addition to the role of political skill, gender has also been found to play an important role in determining employees' embeddedness in social networks. Research suggested that women are often in a disadvantaged position and have smaller personal networks (Hanson and Pratt, 1995). Previous research has not examined compensating strategies used by women in particular as a disadvantaged group within networks, but suggests that gender may have a more complex effect on personal networks than other traits studied (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, 2001). The current study aims to integrate the inter-personal skill perspective (political skill) in investigating the underlying relationship between gender and social networks.

The current study develops an integrated model of the interaction between political skill and gender with social network positioning (see Figure 1.). We believe by examining political skill and gender simultaneously, this study will contribute to our understanding of how employees construct their social network embeddedness in organizations. In particular, this study makes two key

contributions to social network research. First, it integrates the human capital perspective and social capital perspective by examining how personal ability (political skill) and a demographic variable (gender) affect individuals' social standings simultaneously. Second, we further extend the gender effect in social network research by comparing how male and female employees receive differentiated impacts in term of social network positions due to political skill.

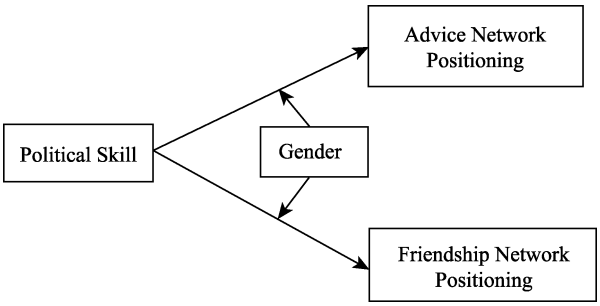

Figure 1 Theoretical Model

2 Social Networks

Social network research focuses on the relationships between actors rather than the attributes of the actors themselves (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, and Tsai, 2004). Networks are not merely sets of linked individuals, but rather systems for mobilizing resources and capital, and performing other functions closely related to work (Lincoln and Miller, 1979). Social capital refers to resources that are accessible through social relations, and embedded in the ties composing one's personal networks (Lin, 2001). Tangible and intangible resources such as wealth, information, power, and reputation, as well as others' social networks comprise an individual's social capital (Lin, 2001). In the current study, we examine two types of networks: friendship and advice. We choose these two types of networks because they are typical representatives for formal and informal social ties. A friendship network is an expressive network, and it originates from interpersonal liking and mutual emotional bonds. An advice network is an instrumental network, and it reflects one's expertise in task-related domains.

The relevant resources in a friendship network are liking and socio-emotional support. Yet friendship ties may also be instrumental in obtaining tangible resources such as information or rewards (Brass, 1992). Friendship relations

encourage trust, empathy and a norm of reciprocity that are likely to facilitate information and knowledge exchange (Uzzi, 1996). Information obtained from friends may thus be more readily available and also more credible (Brass, 1992). In addition, friends may have greater motivation to be of assistance to (Krackhardt, 1992) and cooperate with (Jehn and Shah, 1997) one another than those who lack such an emotional bond.

Advice networks have been shown to affect several aspects of an employee's organizational experience. Research has determined that advice centrality positively predicts both in-role and extra-role performance (Sparrowe, Liden, Wayne, and Kraimer, 2001), perceptions of risk taking, acceptance, information access (Ibarra and Andrews, 1993), and knowledge overlap (Wong, 2008). Seibert, Kraimer, and Liden (2001) found that placements in advice networks could have an indirect impact on salary, promotions over time, and career satisfaction.

In their examination of personality and individual differences as antecedents to centrality in team networks, Klein and colleagues (2004) posited that demographics, personal values, and personality all impact individuals' positions of centrality. Overall similarity across the aforementioned dimensions, with demographic similarity having the weakest effect, predicted both advice and friendship centrality. Further, the personality traits of agreeableness and neuroticism predicted centrality with high agreeableness having a positive relationship and high neuroticism being negatively related. Given these results, further research is necessary to provide an improved understanding of the influence of individual differences on network positioning.

3 Political Skill

Political skill, defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ferris, et al., 2005, p.127), is a concept rooted in discussions of power, persuasion, negotiation, and manipulation (e.g., Pfeffer, 1981; Mintzberg, 1983). In recent years scholars have more closely examined these phenomena; this work has refined the concept as well as resulted in a growing body of literature that has yielded robust findings with regard to the importance of political skill in the workplace.

Politically skilled individuals are characterized as being socially astute, capable of influencing others, sincere in their interactions, and thus good at social networking (Ferris et al., 2007). Ferris et al. (2007) described social astuteness as individuals' awareness of their own and others' behaviors given the social environment. High levels of this characteristic are related to sensitivity to others and the ability to identify with others which is associated with being able to meet one's personal objectives. Interpersonal influence focuses on individuals' ability to be convincing in ways that lead to positive responses from the targets. This type of influence involves engaging in behaviors that are suitable for the influence context. Networking ability involves the development of valuable contacts through mostly subtle and friendly interpersonal interactions as well as skilled negotiating and conflict management. These interactions result in strong coalitions and positioning that promotes opportunities. Finally, apparent sincerity addresses individuals' ability to appear sincere, authentic, and honest. This affects perceptions of the motives of one's behaviors; those that are perceived to be without manipulation are more likely to be successful in attaining their intended goals.

Political skill operates to increase individuals' confidence that they are able to successfully navigate their environment and promote desirable outcomes (Ferris et al., 2007). As such, political skill moderates the person-situation relationship. A rapidly growing body of research has shown that political skill has wide-ranging effects within organizations. Specifically, political skill has been shown to positively affect the quality of leader-subordinate relationships (Breland, Treadway, Duke, and Adams, 2007; Brouer, Duke, Treadway, and Ferris, 2009), subordinates' guanxi with supervisors and career development in Chinese firms (Wei, Liu, Chen, and Wu, 2010), leadership effectiveness (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas and Ammeter, 2004; Semadar, Robins, and Ferris, 2006), job satisfaction in political climates (Gallagher and Laird, 2008), stress (Liu, Perrewé, Hochwarter, and Kacmar, 2004; Zellars, Perrewe, Rossi, Tepper, and Ferris, 2008) and increased performance ratings (Harris et al., 2007; Kolodinsky, Treadway, and Ferris, 2007; Treadway et al., 2007).

As we view organizations as political arenas, political skill is an appropriate measure of an employee's ability to navigate these power dynamics. Treadway, Hochwarter, Kacmar, and Ferris (2005) found individuals with high levels of political skill were more likely to engage in political behavior. In particular, they

frame political skill itself as an important tool to gain access to valuable resources in the organization. As we theorize social network positions are also a type of intangible resources for organizational members, it is reasonable to argue that political skill is likely to facilitate employees' embeddedness in advantageous positions in advice and friendship networks. In particular, we believe political skill will enhance employees' both in-degree and out-degree centrality. As for out-degree centrality, highly politically skilled individuals are more socially astute, and they are more likely to proactively seek to build social ties than their low politically skilled cohort. As for in-degree centrality, highly politically skilled individuals are better at building interpersonal ties (indicated by their ability to network), and this ability leads to a larger network reflected by in-degree centrality. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1a: Political skill is positively related to employees' out-degree centrality in their advice network.

Hypothesis 1b: Political skill is positively related to employees' in-degree centrality in their advice network.

Hypothesis 2a: Political skill is positively related to employees' out-degree centrality in their friendship network.

Hypothesis 2b: Political skill is positively related to employees' in-degree centrality in their friendship network.

4 Gender and Social Network Positioning

Research on the effect of gender on social networks has shown that men and women embed themselves in different positions in a network. There is evidence that women are rated as less influential than men, and often are not well-integrated into men's networks especially in an organization's dominant coalition (Brass, 1985). On the contrary, men are more likely than women to have extensive and utilitarian networks at work (Hanson and Pratt, 1995).

Men are often viewed as more independent than women. For example, Carlson (1971) found that men and women have fundamental differences in personality, particularly in ego function. He argued that males view themselves in objective and individualistic terms, independent of others, and females construct themselves based on their social relationships. This finding suggests that women are more relationship oriented, whereas men are more task oriented. Though it is

evident females usually embed themselves in more disadvantageous positions than their male cohort, some contrary findings suggest that the story might be more complex than that. In one study (Gill, Stockard, Johnson, and William, 1987), the authors found that women and men differentiated in the relational dimension in five separate samples and females are more likely than males to perform social interactions when they are confronted with a task or questions.

As noted above, gender differentiates employees' social network positioning. These inconsistent findings suggested that there is an overlooked variable tangling with gender that affects network positions. In the current study, we believe political skill may help clarify this issue.

Proactively seeking social ties in advice and friendship networks may be viewed as a behavior used to establish individuals' social networks, and gender plays a role in how individuals develop their personal networks. For example, Hanson and Pratt (1995) found that men are more likely to have extensive and utilitarian networks at work, while women have more expressive networks of smaller size. Consistent with this result, Ibarra (1997) found that female mangers have less homophilous networks than male managers in several Fortune 500 firms. The study also found that women possessed more close ties than men. Therefore, the author argues that males and females build different profiles in their networks for career success.

In addition, research shows that females are nonetheless in a disadvantageous position when forming networks. For instance, Scott (1996) found that, in a public sector context, women who share the same title, work experience and age as their male counterparts tend to have fewer relationships with top government officials. In addition, a woman is more likely to connect with another woman at the same level within an organization, but have fewer links with women who have higher positions. Consistent with this notion, Brass (1985) suggested that women are less integrated in the male networks within an organization, which is a critical career resource. Also, female employees are less central in overall networks. Therefore, we propose that gender influences individuals' social network positions in both advice and friendship networks.

In terms of their out-degree centrality in an advice network, as men tend to be more active in developing their utilitarian networks or seek to join an organization's dominant coalition, they may possess higher out-degree centrality compared to their female counterparts. In looking together at the impact of both

political skill and gender on out-degree centrality, we expect that males with high levels of political skill are most likely to have the highest out-degree centrality, whereas females with low levels of political skill are least likely to seek advice and friendship connections with others. Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 3a: Gender will moderate the positive relationship between political skill and out-degree centrality in friendship networks such that the relationship will be stronger for males than females.

Hypothesis 3b: Gender will moderate the positive relationship between political skill and out-degree centrality in advice networks such that the relationship will be stronger for males than females.

On the other hand, for in-degree centrality, we predict males will have higher in-degree centrality than their female counterparts as men are always at the center of the dominant coalition (Brass, 1985).

Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 4a: Gender will moderate the positive relationship between political skill and in-degree centrality in friendship networks such that the relationship will be stronger for males than females.

Hypothesis 4b: Gender will moderate the positive relationship between political skill and in-degree centrality in advice networks such that the relationship will be stronger for males than females.

5 Method

5.1 Sample and Procedures

For the study we surveyed 181 employees from a private hospital in northeast China. Surveys were distributed by members of the research team with each questionnaire being accompanied by an endorsement letter from the company. Employees were given time during their breaks to complete the questionnaire and return their survey in a blank sealed envelope to a member of the research team.

As we used a whole social network analysis in the study, we approached all the employees of the hospital (by the time we conducted the study some had resigned and others were on maternity leave). Overall, we received 156 usable

responses related to our study focus out of 181 surveys sent out, yielding a response rate of 87.85%. According to Costenbader and Valente (2003), even if the social network is incomplete or some network data are missing we may still take advantage of some aspects of network theory and techniques. The average age of our sample was 30.68 years (*SD* = 8.71), and their average tenure was 3.04 years (*SD* = 2.89). 109 were women (68.55%) and 50 were men (31.45%).

5.2 Measures

5.2.1 Political Skill

We measured political skill using an 18-item questionnaire developed and validated by Ferris et al. (2005). This measure was self-reported and manipulated to assess respondents' perceptions of their own political skill. The items consisted of four dimensions of political skill. The dimensions are networking ability (e.g., "I am good at building relationships with influential people at work"), social astuteness (e.g., ''I always seem to instinctively know the right things to say or do to influence others"), interpersonal influence (e.g., "I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others"), and apparent genuineness (e.g., "When communicating with others, I try to be genuine in what I say and do"). We measured all items using a 7-point-Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Evidence of scale validity is reported in Ferris et al. (2005). The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.90.

5.2.2 Out-Degree/In-Degree Centrality of Advice/Friendship Networks

We used the roster method to collect data on out-degree /in-degree centrality. Participants were given two lists that included the names of all employees in the hospital. One asked the respondents to check the names of individuals from whom they seek information or opinions related to their work and the other asked respondents to identify the degree of intimacy with the names on the list. Thus the former tracked an information flow social network and the latter a friendship network. UCIET was used to calculate the respondent's out-degree centrality and in-degree centrality in the networks. In the advice network, out-degree centrality is represented by the number of people from whom the employee seek

information or opinions. In-degree centrality is represented by the number people who had sought knowledge, information or opinions from the employee. In the friendship network, out-degree centrality is represented by the number of people with whom the employee thinks he or she has an intimate relationship. In-degree centrality is represented by the number of people who think the individual is their intimate friend.

5.2.3 Gender

In the study, Gender is coded as 0 = female and 1 = male.

5.2.4 Control Variables

As demographic differences may influence an employee's social network positioning (Klein et al., 2004), we included age, position, and tenure as control variables.

6 Results

The means, standardized deviations, correlations, and reliability statistics of key variables are presented in Table 1. In general, the correlations among measures were as expected. Although political skill may have little effect on the outcome variables we are focused on (Table 1), we seek evidence for when the interaction of political skill and gender with centrality has a significant relationship.

6.1 Hypothesis Testing

We used Ucinet 6.0 to calculate out-degree centrality and in-degree centrality. To analyze the relationships more specifically, we conducted hierarchical multiple regressions to test the hypotheses. In the analysis, we used grand-mean centering for the variables that involve interaction.

6.2 Main Effects of Political Skill on Advice and Friendship Networks

Hypothesis 1a and 2a state that political skill has a significant relationship with

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Inter-Correlations among Variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Age	30.68	8.71									
Position	0.74	1.17	0.44**								
Tenure	3.04	2.89	0.41**	0.59**							
Gender	0.30	0.47	0.31**	−0.01	0.06						
Political skill	4.93	0.77	0.02	0.10	0.07	0.20*					
Out-degree Centrality in advice network	4.51	9.38	−0.07	0.21**	0.15	0.04	0.11				
In-degree Centrality in advice network	3.96	2.43	0.25**	0.35**	0.42**	0.30**	0.11	0.001			
Out-degree Centrality in friendship network	2.25	5.85	−0.03	0.06	0.17*	0.06	0.18*	0.23*	0.15**	0.13	
In-degree Centrality in friendship network	2.01	1.69	0.17	−0.02	−0.03	0.24**	0.08	0.009	0.19*	0.10	0.04

Notes. $N = 156$. *SD* = standard deviation $p^{*} < 0.05$, $p^{**} < 0.01$ Reliabilities of the scales (Political Skill) is presented in boldface within parentheses along the central diagonal.

out-degree centrality and in-degree centrality in advice networks. However, as demonstrated by Table 2, the results reveal a non-significant positive relationship between political skill and out-degree centrality (b = 0.80, p > 0.1, ns) and in-degree centrality (b = 0.03, p > 0.1, ns). Therefore, Hypotheses 1a and 2a were not supported.

As for friendship networks, we see in Table 3 that political skill is significantly related to out-degree centrality (b = 1.23, p < 0.05, ns). Thus Hypothesis 1b was supported. This result suggests that employees with high levels of political skill are more likely to proactively reach out to develop friendship ties. However, although political skill is positively related to in-degree centrality, the relationship is not significant, i.e., Hypothesis 2b was not supported.

Table 2 Results of HMLR Analysis: Interactive Effects of Political Skill and Gender on Advice Network

	Out-degree Centrality				In-degree Centrality			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	−0.23*	−0.23*	−0.27**	−0.26*	0.02	0.02	−0.01	−0.03
Position	2.02*	1.95**	2.10**	2.09*	0.29	0.27	0.39*	0.41*
Tenure	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.26	0.26**	0.26**	0.26**	0.27**
Political skill (A)		1.05	0.80	0.79		0.22	0.02	0.03
Gender (B)			1.97	1.85			1.53**	1.73**
A * B				0.64				−1.14*
F	4.42**	3.63**	3.18**	2.65*	12.57**	9.64**	11.44**	10.76**
R^2	0.079**	0.086**	0.094**	0.095*	0.196**	0.200**	0.272**	0.298**
ΔR^2	0.079	0.007	0.008	0.001	0.196	0.005	0.072**	0.026*

Notes. N=156. *SD*=standard deviation. ^{+}p<0.1, $^{*}p$<0.05, $^{**}p$<0.01. HMLR=Hierarchal Multiple Linear Regression.

6.3 Interaction of Political Skill and Gender in Advice Networks

Our hypotheses suggest that gender moderates the positive relationship between political skill and out-degree centrality and also the relationship between political skill and in-degree centrality in advice networks.

Table 3 Results of HMLR Analysis: Interactive Effects of Political Skill and Gender on Friendship Network

	Out-degree Centrality				In-degree Centrality			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Constant	3.31^{+}	−3.25	−2.58	−2.50	0.84^{+}	−0.15	0.43	0.7
Age	−0.08	−0.07	−0.09	−0.09	0.05*	0.05**	0.03^{+}	0.02
Position	−0.10*	−0.19	−0.14	−0.13	−0.12	−0.13	−0.08	−0.06
Tenure	0.46*	0.45*	0.45*	0.45*	−0.04	−0.04	−0.04	−0.04
Political skill (A)		1.32*	1.23*	1.23*		0.20	0.12	0.13
Gender (B)			0.76	0.81			0.65*	0.84**
A * B				−0.29				−1.06**
F	2.20*	2.92*	2.43*	2.02^{+}	2.30^{+}	2.06^{+}	2.58*	3.60**
R^2	0.041*	0.071*	0.074*	0.074^{+}	0.043^{+}	0.051^{+}	0.078*	0.124**
ΔR^2	0.041	0.030	0.003	0.000	0.044^{+}	0.008	0.027*	0.047**

Notes. N=156. *SD*=standard deviation. $^{+}p<0.1$, $^{*}p<0.05$, $^{**}p<0.01$. HMLR=Hierarchal Multiple Linear Regression.

As indicated by Model 4 of Table 2, the relationship between the interaction of political skill and gender and out-degree centrality is not significant (b=0.64, p>0.1) whereas the interaction with in-degree centrality is significant (b= –1.14, p<0.05). Following Preacher, Curran, and Bauer (2006), we plotted this significant moderating effect and conducted simple slope tests. Figure 2 illustrates that for males, political skill and in-degree centrality are negatively related (simple slope = –1.10, p<0.05), whereas when employees were female, the relationship became non-significant (simple slope = 0.03, p > 0.1, ns). Therefore, Hypothesis 3b was supported. The results suggested that male employees with high levels of political skill tend to have low in-degree centrality.

6.4 Interaction of Political Skill and Gender in Friendship Networks

The HMLR results in Model 8 of Table 3 show that the interaction between political skill and gender was negatively related to out-degree centrality but insignificantly (b = –0.29, p > 0.1). On the other hand, the interaction with

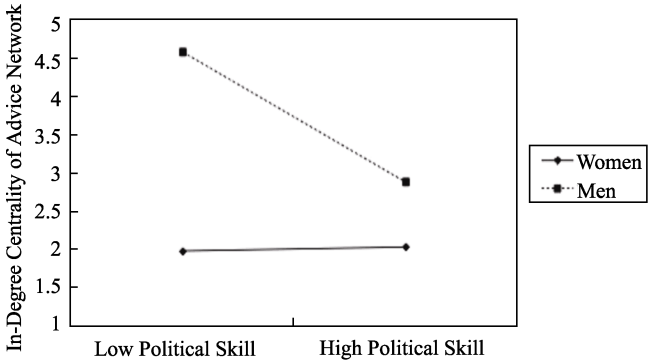

Figure 2 The two-way interactive effect of political skill and gender on in-degree centrality of the advice network

in-degree centrality has a significant relationship (b = –1.06, p<0.01). As can been seen from Figure 3, the simple slope test results (Preacher, Curran, and Bauer, 2006) reveal that when employees are male, political skill and in-degree centrality has a negative relationship (simple slope = –0.93, p < 0.05). However, when the staff are female, the relationship becomes non-significant (simple slope value=0.13, p > 0.1, ns). So our hypothesis was not supported as it expected the opposite and the results showed that male employees with higher levels of political skill have lower in-degree centrality. In other words, employees in the work place are less likely to think that men with political skill are their intimate friends.

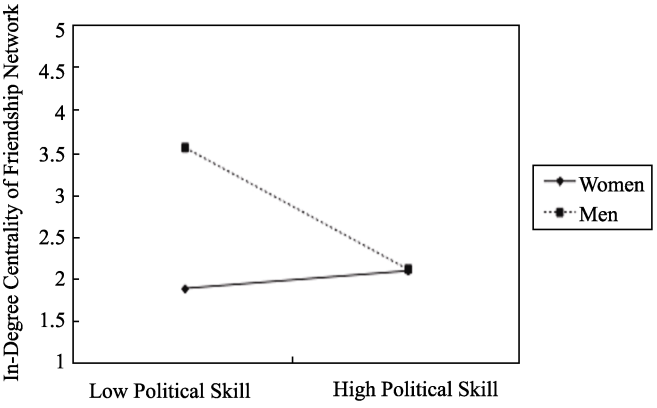

Figure 3 The Two-Way Interactive Effect of Political Skill and Gender on Out-Degree Centrality of the Friendship Network

7 Discussion

7.1 Theoretical Implications

The current findings contribute to our understanding of how personal attributes affect employees' social network embeddedness. Specifically, this study is the first empirical attempt to investigate political skill as a social skill antecedent to an employee's social network embeddedness. We found that political skill seems to have no effect for female employees, but does make a difference for male employees. These results explore the boundary conditions of social skill on employees' network embeddedness, and suggest that male and female actors may need different capabilities to engage in central positions in advice networks. These results revealed a deeper mechanism between gender and social network positioning beyond simple surface demographics.

Second, by discovering the opposite effects of political skill on employees' advice versus friendship networks, the current study sheds light on the differentiated role of individuals' abilities in social network embeddedness. Consistent with our theory, employees with high levels of political skill more proactively approach others for friendship ties. However, the group with good political skills is not the target for others seeking friendship. In addition, political skill does not affect employees' advice network positioning. If we further analyze the difference between friendship and advice networks, we find that central positions in friendship networks are based on interpersonal liking in informal relationships, and central positions in advice networks are based on expertise, liking, and seniority in formal and semi-formal relationships. Political skill is an ability that helps employees to accurately understand their surrounding social environment and get ahead (Ferris et al., 2005). Therefore, political skill would bring more utility for employees in building informal social relations. Our study has supported this differentiated effect of political skill on building informal and formal personal ties.

Third, the current findings contribute to our understanding of how men and women are differently affected by political skill in building their social networks. In particular, we found that political skill does not affect female employees' advice and friendship networks. In addition, male employees with high levels of political skill are in the most peripheral positions for others seeking advice and

friendship. It almost seems that these male employees are punished for their strong ability to engage in political behavior, and might be seen as threats or unreliable sources for work-related advice and friendship, whereas other groups with low levels of political skill are seen as trustworthy and an appropriate target for others in seeking advice and friendship. These results suggested that political skill does not automatically result in centrality in advice and friendship networks. These findings also demonstrate the complex mechanism between individual skill and social network embeddedness, which is worthy of future research.

7.2 Practical Implications

A central position in advice networks is positively related to in-role and extra-role performance (Sparrowe et al., 2001) and information access (Ibarra and Andrews, 1993). To encourage employees to embed themselves in a central position, managers will benefit from utilizing different strategies to help male and female employees. As our results show, men with high levels of political skill are less likely to possess central positions in advice and friendship networks, whereas women are not affected by this particular motive. Women, as previous research has suggested (Kilduff and Brass, 2010), are more relationship-oriented. Therefore, managers and companies can implement customized training programs for male and female employees to encourage them in their personal network building.

Managers should also be aware that male employees with high levels of political skill are usually not the most popular sources of advice and friendship for others. As this situation may be frustrating for highly motivated men, managers can prepare them for these obstacles beforehand. Furthermore, managers should also encourage women to be more proactive in work-related information exchange, and help them to benefit from central positions in the social networks in an organization.

7.3 Limitations and Future Directions

First, the current study uses a cross-sectional design, and may not support the current causal hypothesis. Analytically, the causal relationships between gender/political skill and social network embeddedness could be reversed.

However, it is impossible to argue that social networks affect gender; therefore, this possibility is ruled out. In addition, it also seems counter-intuitive that network positions lead people to develop political skill. Nevertheless, future studies would benefit from a longitudinal design to provide better support for the causal relationships between individual attributes and network positioning.

Second, this study explored the model based on a Chinese hospital sample. In such a medical care context, employees work in teams (e.g., a surgical team), and often discuss tasks with their colleagues. This setting allows employees to develop their social network ties, in both task-related ways (advice network), and personal ways (friendship ties). In addition, Chinese culture is typically a collective culture, and interpersonal relationships are an important part of people's lives. The cultural emphasis on social ties gives the current study an opportunity to examine these well-developed social ties among Chinese workers. As previous studies have argued that Easterners might interpret and understand cross-cultural management knowledge and skills in different ways compared to Westerners (Shapiro, Ozanne and Saatcioglu, 2008), we also expect future research could expand to different cultures or industries.

8 Conclusion

The current study found that employees with high levels of political skill proactively seek friendship ties and political skill does not affect employees' advice networks in general. In addition, political skill does not affect female employees' advice and friendship ties whereas male employees with high levels of political skill have a lower level of in-degree centrality in advice and friendship networks compared to men with low levels of political skill.

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