

THE INTERACTIVE RELATIONSHIP OF INTERNAL SERVICE AND SUPERVISOR
POLITICAL SKILL WITH EMPLOYEE SALES BEHAVIORS

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Psychology

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctorate of Philosophy

By

Benjamin Almy Farmer

May, 2015

THE INTERACTIVE RELATIONSHIP OF INTERNAL SERVICE AND SUPERVISOR
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ABSTRACT

I investigated the joint relationships of supervisor political skill and the internal service quality provided to sales employees with employee team sales behaviors. Employing Conservation of Resources theory, I argue that the political skill of the supervisor provides motivational resources, and internal service provides capability resources to position employees to manifest effective sales behaviors. Further, I hypothesized that political skill moderates the relationship between internal service quality and team sales behaviors. Results of analyses conducted on data collected from 89 retail store employees and their respective supervisors revealed that: (a) employee perceptions of internal service quality were related to team sales behaviors; (b) supervisory political skill was unrelated to team sales behaviors; and (c) the relationship between internal service and team sales behaviors was stronger among workers with supervisors higher than lower in social skill.

Keywords: Political skill, internal service, sales behaviors, conservation of resources

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To all those who helped me along the way,

My sincerest thanks, with admiration, respect, and love. May I provide the same to those who come after me.

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THE INTERACTIVE RELATIONSHIP OF INTERNAL SERVICE AND SUPERVISOR POLITICAL SKILL WITH EMPLOYEE SALES BEHAVIORS

Sales drive organizational success. Consequently, researchers and practitioners have investigated ways to optimize employee sales performance. Evidence indicates that such behaviors as maintaining regular contact with customers and disclosure of personal and firm information foster communication between customers and sales representatives, leading to increased sales (Boles, Brasher, Bellenger, & Barksdale, 2000). Showing concern for customers' well-being and sales needs is also linked to increased sales (Borucki & Burke, 1999). Beyond specific behaviors, individual differences among sales persons, such as intelligence, extroversion, and conscientiousness also predict both subjective measures of performance and actual sales numbers (Vinchur, Shippmann, Switzer, & Roth, 1998). Whereas employee individual differences typically may only be manipulated through selection (i.e., hiring intelligent and extroverted sales persons), maximizing sales performance with existing employees requires that employers use strategies that encourage useful sales behaviors among their employees.

With this dissertation, I focus on the relationships of supervisory political skill and internal service quality with employee sales behaviors. I argue that a supervisor can impact the psychological resources available to their employees through social influence on employees, co-workers, other supervisors, and customers. Further, I argue that the quality of internal service provided to employees may either enable employees' sales behaviors or act as a barrier to performance; that is, it affects their capability to perform. Both internal service and political skill have received increasing attention in organizational literature recently due to their links with employee performance and well-being (Conduit, Matanda, & Mavondo, 2014; Ferris et al.,

2007). Employing Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, I propose that supervisor political skill and employee perceptions of internal service quality relate to team sales behaviors in a retail setting. I argue that politically-skilled supervisors motivate employees in order to optimize their team's performance. I argue that internal service quality acts as a resource to employees, hindering or enabling them as they perform their jobs. Further, I propose that their joint effects are interactive. That is, politically-skilled supervisors provide psychological boosts to employees that lessen the impact of low-quality service, while strengthening the impact of high-quality service through motivational influence. I present in Figure 2 a graphical representation of the proposed model.

Political Skill

Political skill positions individuals to collect, analyze, and use social information in an organizational context. The skill is a form of social influence (Ferris et al., 2007). Vital for persons in positions of authority whose job requires understanding the feelings and motivations of employees, supervisors use this information to optimize a work team's performance (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004). Political skill, social skill, and related social capability constructs have received increased attention in recent years, as researchers have explored ways in which workplace social influence operates among employees and supervisors. Researchers and practitioners have investigated how members influence one another's attitudes and behaviors (Momm, Blickle & Liu, 2013; Momm et al., 2014). Political skill has been known by many names over the years, but it has often been explored with a common underlying component that may be described as a capability to understand others' feelings, desires, and needs, and a utilization of this information to meet goals within the social or organizational sphere.

Organizational scientists have focused on how political skill may benefit the individual possessing the skill. They have found evidence linking political skill with workplace successes, due in part to the ability of politically-skilled employees to influence their co-workers, subordinates, and supervisors (e.g., Kolodinsky, Treadway, & Ferris, 2007). Political skill is most commonly investigated as an upward influence tactic (employee to supervisor), and researchers have provided robust evidence that employees receive higher performance ratings from their supervisors when they are more politically adept (Blickle et al., 2011; Ferris et al., 2007). To a lesser extent, researchers have also investigated the downward influence of supervisor political skill on team outcomes, finding that supervisors can influence their entire team's performance (Ahearn et al., 2004).

With this dissertation, I investigate political skill as a tool of downward influence from supervisors to their team members with regards to sales behaviors. In line with Hobfoll's COR theory (1989), I argue that political skill functions as a psychological resource that motivates employees.

Political Skill Construct Definition

Though not always known as political skill, the concept is as old as the social and business interaction itself. Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532) may be one of the earliest existing pieces of literature on political skill, exploring topics, such as reputation, influence, and trust in medieval principalities. In line with more recent work by Ferris and colleagues (2005, p. 127), I define political skill 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 effectiveness with reasoning." Ferris and colleagues' definition is in line with current understanding of the construct, and with related research findings that demonstrate the existence

of a single higher order political skill factor (Ferris et al., 2007). Ferris and colleagues found support for this higher order construct hypothesis by demonstrating that social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity all have unique contributions while loading onto a single higher order factor (Ferris et al., 2008). Due to arguments presented by Hall and Bernini (2001), and Ferris, Perrewé, and Douglas (2002) in favor of a single higher order factor, and in line with evidence presented by Ferris and colleagues (2007), I utilize the term “political skill” to refer to a single higher order construct throughout this dissertation in place of utilizing numerous related construct labels that fall within the rubric of social effectiveness.

Political Skill Outcomes

Over 30 years ago, Mintzberg (1983) introduced the concept of organizations as political arenas, arguing that employees must constantly be aware of and utilize political tactics as they navigate the organizational politics inherent in the world of work. His work helped push political skill into the academic realm, suggesting that an individual’s political skill is measurable and affects workplace behaviors and outcomes. Since then, researches have demonstrated that political skill is a predictor of individual performance ratings (Harris, Kacmar, Zivunsky, & Shaw, 2007; Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris, & Hochwarter, 2008), including ratings of performance over time (Blickle et al., 2011). Blickle, Wendel, and Ferris (2010) found evidence that political skill strengthens the relationship between an employee’s desire to get ahead and his or her sales performance. Andrews, Kacmar, and Harris (2009) found that political skill helps employees to thrive in the face of workplace ambiguity, arguing that ambiguity provided more opportunity for interpersonal influence. Beyond ratings of performance, political skill is also linked to overall employee promotability and employee well-being (Blickle et al., 2011).

Meurs and colleagues found a positive relationship between workplace conflict and employee burnout (Meurs, Gallagher, & Perrewé, 2010). Arguing that political skill is indicative of certain personality traits that help employees remain calm and positive in the face of organizational stressors, Meurs and colleagues found that political skill relates to decreased stress levels (2010). These findings support a resource-based view of political skill as a tool to maintain resources. Being able to be calm in tense situations may also impact co-workers and subordinates, possibly aiding politically-skilled supervisors to lessen the intensity of situations and have more control over social interactions.

Some researchers have explored political skill outside of its benefits to individual performance and well-being by investigating the political skill of supervisors as a tool for influencing subordinates. Treadway and colleagues found political skill relates to perceptions of organizational support and supervisor trust (Treadway et al., 2004). They argued that supervisors with political skill are able to foster mutually beneficial relationships with employees both professionally and interpersonally. In line with Ferris and colleagues' definition (2005), Treadway and colleagues (2004) argued that measures of political skill indicated supervisors' ability to understand the emotional and professional needs of their co-workers and subordinates. Using this information, supervisors work to build relationships with employees that are both enjoyable and professionally advantageous. Hobfoll's COR theory (1989) may help to explain this phenomenon, as politically-skilled supervisors are acting to supply their subordinates and co-workers with psychological resources. As supervisors learn the motivational needs of employees, such as encouragement, autonomy, or direction, they can use this information to provide these needed resources on an individualized basis.

Ahearn and colleagues found that the political skill of supervisors relates to overall team performance (Ahearn et al., 2004). Ahearn's team argued that politically-skilled supervisors are able to influence teams without direct involvement in team functions, influencing employee dispositions to increase motivation. Ahearn and colleagues argued that politically-skilled supervisors are more in tune with employee needs and skills and encourage employee strengths. With this dissertation, I aim to investigate the outcomes of political skill further by exploring the relationship between supervisor political skill and team sales behaviors.

Influence Theories and Political Skill

Despite the attention political skill has received in both academic and applied fields, the construct has received only modest theoretical attention. Ferris and colleagues (2005) stated that many assumptions in the study of political skill have been made. "Research(ers) have largely assumed that the mere demonstration of an influence attempt (as indicated by political skill) is synonymous with its effectiveness" (Ferris et al., 2005, p.127). Unfortunately, equating action with effect eliminates a need for theoretical explanations of both underlying cognitive processes and behaviors. Ferris and colleagues explored the construct's validity, going beyond cause and effect by exploring the "how" of political skill effectiveness.

Ferris and colleagues (2005) and later Blass and Ferris (2007) found evidence that political skill is made up of four core components: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability/social capital, and apparent sincerity or genuineness (Blass & Ferris, 2007). Blass and Ferris further explored the "how" by arguing "the accumulation of friendships, connections, and alliances allows individuals to leverage this social capital to help facilitate change efforts for increased leader effectiveness" among the politically-skilled (2007, p. 11). Ammeter, Douglas, Gardner, Hochwarter, and Ferris (2002) took on what is likely the most

comprehensive approach by developing a theory of political leadership. Focusing primarily on existing trait based leadership models, Ammeter and colleagues (2002) developed a robust theoretical framework to explain how political leadership is distinct from other forms of leadership. Unfortunately, their work largely neglected existing theories of influence, and cognitive process from the perspective of those being influenced – leaving further area for development. Beyond steps taken by Ammeter and colleagues (2002), existing theories of social influence, agency, and leader-follower interaction may further explain the effectiveness of political skill as a tool to increase employee performance. I suggest that resource-based stress theories also provide a framework for understanding the role of supervisory political skill on employee outcomes.

Researchers have demonstrated that political skill provides heightened awareness of others' verbal and nonverbal emotional cues (Momm, Blickle, & Lieu, 2010; Momm et al., 2014), helping employees to evaluate others' feelings, intentions, and sincerity (Ferris et al., 2007). Supervisors can use this information to strengthen relationships with their subordinates, gaining their trust (Treadway et al., 2004). They may also use their skill to learn what methods will be effective for motivating their employees, and what methods will only lead to greater stress/loss of personal resources (Thompson, Kirk, & Brown, 2005). Resource theories argue that humans continually work to hoard personal resources such as time, money, and energy (Hobfoll, 1989).

By understanding *both the* needs of their employees, a supervisor may both provide employees with resources, as well as help them to lessen or slow their depletion of resources. Whereas some employees may need more privacy and freedom to work, others may require regular encouragement and prodding. Political skill provides supervisors with information

regarding the needs of their employees, as well as helps them to develop and implement strategies to meet these needs. As supervisors work to optimize their team's performance, the knowledge garnered from political skill provides invaluable information, helping supervisors determine how to allocate resources and job tasks as well as determining which employees need motivating and what actions act as motivators.

Ferris and colleagues (2007) argued that the politically-skilled can also use their awareness and collected knowledge from the workplace to influence others to their way of thinking, creating a kind of 'shared meaning' between others and themselves. For supervisors, this shared meaning may take form as common goals and shared emotions among team members, such as excitement about a new project, a desire to complete a task by a certain time to get a good team performance review, or the urge to support a team member struggling with a job task. This concept of shared meaning adds further support to a resource-based view of political skill and downward influence.

Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1962) argues that humans have a conceptual model of people that impacts not only how they expect others to talk, think, and act, but also how individuals expect themselves to do the same. The theory states that humans attempt to think and act in line with personal ideas they have about themselves. For example, the personal view, "I am good and good people don't steal" would lead to dissonance if one robbed a store. When an individual thinks or acts in ways that diverge from the model, the theory argues that he or she may experience negative feelings, such as confusion, annoyance, shame, or even anger. These feelings are brought about by cognitive dissonance and may be thought of as the psychological distance between how one perceives how one should act vs. how one is acting or has acted recently. Supervisors who are able to create a shared meaning with their employees are in a sense

shaping employees' model of themselves, their team, and their organization. If this model includes pride in high sales numbers and a desire to meet organizational goals, then employees who are not meeting sales goals may work harder due to feelings of shame or sadness brought on by cognitive dissonance. Employees expend psychological resources as their self-image moves further from their actual selves. They must expend mental resources to bring this ideal and the actual closer together, such as through energy expended on coping mechanisms (Case, Andrews, Johson, & Allard, 2005). For supervisors, the development of a shared meaning means that employees may be more motivated to close this gap on their own, acting in ways which meet the needs of the supervisor and organization while, providing employees with a sense of accomplishment and belonging.

Political Skill and Social Influence

Interpersonal influence refers to one's ability to alter both the attitudes and behaviors of others, often with the goal of bringing the influencee to the influencer's way of thinking. Treadway and colleagues (2013) found that political skill plays an important role regarding social influence and interpersonal power in organizations. In a two-study work involving restaurant employees (study 1) and retail employees (study 2), they found that supervisors leveraged their performance to increase interpersonal power and social influence. This relationship was of little value when supervisors lacked political skill, however. This finding indicates that a supervisor's performance has little impact on his or ability to influence others, unless their political skill provides them with an understanding of how to leverage this information. In line with these findings, I argue that political skill provides supervisors with a means to influence their employees to better perform their job tasks. A politically-skilled supervisor is better able to refocus sales employees' attention away from workplace barriers, as

well as foster amiable relations among staff members. In line with work by Momm and colleagues (2013, 2014), politically-skilled supervisors are also better able to recognize the verbal and physical cues of their employees, allowing supervisors to more quickly and accurately read situations. These skills may help supervisors minimize workplace conflict, which might otherwise drain resources and hinder overall team performance. Therefore, I propose:

H1. Supervisor political skill is positively related to team sales behaviors.

Internal Service

Internal service quality – the extent to which the service and material needs of internal employee customers are met – influences the performance of core job functions of those internal employee customers (Chen, 2013). That is, internal service providers support the functions of other employees by providing them with tangible and intangible resources required to complete their job tasks. In contrast, external service providers serve external customers, typically referred to simply as customers. Some researchers have argued for years that internal service providers are an essential component of organizations, contributing to overall organizational effectiveness (Mills & Ungson, 2001) and deserving of additional research attention (Boshoff & Mels, 1995). However, internal service has received only modest attention in the organizational science literature (Chen, 2013). By lending theoretical insight to the study of internal service quality, researchers and practitioners may more fully explore the construct's workplace relationships, increasing its utility and importance as a research and applied construct. Additionally, further exploring the construct's relationship with team performance-related behaviors strengthens the generalizability of previous studies and boosts the construct's overall importance to workplace research and practice. With this dissertation, I aim to inform research regarding internal service quality by further exploring the construct's relation to team sales performance and applying COR

theory (Hobfoll, 1989) as a grounding for why and how the quality of service provided to employees may impact their workplace behaviors.

Internal Service Construct Definition

I refer to internal service quality as the perception of support provided by internal employees and not as a climate of internal service quality. I emphasize this distinction due to recent efforts to treat service and service climate as interchangeable. I argue that internal service should not be confused as a type of climate in and of itself (Erhart et al., 2011), but rather as an indicator of employees' perceptions of the quality of service received. Because of the various ways in which researchers have explored service climate, providing a distinction between internal service quality and service climate is warranted to avoid construct confusion.

The internal service and external service constructs have many similarities, such as a focus on quality of service, speed of delivery rated by customers, and the operational outcomes explored by researchers (Brandon-Jones & Silvestro, 2010). Unlike external service, however, internal service research focuses on the dynamics between internal parties in an organization. Because both the buyer and seller of goods and services work within the same organization, often acting as team members, conditions for internal service-based relationships differ from the traditional internal-external customer service relationship.

When services or products are poor, external customers may simply choose to use other service providers. When a person experiences poor service in a restaurant, he/she may simply choose not to return in the future. Hirschman suggested that in exchange-based relationships, both parties have two primary options when encountering undesirable products or services: "exit" and "voice" (Hirschman, 1970). Either party may "exit" the relationship (e.g., no longer shop at a store, quit a job, or end a relationship) or "voice" their concerns (e.g., speak to the

manager at the store, discuss a pay raise with one's supervisors, or talk through relationship problems). Unlike external service providers, "internal suppliers occupy a monopolistic position" within organizations (Brandon-Jones & Silvestro, 2010, p. 1293). This limits the options of internal buyers who find their service providers to be inadequate by eliminating the "exit" option proposed by Hirshman (1970). Unlike external customers, who can simply shop at another store, employees must live with poor levels of internal service or attempt to improve the service through means of influencing the providers.

Fortunately, for employees, two factors bolster the relationship between internal service providers and internal customers: regular contact between providers and customers and the expertise of internal suppliers. Employee customers educate internal service providers by having regular communication. This in turn leads to service providers having a level of familiarity with internal client demands that minimizes errors. Additionally, these two factors decrease the need for cosmetic sales features, such as expensive advertising campaigns, or sales devices, such as offering limited time price discounts. Whereas internal advertising may be necessary to inform employees of services, certain tactics that are common in external customer interactions may waste time and resources when used in an internal context (Paraskevas, 2001). Despite these advantages, not all organizations offer high-quality internal service, and employee performance suffers (Ehrhart et al., 2011). Studying internal service quality, its measurement, and its relationships may help both researchers and organizations understand and optimize employee performance.

The two dominant approaches to the measurement of internal service quality are the gap-based and the perception-based approaches (Brandon-Jones & Silvestro, 2010). Gap-based measurement evaluates the difference or "gap" between expectations and perceptions of

performance, whereas the perception-based approach measures buyer satisfaction and perceptions of quality regarding internal services provided (Brandon-Jones & Silvestro, 2010). Both gap-based and perception based practices often utilize some form of SERVQUAL, a measurement tool developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) to evaluate service quality. Despite some criticism of SERVQUAL as an imperfect tool for cross-industry study due to the job specific nature of the items in its original and adapted versions, it is the most widely used and accepted scale for internal service quality measurement (Chain & Wu, 2014). Brandon-Jones and Silvestro (2010) compared the validities of the gap and perception based approaches and found both to be valid measures of service quality.

Internal Service Quality and Theory

Due in part to the still young internal service literature, theoretical exploration of the construct and its relationships has been somewhat limited. Organizational psychology received criticism for years regarding a lack of research theory (Webster & Starbuck, 1988). Whereas such areas as leadership (e.g., path-goal theory of leadership and transformational leadership theory) and motivation (e.g., justice and expectancy theories) have seen researchers employ theories from other fields or develop new theories to explain workplace behaviors, the internal service literature currently offers little theoretical insight. I argue that Hobfoll's COR theory (1989) adds needed theoretical perspective to explain a proposed relationship between internal service quality and team sales behaviors.

Employing Hobfoll's (1989) COR theory, I argue that the quality of internal service that employees receive is akin to a personal resource, or as an indicator of access to resources. Advocates of COR theory argue that people have a finite pool of resources, such as time, energy, and affect (Hobfoll, 1989). Employees expend their resources in various ways to complete

personal and job tasks; however, when demands meet or exceed available resources, employees may suffer burnout (Hobfoll, 1989; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). When an internal service provider supplies his/her internal customer (the employee) with low-quality service, the internal customer must expend personal resources to deal with these job demands. For example, if employees in an internal customer service department rarely answer their phone lines and often ignore emails, then their internal customers must spend time sending numerous emails and waiting on hold, wasting time and energy (personal resources) that may otherwise be devoted to core job tasks. This may drain employee resources (time, energy, affect, etc.) and deflate morale, hindering job performance. In turn, these burdens delay sales and reduce customer satisfaction, harming an organization's reputation and bottom line (Caruana, 2002). Conversely, employees in an internal information technology department who go above-and-beyond to supply their internal customers with functional equipment and related training, providing tips and tricks that cut down time and costs may make employees' jobs easier and more efficient. Thus, Hobfoll's COR theory offers a process with which to explain how the quality of internal service affects productivity and job attitudes.

A lack of material resources, such as adequate tools, updated technology, and even information, can vastly hinder employees' ability to conduct job tasks. If internal service providers offer outdated tools, such as old and incompatible software, poorly maintained equipment, or simply fail to provide resources at all, this may hinder or even outright prevent employees from completing job tasks. In a retail setting, poor internal service may translate to providing sales persons with the articles of clothing or other products that may be the wrong size or color – causing frustrations for both the sales person and customers, potentially preventing a sale or future business.

In their study of internal service and service climate, Erhart and colleagues (2011) noted that employees develop social networks that affect access to services and goods from internal service providers. Utilizing networking organizational theory (Van Alstyne, 1997), they explained that employees encounter ease or difficulty in receiving internal service resources when in-groups form and develop norms, such as favoritism, outside of established organizational policy. COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) helps to explain how internal service providers who expend more energy on one employee or a group of employees are less able to meet the service needs of others due to their finite time, energy, and material resources. When members of an internal service department develop positive and negative social relationships with other departments they service they may unintentionally, or intentionally, provide disproportionate service quality. For example, an IT employee who routinely works to ensure one department's computers are working, as an excuse to spend time chatting with a friend in that department, neglects other departments he or she services in the process. Employees of an internal service department who expend resources in time and energy toward prioritizing the needs of one department over another may not have enough resources to meet the needs of other departments, making some social networks a threat to overall organizational performance (Van Alstyne, 1997).

Incorporating additional theory to the study of internal service relationships may help to further the development of internal service as a construct. Additionally, the above arguments may provide theoretical support to existing research that has demonstrated empirical relationships between internal service quality and workplace outcomes.

Internal Service and Performance

In organizations that have large units dedicated to external customer interactions, internal service providers are necessary for the organization to run efficiently. In retail settings, stores have employees who deliver items from supply warehouses and provide customers service in-person, by phone, and by internet. Moreover, purchasers decide which goods and in what quantities are sent to a store for sale. In hotels, electricians, cleaning staff, cooks, and maintenance persons work behind the scenes, ensuring that rooms are in clean and working condition for the guests who may never see or even be aware of the existence of these internal service providers. Conduit and colleagues (2014) found that organizations that tended to have an internal service focus were more successful than those that had an external customer focus. They argued that by focusing on meeting employee needs, employees are empowered to complete job tasks by having access to necessary resources (Hobfoll, 1989) and are more satisfied and committed to their work.

Even when organizations have had both an internal and external focus simultaneously, they have performed less well than those organizations that have primarily focused on meeting the needs of their employees. Conduit and colleagues (2014) argued that the reason for this finding may be the inherent assumption employees have that their role is to provide quality products and services to customers, making an explicit external service orientation redundant. By focusing on superior internal service, employers remove workplace barriers to performance (Conduit et al., 2014).

In line with recent research (Conduit et al., 2014; Erhart et al., 2011), I propose that internal service is related to employee sales performance behaviors. Employees provided with superior internal service are better able to perform their jobs due to having access to more resources. Therefore, I propose:

H2. Employee ratings of internal service quality are positively related to team sales behaviors.

Joint Effects of Internal Service and Political Skill

The joint effects of internal service and supervisory political skill may be additive or interactive. If the former is true, internal service and supervisory political skill combine additively to predict team sales behaviors. That is, both internal service and supervisory political skill have significant relationships with team sales behaviors, and these relationships are independent of each other. If the latter is true, levels of internal service have differential effects on team sales behaviors at different levels of supervisory political skill, and vice versa. Maier (1965) argued that performance is an interactive function of motivation and ability, $P = f(M \times A)$. Similarly, Sackett, Gruys, and Ellingson (1998) noted that individuals with higher capability tend to perform better than individuals with low capability, generally speaking. They (p. 546) emphasized that “the question of interest is whether each additional unit of ability has the same effect of performance at varying levels of motivation.” If the additive model is accurate, then the answer is yes, as both have independent effects on performance. However, the interactive model suggests that additional units of motivation have greater effect at higher levels of ability and vice versa.

COR theory states that resources may be both material (e.g., tools, technology, data), and psychological (e.g., affect, energy). I argue that supervisory political skill is a psychological resource that functions to influence the motivation of the employee and that internal service is an instrumental resource that reflects the extent to which the employee is enabled or capable to exhibit effective sales behaviors. In line with the $P = f(M \times A)$ formula, I suggest that political skill and internal service likely have interactive effects on team sales behaviors, such that higher levels of supervisory political skill have greater effect at higher levels of internal service quality.

Studies suggest that supervisors can buffer or compensate for low levels of internal service. Chen (2013) found that bureaucracy within an organization exerts a strong negative influence on internal service quality by limiting employee motivation and slowing internal service providers' capability to perform. However, he also found that the transformational leadership of supervisors ameliorates this negative influence. Chen argued that transformational leaders are able to inspire employees, bolstering their desire to support their co-workers, their team, and their organization. Chiang and Wu (2014) recently found that internal service influences employee attitudes and affective states. They found that this relationship existed both directly and indirectly through supportive supervisor behaviors.

I argue that, in line with transformational leadership and supervisor support findings, supervisor political skill shapes employee perceptions of the work environment. By shifting employee focus away from the burden of low-quality internal service, and toward the benefits of internal service when high, supervisor political skill motivates employees to manifest effective sales behaviors. That is, in line with the notion that internal service quality acts as a resource or as a gateway to resources: (a) low-quality internal service is a burden on employees that harms performance if supervisors do not intervene, whereas (b) high-quality service enables performance, which is further bolstered by supervisory political skill.

Politically-skilled supervisors motivate employees to work through the difficulties of poor internal service by developing a perception of shared goals, helping employees to avoid conflict with co-workers or organizational policies (Ferris et al., 2002), and by using inspirational appeals in order to attain support for changes, delegation of work, and to obtain assistance (Yukl et al., 1995). In line with COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), I argue that these psychological resources help employees to avoid negative affective states that could impair

performance. Whereas both high internal service quality and supervisor political skill are ideal, the political skill of a supervisor may not only enhance the impact of high-quality internal service but also partially compensate for low-quality internal service. Accordingly, I propose:

H3. Supervisor political skill moderates the relationship between internal service quality and employee sales behaviors, such that the relationship is stronger among employees with supervisors who are higher than lower in political skill.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Data were collected from a large retail organization that sells clothing and provides related services. The organization operates over 600 stores, most of which include one store manager and nine employees. Most employees act in a sales role, interacting with customers regularly. Other employees act in support roles, providing internal services, such as tailoring and merchandising services. Our sponsor arranged for the random selection of 385 stores to participate in the study. Surveys were distributed to store managers by email as a link sent by a company executive. The managers were provided an email link to a manager survey, a link to distribute to their employees for the employee survey, as well as a unique store code generated as part of the larger study. Participants were assured that no members of the organization would have access to their individual responses, and all data would remain anonymous.

Out of the 385 store managers, 110 (29%) responded. At least one non-supervisory employee responded from 244 of the 385 stores (63%), totaling 425 followers with an average of 1.54 followers per store and a 12% response rate overall. However, complete, matched data were collected from only 89 employees (in 60 stores) and their respective supervisors. That is, matched employee-supervisor pairs yielded a sample size of 89 individual employees and 60

stores, only three of which had more than two reporting employees. Due to concerns of the organization's executives, no demographic data were collected. Anecdotal evidence from both focus groups and human resource executives indicated that the majority of employees working in the stores were males in their 20s, 30s, and 40s.

Measures

Internal Service. Based on input from our sponsoring managers, Parasuraman and colleague's SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988) was modified to fit the study's retail sales population. Eighteen items (e.g., "How would you rate the merchandising department on competence?") were modified from the original scale or developed to measure internal service quality within the organization. The study employed a perception-based measure of internal service, measuring employee perceptions of internal service. Employees were asked to rate the items using a 5-point scale (1 = "Poor" to 5 = "Excellent"). The alpha coefficient for the sample was .90. High scores indicate high levels of internal service quality.

Supervisor Political Skill. Seven items (e.g. "I am keenly aware of how I am perceived by others") from a political skill scale (Ferris, Witt, & Hochwarter, 2001) assessed political skill of supervisors. Supervisors were asked to rate the items using a 5-point scale (1 = "Strongly Disagree" to 5 = "Strongly Agree"). The alpha coefficient for the sample was .84. High scores indicate high levels of political skill.

Sales Behavior. A 5-item (e.g., "Employees at my store immediately greet customers when they enter the store") Hunter et al. (2013) sales behavior scale assessed employee sales performance related behaviors. The scale was developed after meeting with several focus groups of employees within the organization taking part in the study. Employees were asked questions related to what constituted useful sales behaviors. Employees were asked to rate the items using

a 5-point scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree” to 5 = “Strongly Agree”). The alpha coefficient for the sample was .91. High scores indicated the extent that raters agreed that employees performed the sales behaviors described in the scale.

Analyses

Due to concerns of employing multilevel analysis to samples with small cluster sizes, researchers have employed Monte Carlo based studies to evaluate the feasibility of such models (Bell, Morgan, Komrey, Ferron, 2010; Maas & Hox, 2005). In a study of cluster and overall sample sizes for multilevel modeling, Maas and Hox (2005, p. 86) concluded:

“...only a small sample size at level two (meaning a sample of 50 or less) leads to biased estimates of the second-level standard errors. In all of the other simulated conditions, the estimates of the regression coefficients, the variance components, and the standard errors are unbiased.”

Because the number of clusters in the proposed sample ($c = 60$) is above the level which lead to bias in Maas and Hox’s (2005) study, I suggest that multilevel analysis of data collected for the present study is appropriate. In order to evaluate the proposed model in a multilevel-context, I used SAS version 9.3’s Proc mixed procedure. SAS’s Proc mixed allows for the analysis of fixed effects of both level-one and level-two predictors on level-one criteria, as well as produces the between-group and within-group variance that may be used to calculate the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC). ICC may be interpreted as the proportion of variance explained between clusters (Snijders & Bosker, 2011). In line with Enders and Tofighi (2007), I created a cluster mean-centered level-one predictor of internal service and level-two grand mean-centered aggregate of internal service. According to Enders and Tofighi (2007), failing to center or grand mean centering level-one predictors in multilevel-models combines both between and

within group variance, and produces uninterruptible fixed effects in multilevel-analysis. By employing a level-one cluster mean-centered internal service variable and a level-two grand mean-centered internal service aggregate, which also acts as a control, analysis produced two unbiased between (aggregate, level two) and within (level one) predictors. Further, supervisor political skill was grand mean-centered, due to its measurement being at the supervisor level (level two). By using these centering methods, the intercept may be interpreted as the level of sales behavior at the average level of all predictor variables for the sample population. After centering all of the predictor variables, I ran SAS Proc mixed to produce the fixed effects of internal service quality (H1), supervisor political skill (H2), aggregated internal service quality (control), and the cross-product of political skill and internal service (H3) with team sales behaviors. In line with Snijders and Bosker (2011), multilevel modeling notation for the final analysis can be found in Figure 1.

Results

I present the means, standard deviations, reliability estimates (Cronbach's α), and intercorrelation matrix in Table 1. As shown there, political skill was unrelated to team sales behaviors ($r = .01, ns$). Internal service quality was related to team sales behaviors ($r = .35, p < .01$).

I calculated the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) using an equation provided by Snijders and Bosker (2011), where the model between-group variance (.082) is divided by the sum of the between and within group variance (i.e., $.082 + .237$) to produce the proportion of variability in observed score (.26), which may be ascribed to variability across groups (Mehta, 2011). In line with Harlow (2014)'s recommendations, this is well above the ICC level of .05 at which multilevel modeling should be considered for analysis.

I present in Table 2 the results of the multilevel regression analyses predicting team sales behaviors. As shown there, and consistent with correlations but inconsistent with Hypothesis 1, the fixed effect of political skill was unrelated to team sales behaviors ($\beta = .08, p = .59$). In line with recent work conducted by Vandenberg and Lance (2015), this finding indicates no second level fixed effect of political skill on the level 2 (between) component of team sales behaviors. As also shown in Table 2 but consistent with Hypotheses 2 and 3, both internal service ($\beta = .34, p = .014$) and the political skill x internal service cross-product term were related to team sales behaviors ($\beta = .75, p = .013$). Additionally, the aggregate fixed effects of internal service on sales behaviors (control; $\beta = .27, p = .013$) was significant; however, small cluster populations decrease the importance of this finding, as it acts as a control to account for between-group variance that may otherwise bias the influence of political skill.

I present in Figure 3 the plot of the interaction. As shown there, internal service was more strongly related to team sales behaviors among employees with managers self-reporting higher than lower levels of political skill. Application of Dawson's (2014) two-way unstandardized simple slope analysis is not appropriate for multilevel models. As stated by Dawson, "the formulas for simple slope tests, slope difference tests and regions of significance do not apply [to multilevel analysis]" (2014, p. 16).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the joint effects of supervisory political skill and internal service quality on team sales behaviors. I suggested that political skill and internal service quality have both main and interactive relationships with team sales behaviors. I argued that supervisory political skill motivates employees through the development of a perception of shared meaning and goals (Ferris et al., 2005) and therefore directly impacts team sales

behaviors. As political skill was unrelated to team sales behaviors, the results do not provide support for this argument.

Further, I reasoned that internal service quality reflects employee access to resources and likely enables employees to manifest effective sales behaviors. That is, internal service affects the capability of employees to manifest sales behaviors. The significant fixed effects and correlations reflecting the relationships between internal service and sales behaviors provide some support for this argument.

In line with COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and Maier's (1965) suggestion that performance is an interactive function of motivation and ability, I argued that: (a) the political skill of the supervisor provides motivational resources; (b) internal service provides capability resources; and (c) political skill and internal service have interactive effects on team sales behaviors, such that higher levels of supervisory political skill have greater effect at higher levels of internal service quality (i.e., motivation has greater effects at higher levels of capability, and vice versa). Hence, I argued that supervisor political skill moderates the relationship between team internal service and team sales behaviors, such that the relationship is stronger among employees whose supervisors are higher than lower in political skill (H3). The results indicated a significant interaction. As hypothesized, Figure 3 reveals that the relationship between internal service quality and employee sales behaviors is stronger among employees with supervisors who are higher than lower in political skill. However, whereas I expected that high levels of supervisory political skill would enhance the internal service-team sales behavior relationship, I found that, among workers with supervisors reporting low levels of political skill, internal service quality was essentially unrelated to sales behaviors. This finding may indicate that actions taken by

supervisors with low political skill somehow negate the otherwise positive influence of internal service quality.

As hypothesized, among workers reporting higher levels of internal service, those with supervisors reporting higher (lower) levels of political skill reported higher (lower) levels of team sales behaviors. Consistent with Maier's interactive hypothesis, high levels of supervisory political skill appear to augment high-quality internal service by enhancing motivation among enabled workers, yielding high levels of effective sales behaviors. That is, in line with arguments by Ferris and colleagues (2005), politically-skilled supervisors use their influence to bring employees to their way of thinking, creating a kind of shared meaning that motivates enabled employees to manifest sales behaviors.

Surprisingly, supervisory political skill did not compensate for low-quality internal service: Among workers reporting low levels of internal service, those with supervisors reporting higher (lower) levels of political skill reported lower (higher) levels of team sales behaviors. This result runs counter to my argument that high supervisory political skill would benefit employee sales behaviors in the face of poor internal service. Why might this occur? Perhaps employees view the displays of political skill by the supervisor as having little benefit when internal service is low. Whereas political skill may act as a motivator for employees provided with resources from high-quality internal service, employees may interpret a supervisor's political skill tactics differently when incapable of performing because of low-quality internal service. Supervisors' use of inspirational appeals for employees to work harder may be well received when resources are high; however, employees may feel drained or annoyed by these tactics when contending with inadequate resources. As has been found in studies of employee perceptions regarding workplace injustice (Jones, 2009), employees may decrease sales behaviors in retaliation toward

their supervisor and organization if they feel they are not receiving the resources needed to perform their job. Indeed, as noted by Shoss, Eisenberger, Restubog, and Zagenczyk (2013), employees react to what they perceive as the source of their hardship, namely the supervisor or organization. Potential supervisor insincerity and feelings of incompetence may erode trust, hurting employee performance (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002) and supervisors' abilities to influence employees (Treadway et al., 2013). It should be noted that recent research conducted by Vandenberg and Lance (2015) has demonstrated that cross-level effects from level two predictors to level one outcomes are not possible; therefore the lack of relationship between political skill and team sales behaviors perhaps may only be interpreted as lack of a level two relationship.

Implications for Research

The findings offer several avenues for research exploration. As reflected in Tables 1 and 2, both correlations and multilevel fixed effects suggest a relationship between internal service quality and sales behaviors. This finding supports arguments that internal service is a construct worthy of more attention in organizational research, as it is now linked to sales behaviors and other measures of performance (Chen, 2013). The interaction of internal service and supervisory political skill suggests opportunities for additional work. Future research may explore the reasons why: (a) low supervisory political skill appears to negate the influence of internal service quality, and (b) high supervisory political skill appears to exacerbate the effect of low-quality internal service rather than provide motivational, compensatory personal resources. Qualitative research, in particular, might point to better understanding. In addition, investigating the utility of employee ratings of supervisory political skill may reveal the effects of supervisor bias in self-

ratings. However, given the sample size, the possibility that the unexpected findings simply reflect measurement or random error is non-trivial.

Implications for Practice

The data revealed that the highest levels of team sales behaviors were among personnel with politically-skilled supervisors and receiving high levels of internal service. Anecdotal evidence suggests that both of these are overlooked in many organizations, and common sense is not necessarily common practice. Efforts to develop supervisory political skill and enhance internal service are likely to be of utility.

Limitations

I emphasize several potential limitations. First, a substantial limitation to the study was the small sample size within clusters. Matched employee-supervisor pairs yielded a sample size of 89 individual employees and 60 stores, only three of which had more than two reporting employees. This prevented meaningful aggregation of employee responses and investigation of the hypotheses at a conceptually appropriate level-two analysis. Indeed, small cluster populations inhibited analysis by preventing exploration of aggregates. That is, because of the small population within clusters, supervisor ratings of team sales behaviors could not be used as an outcome variable due to an inability to use the aggregation of internal service quality at level two brought about by small sample size. Further, this prevented exploration of employee ratings of sales behaviors to be aggregated to level two as an outcome variable, as was proposed by the dissertation committee. Within the sample, only three groups had clusters larger than two observations, and nearly two-thirds of the clusters had a single observation, preventing the initially proposed analysis. It is not feasible to aggregate individuals to the group level when group populations are very small, as it would require treating individual observations at an

inappropriate level and making assumptions regarding the homogeneity of members within groups. This limitation prevents comparisons between employee measurements of sales behaviors and supervisor measurements of sales behaviors.

Cluster size limitation adds further complication regarding the analysis conducted, as the current model employed team sales behaviors measured at the individual level. Whereas employee perceptions of his or her co-worker's sales behaviors provide important information, studies have found that supervisor ratings are regarded as more valid and reliable than are employees' self-ratings or co-worker ratings of performance (Heidemeier & Moser, 2009). Whereas team sales behaviors are directly observable, co-workers' ratings may be susceptible to some level of bias. It may be both expensive and time-consuming; however, future studies may use observational tactics by trained observers to more accurately assess team sales behaviors.

Additionally, the measurement of political skill of supervisors was self-rated and may be subjected to inflation due to individual bias, as has been demonstrated in self-ratings of performance (Heidemeier & Moser, 2009). However, because self-ratings are common in studies of political skill (e.g., Harris et al., 2007; Jawahar, Stone, & Kisamore, 2007) and have been found to be consistent between self and other ratings (Ferris et al., 2007), this is a small potential limitation regarding the study of political skill in general, rather than a weakness of this study in particular. Further, the mean and standard deviation for political skill displayed in Table 1 are similar to those found by Brouer et al. (2011) and comparable, or even smaller, to other studies using seven-point Likert-type scales (i.e., Meurs et al., 2010, Treadway et al., 2011). Beyond the target of measurement, a more focused measure of political skill may also provide a better picture of a potential relationship between political skill and employee behaviors. In place of using a general measure, as was used in this study, a measure focused on influence tactics toward

sales employees or employees in a retail setting may reveal a relationship not found in the current study. Future studies may further investigate political skill ratings from other perspectives. Comparisons with ratings from subordinates or co-workers may help to determine the validity of self-rated political skill and its potential for bias in self-ratings. The sample population's lack of demographic data was an additional limitation. Whereas anecdotal evidence indicates that participants are mostly young to middle-aged white males, no demographic data were available. This limits the generalizability of the findings, as it is unknown how representative the sample is of a larger retail or general population.

Conclusion

This study expanded both theoretical and empirical support regarding political skill and internal service as personal resources that influence employee behaviors. Findings revealed support for the importance of internal service quality as a factor that relates to employee sales behaviors, a finding that supports arguments for additional research in the area of internal service. This finding may help to spur additional research regarding the utility of internal service quality for employee performance. Employing a resources-based theoretical perspective (Hobfoll, 1989) may also open up the potential to find links between internal service and indicators of employee well-being.

Mixed findings regarding the link between political skill and team sales behaviors indicate that further research is needed; however, results show that political skill may hold some level of utility in promoting employee sales behaviors under the right circumstances. As is the case with research in general, investigations into underexposed areas offer potential, both for new discoveries and new questions. The results of this dissertation appear to offer more avenues for further study than answers; however, these avenues may eventually provide a more accurate

and useful understanding regarding the importance and utility of internal service and political skill for both researchers and practitioners.

Appendix A

Supervisor Political Skill

1. I find it easy to put myself in the position of others
2. I am keenly aware of how I am perceived by others
3. In social situations, it is always clear to me exactly what to say and do
4. I am particularly good at sensing the motivations and hidden agenda of others
5. I am good at making myself visible with influential people in my organization
6. I am good at reading others' body language
7. I am able to adjust my behavior and become the type of person dictated by any situation

Appendix B

Internal Service Quality

1. How would you rate the merchandising department on timeliness of response?
2. How would you rate the merchandising department on follow-through?
3. How would you rate the merchandising department on competence?
4. How would you rate the tuxedo department and distribution on timeliness of response?
5. How would you rate the tuxedo department and distribution on follow-through?
6. How would you rate the tuxedo department and distribution on competence?
7. How would you rate the customer service department on timeliness of response?
8. How would you rate the customer service department on follow-through?
9. How would you rate the customer service department on competence?
10. How would you rate the distribution center and route drivers on timeliness of response?
11. How would you rate the distribution center and route drivers on follow-through?
12. How would you rate the distribution center and route drivers on competence?
13. How would you rate the service you receive from other (Organization Name) stores on timeliness of response?
14. How would you rate the service you receive from other (Organization Name) stores on follow-through?
15. How would you rate the service you receive from other (Organization Name) stores on competence?
16. How would you rate the regional tailor on timeliness of response?
17. How would you rate the regional tailor on follow-through?
18. How would you rate the regional tailor on competence?

Appendix C

Employee Sales Behaviors

1. Employees at my store immediately greet customers when they enter the store
2. Employees at my store smile when talking with customers
3. Employees at my store build friendly rapport with customers
4. Employees at my store anticipate customer objections
5. Employees at my store dress neatly and professionally

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelation Matrix

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Supervisor Political Skill	3.94	0.45	(.84)			
2. Internal Service Quality	3.73	0.71	.03	(.90)		
3. Team Sales Behaviors	4.12	0.57	.01	.35**	(.91)	

Note. Correlations are presented below the diagonal ($n = 89$). Cronbach's Alpha is presented in parentheses across the diagonal. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 2

Results of MLM Hypotheses Testing

Variable	Estimate	Standard Error	p
Intercept	4.27	.06	<.0001
Supervisor Political Skill	.077	.14	.5960
Internal Service	.340	.13	.0135
Internal Service (level 2 aggregate, control)	.275	.11	.0160
Internal Service X Supervisor Political Skill	.753	.28	.0134

MLM: Multi-level Model Notation

$$\begin{aligned}
 ESB_{ij} = & \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01} * (\overline{ISERV}_{.j} - \overline{ISERV}_{..}) + \gamma_{02}(\overline{PSKILL}_{.j} - \overline{PSKILL}_{..}) + (\gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11} \\
 & * (\overline{PSKILL}_{.j} - \overline{PSKILL}_{..})) * (ISERV_{ij} - \overline{ISERV}_{.j}) + u_{0j} + e_{ij}
 \end{aligned}$$

Figure 1. Model equation using MLM notation

Level 2: Supervisor/Work Group

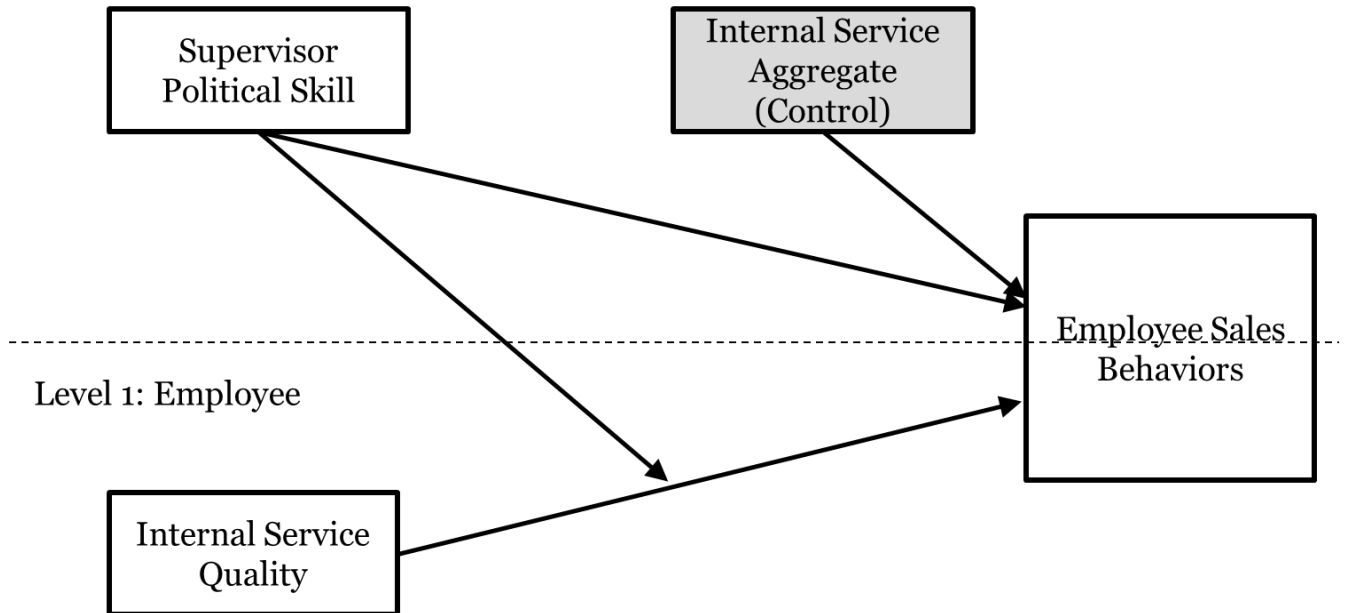


Figure 2. Visual representation of complete model.

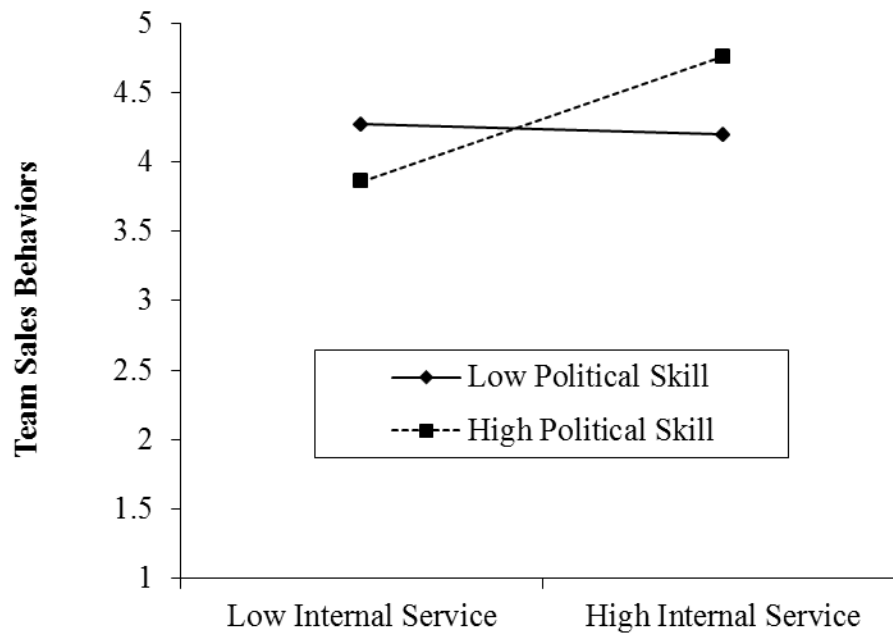


Figure 3. Political skill as a moderator of the relationship between internal service quality and team sales behaviors. Low political skill and internal service indicate participant scores one standard deviation below the mean. High political skill and internal service indicate participant scores one standard deviation above the mean.