Is the Political Skill Inventory Fit for Personnel Selection? An Experimental Field Study

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The political skill inventory (PSI) assesses social effectiveness in organizations by self-reports and has demonstrated strong evidence of validity. It was the purpose of this experimental field study to investigate construct and criterion-related validity of the PSI when used under conditions of personnel selection. In the experimental group ($n = 102$), the instructions asked job incumbents to work on the PSI, a social desirability scale, and a Big-Five personality inventory as if they took part in a personnel selection procedure for a personally very attractive position. Additionally, they were asked to report yearly income. In the control group ($n = 110$), job incumbents were asked to answer the items honestly. As expected, in both conditions, the PSI did not correlate with social desirability, but it correlated positively with extraversion, conscientiousness, and income, and negatively with neuroticism, thus demonstrating construct and incremental criterion-related validity under both conditions. Implications and limitations are discussed.

1. Introduction

More than 25 years ago, both Mintzberg (1983, 1985) and Pfeffer (1981) suggested political perspectives on organizations, whereby political skill was proposed by both to be an essential competency, critical to being successful in organizations. However, the development of the political skill construct was not pursued at that time, and only in recent years has been more fully conceptualized (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005; Ferris et al., 2007) and empirically measured (Ferris et al., 2005).

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 et al., 2005, p. 127), and research has provided considerable evidence for its construct validity (e.g., Ferris et al., 2005, 2007, 2008; Liu et al., 2007). In addition, political skill has been shown to emerge as the best predictor of managerial job performance when examined in competitive prediction with other social effectiveness constructs (i.e., self-monitoring, leadership self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence; Semadar, Robins, & Ferris, 2006), and superior to self-efficacy in the prediction of contextual job performance (Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris, & Hochwarter, 2008). Likewise, political skill emerged as a significant predictor of overall job performance ratings after controlling for general mental ability and the Big-Five personality variables, both cross-sectionally and predictively (Blickle et al., in press). Furthermore, political skill was associated with early employees' income, hierarchical position, and career satisfaction (Ferris et al., 2008). In addition, political skill attenuates the negative influence of social stressors on job satisfaction, somatic wellbeing, and blood pressure (Harvey, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2007; Perrewé et al., 2004).

In conclusion, political skill is a relatively recently developed social effectiveness construct, and already has demonstrated some impressive evidence of construct and criterion-related validity. Thus, the political skill inventory (PSI) meets the necessary conditions to be used as an assessment tool in personnel selection. However, the PSI is mostly used as a self-report assessment scale. Given the prevalent beliefs among many organizational stakeholders (e.g., organizational decision-makers and the legal system) that job applicants or existing employees completing self-reported assessment devices can and do fake their responses, the issue of potential response distortion needs to be addressed if we hope to see the PSI as an effectively functioning selection

and assessment tool utilized in personnel decision making (Dilchert, Ones, Viswesvaran, & Deller, 2006). Therefore, it was the purpose of the present study to investigate the construct and criterion-related validity of the PSI when used under conditions of personnel selection.

1.2. Theoretical development and hypothesis formulation

Political skill is a newly minted variable. It is a comprehensive pattern of social competencies manifested in the work place and affected by stable dispositions, training, practice, and experience (Ferris et al., 2007, 2008). Thus, the PSI measures a noncognitive social effectiveness variable that is not a personality measure. However, like many personality scales (Hough & Oswald, 2008), the PSI is mostly used as a self-report assessment scale.

A major concern of many organizational stakeholders in using assessment devices based on self-reports by applicants in applied personnel selection settings has been the potential for response distortion (e.g., claiming unlikely virtues, denying personal weaknesses, exaggerating personal strengths, and other forms of trying to make a good impression). Dilchert et al. (2006) concluded that all high-stakes assessments are likely to elicit deception from assessees. Therefore, social desirability scales have been developed to detect such response distortions (Ones, Viswesvaran, & Reiss, 1996), and subsequent research has demonstrated that, under conditions of personnel selection, the mean of socially desirable responding strongly increases compared with conditions under which participants have no external incentives to distort (Viswesvaran & Ones, 1999). We expected to replicate this finding.

Hypothesis 1: The mean of a self-report social desirability scale under a personnel selection condition is higher than under conditions when participants have no external incentives to distort.

As one strategy to cope with the response distortion problem in high-stakes assessments, test-developers eliminated items in the test construction process of the assessment device that correlated with social desirability. Such a process was used by Ferris et al. (2005) in the development and initial validation of the PSI. They eliminated items from the item pool that correlated significantly with a short, homogenous version of the Crowne–Marlowe Social Desirability scale (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972). They eliminated 10 items from the item development set. In effect, the total score of the final item set of the PSI items was not associated with social desirability.

Thus, we expected that the mean of the PSI would not be influenced by the personnel selection context, and thus, that there would be no substantial correlations between the PSI and a social desirability scale. However, because these are predictions or expectations in the direction of the statistical null hypothesis, one cannot statistically test them per se, but instead need to strive for an adequate sample size in order to optimize statistical power (Cohen, 1992), and describe the empirical findings (Fisher, 1966).

According to Cronbach and Meehl (1955), the meaning of a psychological measure is defined by the network of relationships (i.e., nomological net) between the focal scale and other already well-established scales. Thus, a scale preserves its psychological meaning from one situation to another if the correlations of that scale with the already well-established measures are the same across situations. If these cross-situational relationships are confirmed, then substantial evidence is provided for the construct validity of the measurement device. One of the most well-established measures in industrial–organizational psychology is the *NEO Five-Factor Inventory* (NEO-FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1989, 1992), which is a self-assessment tool for five general personality traits; namely neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness.

The NEO-FFI is especially well researched in the personnel selection context (Birkeland, Manson, Kisamore, Brannick, & Smith, 2006; Bradley & Hauenstein, 2006; Viswesvaran & Ones, 1999). Birkeland et al. (2006) found (i.e., in a meta-analysis) that job applicants distort responses on personality dimensions that are viewed as particularly job relevant, with the largest effect sizes found on the conscientiousness and neuroticism dimensions. Across different jobs, applicants presented themselves as well-adjusted, dependable, and achievement oriented. We also expected to replicate these findings.

Hypothesis 2: Under a personnel selection condition (i.e., where participants have incentives to distort their responses; where the stakes are high), the mean of the self-report neuroticism scale will be lower than under conditions where participants have no external incentives to distort.

Hypothesis 3: Under a personnel selection condition (i.e., where participants have incentives to distort their responses; where the stakes are high), the mean of the self-report conscientiousness scale will be higher than under conditions where participants have no external incentives to distort.

Although distortion raises the mean of the conscientiousness scale and lowers the mean of the neuroticism scale, the relationships between the NEO-FFI scales remain stable (Bradley & Hauenstein, 2006). Thus, we expected that the relationships between the PSI and NEO-FFI scales remain stable in personnel selection contexts. Based on theory, previous empirical research

(Blickle et al., in press; Ferris et al., 2005, 2008; Liu et al., 2007) has found a strong positive association of the PSI with the extraversion scale from the NEO-FFI (Costa, & McCrae, 1989). Both scales share common variance of a positive, outgoing interpersonal orientation.

In addition, the PSI was moderately negatively associated with trait anxiety, which forms part of the neuroticism scale of the NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1989), and measures the inverse of emotional stability. High political skill and emotional stability share common variance of calm, self-confident behaviour, and perceived internal control over the personal environment. Finally, the PSI was moderately positively associated with the conscientiousness scale of the NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1989), which reflects the common variance due to the attention to detail and the interest in the observation of behaviour.

Hypothesis 4: The correlation between political skill and extraversion will be positive both under a personnel selection condition and under conditions when participants have no external incentives to distort.

Hypothesis 5: The correlation between political skill and neuroticism will be negative both under a personnel selection condition and under conditions when participants have no external incentives to distort.

Hypothesis 6: The correlation between political skill and conscientiousness will be positive both under a personnel selection condition and under conditions when participants have no external incentives to distort.

Ferris et al. (2008) found that political skill was associated with new employees' income. This is in line with previous meta-analytic findings from Ng, Eby, Sorensen, and Feldman (2005), who found that political knowledge and skills was related moderately with employees' salary. Furthermore, Ones et al. (1996) found in a meta-analysis that social desirability was not a response bias that attenuated the criterion-related validity. Thus, we expected that also in a personnel selection situation the relationship between political skill and current income will be undistorted.

Hypothesis 7: The correlation between political skill and current income will be positive both under a personnel selection condition and under conditions when participants have no external incentives to distort.

1.3. Plan of the research

An experimental field study was conducted to test the hypotheses. The study used an experimental and a control group. Participants were job incumbents of a large nation-wide organization in Germany, and they were chosen *randomly* for the control and the experimental group. In the *experimental group*, the instructions asked the participants to work on the questionnaires as if they took part in a personnel selection procedure for a personally very attractive position, which they strongly wanted to get. In the *control group,* the participants were asked to answer the questionnaire items honestly, reflecting how they truly felt.

Data should be in line with Hypotheses 1–3 if the experimental manipulation is successful. The essential hypotheses in the present research focused on construct validity (Hypotheses 4–6) and criterion-related validity (Hypothesis 7) of the PSI. These correlation hypotheses had a clear one-sided direction. Previous research under nonpersonnel selection conditions had demonstrated moderate and strong effect sizes of the PSI with extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and income (Cohen, 1988). To minimize the β-error for *moderate effect* sizes, we strived to obtain a sample size in each of the two groups of at least 100 participants (Cohen, 1992). This would yield a statistical power above .90 and an α-error of 5% (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007).

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were employees in nine regional offices of a large government agency in Germany. Surveys were sent to the job incumbents by the local head of the government agency. The employees received a package in the mail with a questionnaire and a prepaid return envelope. The questionnaires were distributed to 445 persons. Participants were asked if they would like to take part in a study using psychological measures typically used for personnel selection. It was stated that their participation gives them the opportunity to personally experience psychological questionnaires. In the study, 212 employees participated which is a return rate of 48%. Participants received feedback about the results of the study after the study was finished.

In the study there were 126 female (59.4%) and 86 male participants. The age of the participants ranged between 23 and 61 with a mean age of 43.80 years ($SD = 9.52$ years). Educational level varied among the participants. More specifically, 12 (5.7%) reported 7–9 years of schooling, 43 (20.3%) had 11 years of schooling (i.e., the German *Realschule*), 141 (66.5%) reported 13 or more years of schooling (i.e., the German *Abitur*). Information on their academic degrees was provided by 123 participants, indicating that 71 (33.4%) graduated at the bachelor level (i.e., the German *Fachhochschulabschluss*), 48 (22.6%) reported holding master-level degrees

(i.e., the German *Universitätsabschluss*), and 4 (2%) held doctoral-level degrees.

The mean of weekly working hours was 39.2 hr ($SD = 6.9$ hr). The mean of job tenure was 11.3 years ($SD = 10.8$). The mean of total years already used in jobs was 21.54 years ($SD = 11.01$ years). Of the participants, 15 (7.1%) were clerical workers, 142 (67%) belonged to the administrative personnel, 35 (16.5%) were administrative officers, and 19 (9.4%) were higher executives. One person gave no information concerning his or her status. In the experimental group were 31 persons with a managerial job, and in the control group were 23 persons with a managerial job. The mean of the yearly gross income was €40,224 ($SD = €15,698$; €1 = US$1.36).

2.2. Experimental manipulation

The study used an experimental and a control group, and the participants were chosen *randomly* for the groups. Participants in both groups were asked to work on a questionnaire alone when undisturbed by others. In the *experimental group,* the written instructions asked the participants to work on the questionnaires as if they took part in a personnel selection procedure for a personally very attractive position, which they strongly wanted to obtain. In the *control group,* the participants were asked to answer the questionnaire items honestly, indicating how they truly felt.

The instructions were drawn from Blickle, Momm, Schneider, Gansen, and Kramer (2009). The wording in the experimental group was: 'Please, imagine you were applying for a personally very attractive job. And as part of the selection procedures you were asked to complete the following questionnaire the results of which inform the selection decision of your potential employer. You will find the questionnaire on the following pages. Please, complete the following questions in the same way as you would do it if you were in a personnel selection situation. [This sentence was also underscored in the written instruction]. Please, present yourself based on your gut feelings how you would be most successful in getting this job by impressing the selecting persons most successfully.' The specific instructions for the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR), NEO-FFI, and PSI ended with the phrase: 'Remember: Complete these questions as if you were applying for a personally very attractive job and as if this questionnaire formed part of the selection procedure!'

The wording in the control condition was: 'On the following pages you will find some statements concerning your own person. Please, complete the following questions as sincerely as possible. [This sentence was also underscored in the written instruction]. Please do not try to make good impressions but respond based on your gut feelings in a way which you feel is appropriate for you!' The specific instructions for the BIDR, NEO-FFI, and PSI ended with the phrase: 'Remember: Complete these questions as sincerely as possible!'

It was expected that due to the randomized distribution of the participants to the two groups of the experiment there should be no differences between the two groups concerning gender distribution, age, education, tenure, job experience, status, and income.

2.3. Manipulation check

It was expected (Hypotheses 1–3) that if the experimental manipulation was successful, the means of the social desirability scale and the conscientiousness scale would be higher in the experimental group than in the control group and the mean of the neuroticism scale would be lower in the experimental group than in the control group.

2.4. Measures

2.4.1. Political skill

The German version (Blickle et al., 2008) of the PSI was used to assess self-reported employee political skill (Ferris et al., 2005). The PSI comprises 18 items and uses a 7-point Likert-type scale. The mean score ranged between 1 = *low*, and 7 = *high*. Sample items include 'I always seem to instinctively know the right things to say and do to influence others,' and 'I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agendas of others.'

2.4.2. Personality

The personality traits of neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness were measured with the German version of the NEO-FFI (Borkenau & Ostendorf, 1993; Costa & McCrae, 1989). The self-assessment of each trait comprises 12 items and uses a 5-point Likert-type scale. The mean scores ranged between 0 = *low*, and 4 = *high*.

2.4.3. Social desirability

Social desirability was measured with the German version of the *Other deception*-scale (BIDR) of the BIDR (V. 6; Paulhus, 1984; 1994) by Musch, Brockhaus, and Bröder (2002). The scale comprises 10 items and also uses a 7-point Likert-type scale. The items ranged between 1 = *low*, and 7 = *high*, thus the sum of the items ranged between 10 and 70.

2.4.4. Criterion variable

Participants were asked to report their current yearly gross income.

2.4.5. Controls

Participants were asked to report gender, age, specific job experience (in years), and years of overall job experience. Additionally *we* asked participants to report

their educational level. The measure used eight levels similar to the Educational Scale of Hollingshead's index of social position (ISP, Miller & Salkind, 2002). The lowest level was *left school without graduation*; the highest rank was *doctoral degree, MD, PhD, LLD, and the like*. Furthermore, we asked participants to rank their status with a scale commonly used in sociology (Isserstedt, Middendorff, Fabian, Schnitzer, & Wolter, 2007), which is very similar to the Occupational Scale of Hollingshead's ISP (Miller & Salkind, 2002). It has 15 levels, the lowest being *unskilled worker*, and the highest being *proprietor of a large company*.

3. Results

In the experimental group, 102 complete questionnaires were returned, and in the control group, 110 complete questionnaires were returned. The control and the experimental groups did not differ significantly concerning the distribution of gender, educational level, and status tested by χ^2-tests ($p < .05$, two-tailed). Additionally, the two groups did not differ concerning the means of age, specific job experience, overall time of employment, the mean number of working hours per week, and mean income tested by *t*-tests ($p < .05$, two-tailed). These findings build confidence that the two groups were equivalent except for the experimental manipulation.

3.1. Manipulation check

If the experimental manipulation was successful, the mean of the social desirability scale (Hypothesis 1) and the conscientiousness scale (Hypothesis 3) should be significantly higher in the experimental group than in the control group. In addition, the mean of the neuroticism scale (Hypothesis 2) should be significantly lower in the experimental group than in the control group.

As expected (cf. Table 1), the mean of the *social desirability* scale was in the job application condition ($M = 44.8$) higher than in the honesty condition ($M = 40.45$, $t = 2.97$, $df = 210$, $p < .005$; $\eta^2 = .04$). The mean of the *conscientiousness* scale was in the job application condition ($M = 3.25$) higher than in the honesty condition ($M = 2.98$, $t = 4.65$, $df = 210$, $p < .005$; $\eta^2 = .09$). The mean of the *neuroticism* scale was in the job application condition ($M = 1.23$) lower than in the honesty condition ($M = 1.60$, $t = -4.20$, $df = 210$, $p < .005$; $\eta^2 = .07$). Thus, the experimental manipulation was successful.

Cronbach's αs of the scales in the faking good condition were in the same range as in the honesty condition with the exception of the openness to experience scale which was below .60 in the faking good condition. All other internal consistency values were in the range reported by the test manuals (Borkenau & Ostendorf, 1993; Ferris et al., 2005; Musch et al., 2002).

Post hoc, we looked at the other dimensions of the Big Five for differences of means between the two groups in the experiment. The mean of the extraversion scale in the faking good condition was higher than in the honesty condition ($t = 2.68$, $df = 210$, $p < .01$; $\eta^2 = .03$). However, there were no significant group differences on the openness to experience and the agreeableness scales.

For managers, political skill should be very important. Therefore, post hoc, we also compared the two groups

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, coefficient α reliabilities, and correlations of variables

Variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. PSI	5.12	0.63	.85	.02	−.25**	.52**	.20*	.08	.18*	.22**
	5.25 ↔	0.64	.88							
2. Social desirability	40.56	10.23	.10	.66	−.04	.02	.01	.18*	.12	.08
	44.78 ↑	10.40		.72						
3. Neuroticism	1.60	0.73	−.36**	−.12	.88	−.51**	−.02	−.14	−.08	−.15
	1.23 ↓	0.54			.83					
4. Extraversion	2.46	0.58	.46**	.23*	−.55**	.82	.15	.12	.30**	.14
	2.66 ↑	0.47				.76				
5. Openness	2.44	0.55	.26**	−.16	.00	.19*	.72	−.03	−.12	.05
	2.49 ↔	0.44					.59			
6. Agreeableness	2.84	0.42	.24**	.19*	−.16	.34**	.03	.67	−.08	.04
	2.82 ↔	0.38						.65		
7. Conscientiousness	2.98	0.46	.33**	.20*	−.39**	.40**	.17*	.34**	.77	−.05
	3.25 ↑	0.37							.74	
8. Income	€40,630	€16,258	.20*	.13	−.14	−.01	.12	−.09	−.05	(–)
	€39,785 ↔	€15,139								

Note. PSI = political skill inventory; € = euro, €1 ≈ US$1.36; ↔ = no differences of means with the honesty reporting condition, $p < .05$ (two-tailed); ↑ = higher means than in the honesty condition, at least $p < .05$ (two-tailed); ↓ = lower means than in the honesty condition, at least $p < .05$ (two-tailed). Honesty condition $n = 110$, Application condition $n = 102$. Correlations $^*p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$ (one-tailed tests). With *M* and *SD*, lower left, values of the application condition; upper right, values of the honesty condition; Find the coefficient α reliabilities in the mean diagonal, upper values belong to the honesty condition, lower values belong to the application condition; Find in the upper right half of the correlation matrix the correlations in the honesty condition; find in the lower left half of the correlation matrix the correlations in the application condition.

in the managerial sub sample (experimental group: $n = 31$, control group: 23). As expected, the mean of the *social desirability* scale in the job application condition ($M = 44.19$) was higher than in the honesty condition ($M = 40.47$). These are nearly the same means as in the total sample. The mean of the *conscientiousness* scale in the job application condition ($M = 3.21$) also was higher than in the honesty condition ($M = 2.97$, $t = 2.02$, $df = 52$, $p < .05$). The mean of the *neuroticism* scale in the job application condition ($M = 1.29$) also was lower than in the honesty condition ($M = 1.57$, $t = -4.17$, $df = 52$, $p < .005$). Thus, the experimental manipulation was also successful in this sub sample. Additionally, the mean of the extraversion scale in the faking good condition ($M = 2.81$) was higher than in the honesty condition ($M = 2.55$, $t = 2.01$, $df = 52$, $p < .05$).

3.2. PSI and social desirability

As expected, the means of the PSI scale in the two experimental groups differed only marginally. The mean in the job application condition was $M = 5.25$ and in the honesty condition $M = 5.12$ ($t = 1.44$, $df = 210$, $p > .10$; $\eta^2 = .01$). The same pattern was found in the managerial sub groups: The mean in the job application condition was $M = 5.53$ and in the honesty condition $M = 5.34$ ($t = 1.18$, $df = 52$, $p > .20$). Given the respective sample sizes in the full sample, and an α error of 5%, the power to detect a moderate difference between means was .80. (Faul et al., 2007). Thus, we cannot exclude substantial, but small, differences in self-reports on political skill between a job application situation and honest self-reports. However, obviously, moderate differences which are of practical relevance are not very probable (Cohen, 1992). Additionally, the correlations between political skill and the social desirability scale were both in the job application condition ($r = .10$, $p > .10$) and in the honesty condition ($r = .02$, $p > .10$) very small (cf. Table 1). In the managerial sub group, the correlation between political skill and the social desirability scale in the job application condition was ($r = .10$, $p > .25$). Given the respective sample sizes in the full sample, and an α error of 5%, the power to detect a moderate correlation was above .90 (Faul et al., 2007). Thus, again, we cannot exclude substantial but small correlations between political skill and social desirability, but, obviously, moderate correlation sizes are very improbable (Cohen, 1992).

3.3. Construct validity

As postulated in Hypotheses 3–6, we expected a moderate correlation between political skill and extraversion, and substantial correlations between political skill and conscientiousness and neuroticism. These correlations can be found in Table 1. In the faking good condition (job application condition), political skill and extraversion correlated at $r = .46$ ($p < .01$). Political skill and conscientiousness correlated at $r = .33$ ($p < .01$), and political skill and neuroticism correlated at $r = -.36$ ($p < .01$). These correlations did not differ significantly (t-tests, $p > .10$) from the correlations in the honesty condition. In the honesty condition, political skill and extraversion correlated at $r = .52$ ($p < .01$), political skill and conscientiousness correlated at $r = .18$ ($p < .05$), and political skill and neuroticism correlated at $r = -.25$ ($p < .01$). These findings clearly indicate that the PSI preserves its psychological meaning even under faking good conditions in a job application situation, and thus, construct validity of the PSI is not jeopardized by its use in job application settings.

We did these analyses also in the managerial sub groups. In the faking good condition (job application condition, $n = 31$), political skill and extraversion correlated at $r = .66$ ($p < .05$). Political skill and conscientiousness correlated at $r = .65$ ($p < .05$), and political skill and neuroticism correlated at $r = -.49$ ($p < .05$). In the honesty condition ($n = .23$), political skill and extraversion correlated at $r = .59$ ($p < .05$), political skill and conscientiousness correlated at $r = .26$ ($p < .05$), and political skill and neuroticism correlated at $r = -.27$ ($p < .05$). These correlations did not differ significantly (t tests, $p > .10$) from the correlations in the application condition.

So far, the results have shown that the means of the social desirability scale and the neuroticism, extraversion, and conscientiousness scales were influenced by the experimental manipulation. However, the pattern of correlations between political skill and these variables at the variable level was the same in both instructional samples. To further elaborate this point, we tested with a multi-group structural equation model (LISREL 8.52; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2002) whether the whole pattern of correlations between the Big-Five personality constructs, the Social Desirability construct, and the Political Skill construct were *equal* in the two instructional conditions. If this was the case, this would be the strongest proof of construct validity of the political skill scale.

To this end (Bollen, 1989), the political skill scale, the social desirability scale, and the Big-Five scales were each split into two subscales, one comprising all odd numbered items of the respective scales and the other comprising all even numbered items of the respective scales. Thus, for each construct, we generated two variable indicator scales. In the next step, we calculated the covariance matrices of these scales in both experimental conditions separately. Then, we tested two models, namely, the more and the less parsimonious models. The more parsimonious model assumed that although the measurement models of the constructs may be different in the two samples, the relationships at the construct level are *equal* in both samples. The less parsimonious model assumed that the relationships of the constructs in the two samples are different (i.e., that the two samples represent two different populations).

Table 2. Comparison of two nested structural equation models

Model	*df*	χ^2	*p* (χ^2)	RMSEA	*p* (RMSEA)	NNFI
Equal correlation pattern	150	187.23	.02	.05	.88	.94
Different correlation pattern	144	178.81	.03	.05	.89	.94
		$\Delta df = 6$	$\Delta\chi^2 = 8.42$	NS		

Note. *df* = degrees of freedom; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; NNFI = nonnormed fit index.

Table 3. Equal correlation pattern at the construct level

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. PSI	.09	−.29*	.56*	.26*	.27*	.23*
2. Social Desirability		−.13	.15	−.05	.25*	.21*
3. Neuroticism			−.65*	.15	−.19*	−.31*
4. Extraversion				.19	.23*	.46*
5. Openness					.04	−.04
6. Agreeableness						.10
7. Conscientiousness						

*$p < .05$ (two-tailed).

The calculations of the model used maximum likelihood parameter estimates.

The equal-pattern model and the different-pattern model are two *nested* structural equation models (Bollen, 1989; i.e., the different-pattern model is a more restricted model than the equal-pattern model, and as such, it has fewer degrees of freedom). If the more restricted model is appropriate, than the loss of degrees of freedom yields a substantially higher statistical fit (i.e., the χ^2-values will decrease significantly). If the χ^2-value does not decrease significantly, the more parsimonious model assuming equal patterns is adequate.

The results of the comparison of the two nested models are shown in Table 2.

Spector (2001) summarized the criteria of good fit (root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] $\leq .08$, nonnormed fit index [NNFI] $\geq .90$). Both models had a RMSEA below .08 and a NNFI above .90. Although the χ^2 value of the more restricted different-correlation-pattern model was lower than the χ^2-value of the equal-correlation-pattern model, this decrease was not significant. Thus, the more parsimonious equal-correlation-pattern model held. This strongly supported the construct validity of the political skill scale in both experimental conditions, but also confirmed that the relationships among the Big-Five scales and the correlations of the social desirability scale and the other scales were also equal in both instructional conditions (see Table 3). This also strongly confirmed the construct validity of the Big-Five scales.

3.4. Criterion-related validity

Hypothesis 7 postulated a substantial positive correlation between political skill and income, both in the honesty condition and the faking good job application condition. As can be seen from Table 1, in the honesty condition, political skill and income correlate at $r = .22$ ($p < .01$), and in the job application condition, the correlation was $r = .20$ ($p < .05$). These findings confirmed Hypothesis 7.

Post hoc, we analyzed the incremental validity of political skill in addition to intelligence and personality. As a proxy for intelligence, we used educational level. In both conditions, political skill improved explained variance by 3% (see Table 4). Also, in the managerial sub samples, the increment of political skill in the honesty condition was $\Delta R^2 = .039$ ($p < .01$), and in the application condition $\Delta R^2 = .024$ ($p < .01$).

4. Discussion

The PSI (Ferris et al., 2005) is a recently developed self-assessment tool of social effectiveness which already has demonstrated impressive evidence of construct and criterion-related validity (job performance ratings, income, hierarchical position, career satisfaction; Blickle et al., in press; Ferris et al., 2008). Given the strong conviction among organizational decision-makers and in the legal system that job applicants or existing employees completing self-reported assessment devices fake their responses, the consequences of potential response distortion needs to be addressed if we hope to see the political skill inventory as a successfully functioning assessment and selection tool utilized in personnel decision making.

The experimental design effectively manipulated acquisitive self-presentation. However, as expected, we only found minimal differences between the mean scores of the political skill inventory in the faking good job application condition and in the honesty condition ($\eta^2 = .01$). In addition, in both conditions the correlations between political skill and social desirability (other deception) were rather low, i.e., $r \leq .10$. Likewise, the political skill inventory showed equal relationships of construct validity in both conditions. Political skill scores were positively associated with extraversion and conscientiousness and negatively associated with neuroticism. Finally, political skill scores associated positively with current yearly gross income in both conditions, and had incremental validity beyond the Big-Five personality traits and educational level as proxy for intelligence. This affirmed incremental criterion-related validity of the PSI even under faking good conditions.

Table 4. Hierarchical regressions on Income in both experimental groups

Predictor variables	Criterion = Yearly gross income					
	Honesty condition ($n = 110$)			Application condition ($n = 102$)		
	St.B	ΔR^2	R^2	*St.B*	ΔR^2	R^2
First step						
Intelligence (proxy: educational level)	.28**			.32**		
		.08**	.08**		.10**	.10**
Second step						
Neuroticism	−.12			−.18		
Extraversion	.06			−.10		
Openness	−.05			.07		
Agreeableness		.01		−.15		
Conscientiousness	−.06			−.07		
		.03	.11**		.05	.15**
Third step						
Political skill	.22*			.21*		
		.03*	.14**		.03*	.18**

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$ (one-tailed).

4.1. Theoretical implications

The present study was a successful experimental simulation of a high-stakes testing situation. It demonstrated that, contrary to personality scale scores and the social desirability scale score, the mean score of the political skill inventory was *not* substantially affected by the high-stakes testing situation. In addition, it demonstrated that the pattern of correlations of this newly minted variable with personality scales and a social desirability scale was the *same* both under high-stakes testing simulation conditions and under honesty conditions. In addition, it showed that although the means of the personality variables and the social desirability scale were affected by the high-stakes testing situation, this did *not* spoil its pattern of relationships with other variables.

Thus, not only the construct validity (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955) of the political skill inventory, but also the construct validity of the personality variables, was preserved when high-stakes testing conditions were simulated. Finally, the present study demonstrated criterion-related incremental validity of the political skill inventory over intelligence and personality. These successful findings build confidence in the political skill assessment tool, which is a necessary precondition for practical application in job selection situations.

The present findings are in line with previous meta-analytic research on the validity of self-reports on personality traits in personnel selection situations. Personnel selection situations neither changed substantially construct validity (Bradley & Hauenstein, 2006) nor criterion-related validity (Hough, 1998; Hough, Dunnette, Eaton, Kamp, & McCloy, 1990; Ones & Viswesvaran, 1998; Ones et al., 1996) of self-report personality scales.

In a recent Monte Carlo simulation study, Converse, Peterson, and Griffith (2009) demonstrated that the negative effect of faking on personality scales can be substantially reduced if the personality predictor (e.g., a self-report measure of conscientiousness) is not used as selection measure in isolation but in combination with additional valid predictors which are not affected by faking. Using multiple predictors (i.e., a selection battery) in personnel selection is quite common place in practice. In the *composite approach*, all applicants receive scores on all three predictor measures. These scores are then combined into an overall composite, and applicants are selected top-down based on this composite. In the *multiple-hurdle approach,* time-consuming and expensive assessments (e.g., interviews) are administered only for those who pass less time-consuming and less expensive screening tools.

This multiple-predictor approach in personnel selection is in line with the findings in the present study, and with Blickle et al. (in press) who called for an expansion of the job performance predictor space. Blickle et al. (in press) demonstrated that the more proximal construct of political skill explained unique variance in job performance ratings beyond that accounted for by GMA and personality traits, which are more distal influences both in cross-sectional and predictive studies. In combination with the findings of the present study, that the scores of the PSI were not negatively affected by a high-stakes assessment simulation, the PSI promises to be an ideal additional predictor of job performance in a multiple-predictor selection approach.

In the present study, about 75% clerical workers and administrative personnel and only about 25% managers (i.e., administrative officers and executives) participated. It may be argued that, from a practical perspective, the group of managers represent the only participants likely to be assessed about their social effectiveness, and that these participants represent only a quarter of the sample.

However, because we have done all of the analyses also for the sub sample of the managers, and as the results were completely consistent with the findings in the whole sample, there is strong evidence that our conclusions surely apply to the managerial population.

In addition, we recommended the use of the PSI, not only for selection in managerial samples but also for selection in ordinary employee samples, because previous research has demonstrated convincingly that political skill attenuates the negative influence of social stressors on job satisfaction, somatic well being, and blood pressure (Harvey et al., 2007; Perrewé et al., 2004). Thus, political skill is an important resource in successfully coping with stress at work for all types of employees.

4.2. Directions for future research

In the present research, yearly gross income was used as criterion variable. Future research also should consider the investigation of additional criteria, such as performance ratings by supervisors, hierarchical position, and number of promotions. The present study used a concurrent study design, whereas future research should also make use of predictive and longitudinal designs.

Finally, in the present research, a personnel selection context was *simulated* experimentally. However, it can be criticized that in a real world selection context, there will be motivation to achieve a high score and obtain the job. A critic may argue that these pressures were not operating here. Hypotheses 1–3 tested the success of the experimental simulation, and the hypotheses were derived from differences between personnel selection contexts versus nonselection contexts. The findings supported the success of the simulation, which can be useful steps between theory and practice. However, as it is typical for any simulation (e.g., the simulation by Converse et al., 2009), it was only a simulation of a real life event, and it was not a real personnel selection event. Therefore, we call for future research that uses the PSI in an actual personnel selection context.

4.3. Strength and limitations

The present research has strengths but also some limitations. A strength of the current study is that it successfully simulated a personnel selection situation from the perspective of the employees. Participants' gender, age, education, time of specific job experience, time of overall job experience, number of working hours, position, and income were successfully controlled. In addition, the study was conducted in one organization which contributed to control for other conditions of work by holding them constant. Next, the large sample size provided high statistical power. Finally, criterion-related validity was measured by an objective indicator, namely income, instead of subjective indicators such as performance ratings.

One limitation of the current studies arises from the fact that objective archival data on income were not available for examination and analyses but only participants' reports. However, self-reports of income have been shown to correlate highly with archival company records (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995; Turban & Dougherty, 1994). Another limitation is that the study was cross-sectional and not predictive. Finally, it was not a real personnel selection context but simulated it experimentally. Future research should address these concerns.

5. Conclusion

The PSI has a high potential to be used in psychological testing as a part of personnel decision making. However, as central organizational stakeholders are deeply concerned about the distortion of self-ratings by faking we examined the effects of a job application situation on self-ratings of political skill. The present findings showed consistently that these ratings of political skill were *not* distorted by social desirability and that the inventory preserves its construct and criterion-related validity. These findings demonstrate its applicability in testing as a part of personnel decision making in practice.

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