



## Socioanalytic theory and work behavior: Roles of work values and political skill in job performance and promotability assessment

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### ABSTRACT

Socioanalytic theory postulates that job performance ratings are predicted by basic social motives moderated by social competency. The two motives are the motive to get along with others and the motive to achieve status and power. The present two-study investigation assessed these motives as work values and collected supervisors' job performance and promotability assessments. Social competency was assessed as political skill at work. The results provided strong and consistent support for the hypotheses, thus providing a more direct test of socioanalytic theory and extending it to demonstrate effects beyond overall job performance ratings on contextual performance and promotability assessments. Contributions and implications of these results, strengths and limitations, directions for future research, and practical implications are discussed.

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Socioanalytic theory (Hogan, 1983, 1991, 1996; Hogan & Shelton, 1998) is intended to explain the impact of employees' personality traits on supervisors' job performance ratings as moderated by employees' social competency. Originally, socioanalytic theory was important because it offered an explanation for why meta-analytic findings on the relationship between self-ratings of personality traits and job performance ratings reported by supervisors (Barrick, Mount, & Judge, 2001), although mixed, and seemingly inconsistent, still represent a consistent pattern of relationships (Hogan, & Holland, 2003).

According to socioanalytic theory, there are two basic motives underlying personality traits (Hogan, 1991). One is the motive to get along and to cooperate with others in a friendly and positive way. The other is the motive to get ahead and achieve status and power (Hogan & Shelton, 1998). The strengths of these motives differ from person to person. The proposition is that while the motive to get along is expressed in the personality traits of emotional stability, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, the motive to get ahead is expressed in the traits of extraversion and openness to experience (Hogan & Holland, 2003).

Previous research has partially supported the socioanalytic predictions on job performance. In three studies, Witt and Ferris (2003) demonstrated that the interaction of conscientiousness and social competency predicted ratings of contextual and sales performance. Blickle et al. (2008) found that the agreeableness  $\times$  social competency interaction predicted job performance ratings by supervisors, peers, and subordinates. Additionally, Blickle, Wendel, and Ferris (2010) reported a significant extraversion  $\times$  social competency interaction in the prediction of performance in automobile sales.

However, there also have been findings disconfirming socioanalytic predictions. Blickle et al. (2008) found that the conscientiousness  $\times$  social competency interaction did not predict job performance ratings by supervisors, peers, and subordinates. In addition, Blickle et al. (2010) did not find a significant openness to experience  $\times$  social competency interaction in the prediction of

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automobile sales performance. We suggest that one reason for the failure to consistently support the socioanalytic predictions on job performance is the use of personality traits to measure and represent the motives to get ahead and get along.

These personality traits are general tendencies, abstract potentialities, and general dispositions (Jang, McCrae, Angleitner, Riemann, & Livesley, 1998; McCrae & Costa, 1996), which, however, lack the characteristic adaptations of the individual to specific contexts or environments. Thus, research in this area needs to identify and utilize context-specific measurements of the motives to get ahead and get along in order to provide a specific test of the socioanalytic theory of work behavior. Both personality and work values are presumed by Hogan and his colleagues (e.g., Hogan & Holland, 2003; Hogan & Shelton, 1998) to be distal influences on performance and in need of proximal qualities to transform and direct those distal qualities into action or influence. Political skill is argued to be such a proximal construct that can influence the predictive effectiveness of work values on job performance and other work outcomes.

Therefore, the purpose of the present research is to improve the prediction of job performance ratings on the basis of motives (i.e., to get ahead and get along) and social competency by choosing work values as direct measures of the motives to get along and get ahead at the workplace instead of using general personality traits. The present two-study investigation contributes to the body of existing literature in several ways. First, we propose a new way to operationalize the motives to get ahead and get along in the work context, which is more proximal to workplace behavior. Second, we expand upon socioanalytic theory by examining outcome variables beyond job performance (i.e., we include job performance as a key outcome in Study 1 and assessments of cooperation and promotability in Study 2). Third, we seek to further support the importance of political skill as a proximal set of social competencies that can direct individuals' work values in their interaction effects on important work outcomes.

## Theoretical foundations and hypothesis development

### *Socioanalytic theory of work behavior*

Hogan and Shelton (1998) argued that people are motivated to *get along* and *get ahead*. Individuals need to cooperate and comply with others in a positive ways in order to get along (Hogan & Holland, 2003). Alternatively, in order to get ahead, individuals are competitive, seek responsibility, and attempt to maximize their visibility and be recognized (Hogan & Holland, 2003). Although people are motivated to get along with and ahead, there are individual differences in the desire, ability, and ultimate success of individuals to engage in these objectives. In empirical research, personality has been used as a proxy for motivation by researchers (e.g., Witt & Ferris, 2003).

Hogan and Shelton (1998) contended that social competency is a moderator of the relationships between the motives to get ahead and get along and the performance evaluations provided by supervisors. Through social competency, one is able to transform intentions to get along and get ahead into actions that are perceived and evaluated by supervisors positively. By implication, strong motive prediction of job performance should not be expected without the presence of social competency.

### *Social competency and political skill*

We suggest that it is feasible to select a measurement of social competency that is designed specifically for the use in work and organizational environments. Thus, we recommend using a social competency construct that is specific to the work environment and one that has been well validated in research to date, with sound psychometric properties. Specifically, we use political skill in this investigation as the measure of social competency.

Politically skilled persons possess social competencies that enhance their personal and/or organizational goals through their understanding and influence of others in social interactions at work. The social astuteness of politically skilled individuals provides them with a keen awareness of both self and others, which gives them the capacity to calibrate and adjust their behavior to different and changing contexts. This astuteness and contextual adaptability allow politically skilled individuals to wield a great deal of interpersonal influence because their influence attempts are not perceived as such (e.g., Ferris et al., 2007; Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007). Instead, politically skilled individuals appear to possess high levels of genuineness and integrity, which help them to gain the trust and confidence of those with whom they interact. This set of mutually reinforcing competencies allows politically skilled individuals to develop large and diverse networks of contacts they can leverage for additional influence.

Additionally, political skill has been found to serve as a moderator of specific relationships, acting as an antidote to the strain reactions from stressors (e.g., Perrewé et al., 2004) and facilitating the effectiveness of influence tactics on performance outcomes (e.g., Treadway et al., 2007). Furthermore, political skill has been found to increase the effectiveness of personality as a predictor of job performance (Blickle et al., 2008, 2010; Witt & Ferris, 2003).

### *Work motive interactions with social competency on job performance and effectiveness*

#### *Need for direct measurement of work values as motives*

In line with the "work values as preferences" paradigm (Berings, De Fruyt, & Bouwen, 2004; Lofquist & Dawis, 1971; Macnab & Fitzsimmons, 1987; Pryor, 1982; Super, 1970, 1973), we consider work values as tendencies to prefer job characteristics, outcomes, or features of the work environment and as personal characteristics that explain individual differences in organizational or vocational behavior (Berings et al., 2004; Super, 1973). Work values are personal characteristics that explain individual differences in behavior at the workplace.

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