Quantification of the Impact of Big Five Personality Traits on Political Skills

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Abstract

This paper investigated the impact of different personality traits on political skills in an individual. Here, Big Five traits of personality were considered. A self rated questionnaire was used to determine the effect on political skills due to Openness, Conscientiousness, Extrovert, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability, respectively. Three hundred and eighteen (318) participants provided responses for measures of the five factor model and political skills. Multiple regression tool was applied to find the impact of personality traits. The results showed that Conscientiousness had the highest impact on individual's political skills, while Openness had the least impact on political skills. Individuals working in an institute can make good use of this as they will be able to gauge political skills of their colleagues on the basis of their respective personality types.

Key words : personality, political skill, conscientiousness, open to experience

JEL Classification : M1, M14, M54

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The relationship between personality and politics is a moot point. Since long, researchers are trying to find the exact linkage between personality and politics (Bell, Woodley, Schermer, & Vernon, 2012). The connection between personality and politics is tested by different approaches like conservatism (McClosky, 1958) and genetical attributes (Benjamin et al., 2012). Researchers have not reached to a firm conclusion till now. Researchers of multiple fields are putting their efforts in this field so something logical can be deduced. This work provides another outlook to this field by emphasizing on political skills of an individual. Political skills can be considered as different from one's mental ability (Ferris, Treadway, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, Kacmar, Douglas, & Frink, 2005) and hence, have an important role here.

Personality is an important construct as it affects different factors which are important for an organization. Within an organizational setting, personality of employees affects different factors namely job performance (Barrick, & Mount, 1991), leadership (Phipps, & Prieto, 2011), stress (McCrae, & Costa, 1986), and political participation (Vecchione, & Caprara, 2009). The way in which a context in a relationship between two variables can impact behavior in an organization has been often overlooked (Johns, 2006). In many studies, political skill is considered as a contextual variable, but here, it is considered as a dependent variable. In the present study, an attempt has been made to find the impact of personality on a variable, namely political skill. It has been found that political skill is a unique coping resource which is helpful in grappling with certain negative aspects in an organization (Perrewé, Zellars, Ferris, Rossi, Kacmar, & Ralston, 2004).

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This paper tries to measure the impact of personality traits on political skill in higher academic institutes. There is paucity of work in the field of organizational politics in higher academic organizations. Literature shows that organisational politics within academic organisations is often overlooked (Vigoda - Gadot, Talmud, & Peled, 2011). Academic institutions are often fancied as pluralist and meritocratic institutions which reduces the chances of practice of politics and subsequently exercise of political skills (Vigoda - Gadot et al., 2011). Certain studies has tried to focus on academic institutions and tried to touch this area by focusing on precursors of stress as politics within organizations (Kumari, Verma, & Verma, 2012), but our study has tried to give another angle to this study. This study may help future researchers to get more specific information about relation of personality traits and political skill in an academic organization.

Literature Review

(1) Political Skill : Pfeffer (1981) unwrapped the term "Political skill". He presented political skill as an individual characteristic which helps one in demonstrating political behavior leading to possession of power (Ferris, Treadway, Perrewe, Brouer, Douglas, & Lux, 2007). Later, other researchers like Mintzberg (1983) worked on political behavior and defined political skill as the practice of influencing others through persuasion, manipulation, and negotiation (Ferris et al., 2007). Political skill combines an individual's social know how with his or her capability to mold their behavior in accordance with the situation so that they can gain trust, confidence, and also appear genuine in front of others and effectively influence others (Ferris, Treadway, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, Kacmar, Douglas, & Frink, 2005 ; Ferris et al., 2007).

Four critical dimensions of political skill have also been identified (Ferris et al., 2005). These dimensions are social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity. Each dimension is discussed below in details :

(i) Social Astuteness : Individuals who are socially astute observe everything very minutely and can adjust them according to the situation. Socially astute individuals often are seen as ingenious, even clever, in dealing with others (Ferris et al., 2005).

(ii) Interpersonal Influence : These people are able to build their rapport with others and they communicate with others in a positive way (Ferris et al., 2005). Influential people can establish contacts and gain access to useful information.

(iii) Networking Ability : It was found that networking is an activity in which successful managers spend most of their time (Luthans, 1988). Individuals with this political skill are "masters of quid pro quo" (Ferris et al., 2005).

(iv) Apparent Sincerity : This skill conforms whether attempt to influence would be successful or not as people with this skill appear as a genuine and trustworthy person (Ferris et al., 2005).

Before two decades, politics within organizations was considered as organizational ailment and researchers considered it dysfunctional for an organization. Once it came into light that political skills can be functional for individual as well as organizational well being, doors opened for researchers to dig into different areas of organizational politics. Later, different studies were conducted to find a positive relation between personal qualities of individuals that includes personality and politics within an organization.

(2) Personality : Political attitudes and skills are outcomes of difference in thinking patterns of people. This difference in thought process exists because of a person's personality. An individual's personality depends upon

the ways in which he/she behaves or responds and interacts with others. Organizational theorists argue that personality plays an important role in determining an individual's inclination towards politics (Levinson, 1958). The curiosity to know the base behind why some people are effective and competent in their personal conduct is as old as mankind (Sharma, 2015). Today, there is dearth of empirical studies showing the relation between one's personality and the extent to which an individual participates in political activities (Vecchione, & Caprara, 2009). Lack of research in this area advances a debate on how and why personality impacts political views.

Different personality measures have been used to classify individual's actions. The Big-Five measure of personality is highly supported by different researchers (John & Srivastava, 1999). The Big-Five framework proposes that differences amongst individual's personality can be categorized into five types namely, Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Big Five model is feasible because it can be used to clarify a number of constructs and phenomena (Phipps & Prieto, 2011). The relation between personality and politics has been based on the assumption that a causal relation lies between personality and political attitudes (Verhulst, Hatemi, & Martin, 2010). The assumption has been validated by different researchers at different times. Apart from personality, some other "deep seated predispositions" have been identified. These "deep seated predispositions" leave scope of influence of genetics on political behavior (R GENE). The very first study which examined influence of genetics on individual's political behavior was done by using Classical Twin Design (CTD). Classical twin design (CTD) is based on a vast theoretical preface and quantitative genetics (Hatemi & McDermott, 2012). Classical twin studies assured that personality traits and political skills are heritable (Benjamin et al., 2012 ; Funk, Smith, Alford, Hibbing, Eaton, Krueger, Eaves, & Hibbing, 2013). The extent to which genes shapes one's political skill still needs to be determined (Funk et al., 2013).

Building upon this line of research, this work tries to find out which personality type has more propensities towards better political skill. Specifically, we tried to find out which personality type namely, Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism impacts political skill more.

Hypotheses Formulation

On the basis of the literature review, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

✤ **H1:** Conscientiousness has a positive impact on political skill.

Conscientious individuals are willing to adjust according to the situation in order to achieve their goals. They step forward and take initiatives. This suggests that conscientiousness in an individual might impact his/ her political skills.

✤ **H2:** Agreeableness has a positive impact on political skill.

Individuals with personality trait of Agreeableness are good in maintaining relationships with colleagues. They avoid conflict and do not get into any kind of arguments. This suggests that agreeableness can positively impact political skill.

✤ **H3 :** Extrovert has a positive impact on political skill.

Extroverts are outgoing and are social beings. This trait is in adherence to networking ability which is an important political skill. Extroverts are expected to utilize this trait. This suggests that extroverts might positively impact political skill.

✤ **H4 :** Emotional stability has a positive impact on political skill.

Individuals who are not emotionally stable are easily irritable and have a feeling of unhappiness. Emotionally stable leaders are confident in their abilities and believe that they will accomplish their goals. This firm and positive attitude is supposed to positively affect political skill.

✤ **H5 :** Openness to Experience has a positive impact on political skill.

Individuals who are open to experience are curious and willing to take risks. They always have the urge to gain information. This trait of readiness to gain and utilize that information might have a positive impact on political skill.

Research Methodology

(1) Sample and Procedure : The sample of the study consists of faculty members working in higher academic institutions located in X category cities of India namely, Hyderabad, Delhi, Bengaluru, Greater Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata (Government of India, 2009) which provide Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Business Administration. The permission to conduct this study was taken from the respective institutions and then the list of faculty members and their email ids was collected from the institutions' websites. To decrease the reluctance of the faculty members to respond to the questionnaire, the respondents were assured that confidentiality of their responses would be maintained. The study was conducted by mailing them the questionnaire through email. Questionnaires are an efficient tool for collecting information on facts and opinions from a large group of people (Riley, Wood, Clark, Wilkie, & Szivas, 2011). A total of 720 questionnaires were emailed, and 318 respondents completed the questionnaire. The response rate was 44.16%. The respondents were assured that their responses will be used only for academic purposes and confidentially of data will be maintained. The time period of the study is from 2015 - 2016.

(2) Measures : A questionnaire was formulated in order to conduct the survey for the research work. The research instrument comprised of two sections. The first section consisted of different demographic questions like their age group, annual income, years of experience, etc. The second section of the questionnaire consisted of two factors namely, personality and political skill. The instrument formulated to measure political skill was based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). It consisted of eight items. Items formulated were based on an exhaustive review of literature. A sample item was "I try to make my colleagues believe that if I say I will help them with their work, I genuinely mean it." Personality traits were measured by the 10 item TIPI (Ten Item Personality Inventory) as developed by Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003). Here, TIPI was weighed on a 5- point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).

Analysis and Results

(1) Demographic Profile : Demographic profile of the respondents shows that most of the participants, that is, 31.7 % were in the age range of 25-35 years, 29.6% were aged between 36-45 years, while 22.7% were aged between 46-55 years, and 15.8% were aged between 56-65 years. Most of the academicians, that is, 49.6% were Ph.D. degree holders, 37.8% had the post graduation degree, and 12.6% had postdoctoral degrees. The respondents' monthly income varied widely, 14.1% of the respondents had a monthly income between INR 21,000 - 30,000, 31.4 % earned 31,000 - 40,000 per month, 35.2% earned 41,000 - 50,000, 11.1 % earned 51,000 -

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Age(Years)	No. of respondents	Percent (%)
25-35	101	31.7
36-45	94	29.6
46-55	72	22.7
56-65	51	15.8
Educational Qualification		
PostDoctoral	13	4.3
Doctoral	158	49.6
PostGraduate	120	37.8
Graduate	26	8.3
Income (₹)		
21000- 30000	45	14.1
31000 - 40000	100	31.4
41000 - 50000	112	35.2
61000 and above	26	8.2
Experience of work (years)		
0-10	121	38.2
11-20	135	42.4
21-30	62	19.4

60, 000, and 8.2% respondents earned above INR 61,000. The results also show that 38.2% of the respondents had an experience level of about 0 to 10 years, 42.4% had 11 to 20 years of experience, and 19.4% had 21 to 30 years of experience (see Table 1).

(2) Reliability and Validity Test : Reliability of an instrument indicates the extent to which a scale produces consistent results (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). The statistical tool used to measure reliability of an instrument is Cronbach's alpha (a), the value of Cronbach's alpha can lie between 0.0 to 1.0 (Connelly, 2011). It quantifies the degree to which items in an instrument are correlated with each other (Connelly, 2011). Cronbach's alpha is a reasonable indicator of the internal consistency of the instrument with a lower limit of .70 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Reliability of the measurement scale is good, as they have alpha coefficient above 0.70. Internal consistency of political skill is 0.89 and personality is 0.78, respectively.

Validity of a scale is the extent to which a test is able to measure what it intends to measure (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Validity of an instrument used to measure was measured using face validity and content validity. Face validity of an instrument is measured by the judgment of the researcher (Malhotra & Birks, 2007) as the researcher has a deep knowledge about the subject and is able to formulate the apt research instrument. Content validity was measured by defining what exactly is needed to be measured (Malhotra & Birks, 2007). The tool used to measure personality is adopted from Gosling et al. (2003). The rate of usage of this instrument is high and hence has been proved as an effective measure of personality (Rammstedt & John, 2007).

(3) Descriptive Analysis : The descriptive analysis was carried out to draw inferences from the data. Mean and standard deviation were computed. Mean is the average score of each item which shows how maximum number of respondents responded to each item. Standard deviation was carried out to find out how the responses vary

Table 2 . Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	No. of respondents	Std. Deviation
Conscientiousness	3.86	318	.819
Agreeableness	2.85	318	1.278
Extrovert	2.86	318	1.199
Emotionally stable	2.86	318	1.199
Openness to Experience	2.57	318	1.200
Political Skill	3.75	318	.778

around the mean of the item. More deviation means more difference in opinion and less deviation means less difference in opinion. Mean scores show whether responses fall on satisfaction side or dissatisfaction side. Mean and standard deviation of each factor are tabulated in the Table 2.

(4) Hypotheses Testing : The results of the study indicate that big five traits have a positive impact on political skill. The model indicates positive and statistically significant relationship ($F = 52.472$, $p < .05$). The multiple regression model with five predictors produced $R^2 = .457$, $F = 52.472$, $p < .05$. As it can be inferred that 45.7% of the variances in the dependent variable (Political skill) are explained by all independent variables (Personality traits).

The model 2 shows that all independent variables such as Conscientiousness (β value = .365, $p < .05$), Agreeableness (β value = .217, $p < .05$), Extrovert (β value = .066, $p < .05$), Emotionally Stable (β value = .126, $p < .05$), and Openness to Experience (β value = .062, $p < .05$) have a positive impact on political skill. Here, we can see that different personality traits have a positive effect on political skill. Conscientiousness has 36.5% effect on political skill ; hence, H1 is accepted. The regression table shows that the β value coefficient is highest in the case of conscientiousness, so it has more impact on political skill as compared to others.

The results of the study shows that Agreeableness (β value = .217, $p < .05$) has a positive impact on political skill. Hence, hypothesis H2 is accepted. It means that agreeableness has 21.7% impact on political skill. In case of Extrovert (β value = .066, $p < .05$), it is seen that it has a positive impact on political skill. The results show that the personality trait Extrovert has 6.6% impact on political skill. Hence, hypothesis H3 is accepted. Emotional stability has a positive impact on political skill. The results of the study show that Emotional stableness (β value = .126, $p < .05$) has 12.6% impact on political skill, hence, hypothesis H4 is accepted. Openness to Experience has a positive impact on political skill. The results of the study show that Openness to experience (β value = .062,

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis for Personality Traits

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.000	.200		4.996	.000
Conscientiousness	.365	.042	.384	8.659	.000
Agreeableness	.217	.027	.356	7.989	.000
Extrovert	.066	.028	.102	2.407	.017
Emotionally stable	.126	.034	.156	3.670	.000
Openness to Experience	.062	.027	.095	2.264	.024

a. Dependent Variable: Political Skill

Sig: $p < 0.5$

Table 4. Model Summary

R Square	Adjusted *R* Square	*F*	Sig.
.448	.578	52.472	.000b

p, <.05) has 6.2 % impact on political skill. Here, Openness to experience has the least impact on political skill. The Table 3 and Table 4 sort out the results of the multiple regression analysis.

Discussion

The results of the study indicates that personality traits have a positive impact on political skill as 57.8 % of variance in Political skill is due to Personality traits. Here, largest part of variance is explained by Conscientiousness. It can be inferred from the output that Conscientiousness highly affects an Individual's political skill. Individuals with good political skills are savvy about how to present themselves in front of others and conscientious individuals are highly organized and dependable. Hence, it can be easily inferred that conscientiousness has a positive impact on political skill. Mondak and Halperin (2008) suggested that conscientiousness is expected to be related to several political attitudes. Agreeableness also affects political skill. Individuals who have high agreeableness trait are more cooperative and they predict membership in strategic alliances (Mondak & Halperin, 2008). The variance in political skill due to agreeableness was less in comparison to conscientiousness, the reason behind this is that individuals who are high in agreeableness avoid conflict and are reluctant to raise their voice. They avoid getting in any political situations.

Individuals who are extrovert were found to have a positive impact on political skill. The reason behind this might be that extroverts are highly social and hence they may express their views openly in political meetings and rallies. Extroverts have "can do" quality (Barrick, 2005) which might lead to better political skill. Similarly, emotionally stable individuals also showed positive impact on political skill. Emotionally stable persons do not get easily anxious and can easily adapt to different situations which positively affects political skills. Openness to Experience showed least part of variance in this study. The reason behind this might be that involving in any political activity leads to arguments. Any individual who is Open to experience will be more intellectual and his ideas may not be in accord to other fellow employees (Ha, Kim, & Jo, 2013). Openness to experience has also shown least impact on Job performance (Blickle, Meurs, Wihler, Ewen, Plies, & Günther, 2013). The output of the analysis shows that 57.8% of the variance in political skill is due to Big Five Personality traits. This variance would have been different if certain Personality traits would have been excluded from the study. We can see that trait like Openness to Experience has demonstrated relatively lower relationship with political skill.

Conclusion

This study concludes that personality traits affect political skill. Amongst the Big Five traits conscientiousness affects political skill more than any other personality trait. One reason behind this might be that conscientious people are more organized and systematic in comparison to other personality traits. Political skills are better when individuals are careful, thorough, and persistent (Barrick, 2005), which are characteristics of a conscientious person. Individual who are agreeable to most of the others viewpoint also affects political skill to a great extent. Being Extrovert and emotionally stable also affects political skill. An emotionally stable person calmly thinks about every situation and then takes action while an extrovert is more social and easily form network.

Personality trait of being open to experience has least impact on one's political skill. Individuals who are open to experience are curious and always try to look for something new. Since they are more involved with exploring new ways and finding something new, they may not be able to pay much attention towards other activity. It is clear

from this work that different personality types affects political skills differently. Researchers have put a lot of effort to build relationship between personality and politics (Greenstein, 1992). We can see from literature that interactive effects of personality type and political skill on job performance have been tested but, no specific research has focused on directly linking personality and political skill (Blickle, Meurs, Zettler, Solga, Noethen, Kramer, & Ferris, 2008).

Political skills enable a person to appear in front of others as genuine and sincere and it is difficult for others to understand their behaviour. This research work might be helpful as Individuals working in an institute might be able to gauge political skill of their colleagues on the basis of their respective personality types.

Managerial Implications and Limitations of the Study

This study has been conducted in academic organizations of India. Future researchers must try to include different sectors so that a conclusive result can be formulated. This study has focused on different personality traits which affects political skill. There is a need to diversify this work by focusing on impact of personality traits on different types of political skill. This would further help to gauge the impact of each personality trait on each political skill.

In organizations managers can identify individuals based on their personality types. This research work has acquainted us with an estimate of specific personality type which can make an individual more politically skilled. Political skill enables to select and implement the most effective and efficient tactics through which positive outcomes can be attained. Political skill positively affects self (e.g., motivation, humility, affability), others (e.g., accountability, example setting, trust), and groups/organization (e.g., stretch goals, influencing/learning, empowering) (Smith, Plowman, Duchon, & Quinn, 2009). Political skill has also found to be positively related to career success, subordinate performance, managerial effectiveness and the successful use of impression management tactics (Blickle, Kramer, Zettler, Momm, Summers, Munyon, & Ferris, 2009). Personality variables are recognized as important in predicting as well as understanding individual, team and organizational effectiveness (Hough & Ones, 2001). Employees respond to a situation according to their predispositions about the situation (Greenstein, 1992), in such a situation political skills will play a major role in moulding employees behavior. Managers should entail political skills a personality in according to their day today activities at workplace because this subsequently increases the accomplishment of affective and substantive performance outcomes.

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