The Interaction of Social Skill and Organizational Support on Job Performance

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The present study examined the moderating effect of perceived organizational support (POS) on the relationship between social skill and supervisor-rated job performance. On the basis of regulatory and activation models of behavior, the authors argue that low-POS environments activate social skill because they reflect situations in which interpersonal acuity is required to demonstrate effective job performance. Accordingly, the authors hypothesize that social skill is more strongly related to performance among workers reporting low rather than high levels of organizational support. Results of hierarchical moderated multiple regression analyses on data gathered from 2 samples support the hypothesis. These results suggest that the relevance of social skill to job performance may be dependent on contextual cues. Implications for substantive research, strengths and limitations, and directions for future research are offered.

Keywords: social skill, perceived support, job performance

Researchers have observed that validity coefficients improve when researchers apply their understanding of the situation to develop hypotheses related to personality–performance linkages (Barrick, Mitchell, & Stewart, 2003). It has also been noted that researchers have focused primarily on when rather than how situations influence relationships between personality and performance. Consequently, understanding the influence of situations within which individual differences can be examined is necessary for gaining additional insight into the complexities of work behavior, including the prediction of job performance (Hattrup & Jackson, 1996).

Recent work on trait activation theory has provided a basis for understanding how situations affect the influence of personality traits on behavior (Haaland & Christiansen, 2002; Stemmler, 1997; Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000). Advocates of this approach proposed that situations prompt or leave dormant the influence of traits on performance. Further, they argued that traits drive performance in situations that offer relevant cues requiring competence for effective performance. Conversely, traits have a limited impact when situational constraints offer few relevant cues and/or restrict their expression.

We suggest that situational influences activate individual differences not only in personality but also in ability constructs, such as social skill (Burgoon, Stern, & Dillman, 1995; Spitzberg, 2003). We adopt a characterization of social skill that positions it as a construct that is partially dispositional and partially learned (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2000; Ferris, Witt, & Hochwarter, 2001). This integrative dispositional–situational perspective is consistent with previous personality (Murtha, Kanfer, & Ackerman, 1996) and social skill (Buck, 1991; Spitzberg, 1990) research.

Social skill reflects the "ability to perceive interpersonal or social cues, integrate these cues with current motivations, generate responses, and enact responses that will satisfy motives and goals" (Norton & Hope, 2001, p. 60). Moreover, perceived organizational support (POS) reflects the perception of the employer's concern for and support of the employee (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Both social skill (Ferris et al., 2001) and POS (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002) are related to job performance. However, research to date has failed to examine the multiplicative effects of these constructs to investigate the extent to which POS, as a situational factor, activates or inhibits the demonstration of social skill on job performance. The purpose of the present study is to address this gap in the literature.

Social Skill

Historically, social skill has been evaluated from two perspectives (McCall, 1982). First, the trait approach views social skill as an enduring personality characteristic (Friedman & Miller-Herringer, 1991; Segrin, 1998). This perspective is supported by empirical and conceptual associations between social skill and individual difference variables, such as empathy (Nezlek, Feist, Wilson, & Plesko, 2001) and extraversion (Lieberman & Rosenthal, 2001).

Conversely, the molecular model (Bellack, 1983) maintains that social skill promotes situation-specific behaviors that can be enhanced through vicarious observation (Bandura, 1999; Topping, Bremer, & Holmes, 2000). Because social skill is partially learned (Cherniss, 2000; Segrin & Givertz, 2003), environmental factors play an important role in its use (Spitzberg, 2003). With practice and effort, individuals develop a sense of when it is necessary to use social skill and when it is best to leave these skills inactive (i.e., selective trait activation and utilization; Stemmler, 1997).

Research suggests that viewing social skill as either trait based or learned fails to accurately represent the construct in its entirety (Wilson & Sabee, 2003; Witt & Ferris, 2003). Eighty years ago, F. H. Allport (1924) reported that extraversion serves as a salient proxy for social skill only when coupled with extensive experience, learning, and interaction with evaluative cues. More recently, Haaland and Christiansen (2002) noted that it is unlikely that traits, such as friendliness or sociability, will be detected while the employee is unaccompanied in a room entering data. Following Burgoon and Dunbar (2000), we contend that social skill is best understood when both person and environmental determinants are simultaneously considered.

Thorndike's (1920) discussion of social intelligence has served as the foundation for much of the research examining social skill. Building on this work, Meichenbaum, Butler, and Gruson (1981) noted that social skill reflects the knowledge of both what to do and when to display certain behaviors. Research has shown social skill to demonstrate main effect associations on training efficacy (Ferris, Bergin, & Gilmore, 1986) and main and interactive effect relationships on job performance (Ferris et al., 2001; Witt & Ferris, 2003). Further, researchers have identified social skill as one of the most important personal qualities needed for success on the job (Ferris, Perrewé, & Douglas, 2002; Riggio, 1986; Riggio, Riggio, Salinas, & Cole, 2003; Witt & Ferris, 2003).

As general mental ability yields effective job performance through greater job knowledge (Hunter, 1983; Schmidt, Hunter, & Outerbridge, 1986), social skill leads to increased contribution through alliance cooperation that enables the acquisition of resources. Moreover, socially skilled individuals are more apt to demonstrate patience with difficult customers and coworkers and engender positive feelings than are workers low in social skill. As a result, individuals are able to gather information and other resources because of the development of substantial social networks. This notion is consistent with recent sociological perspectives that define social skill as "the ability to induce cooperation among others" (Fligstein, 2001, p. 112).

Previous work has revealed that other personal characteristics such as general mental ability (Ferris et al., 2001) and conscientiousness (Witt & Ferris, 2003) moderate the relationship between social skill and job performance. To date, researchers have not yet examined the extent to which aspects of the environment affect the social skill–performance relationship. One such aspect of the contextual environment posited to influence this relationship is POS.

POS

Defined as the "general belief that their work organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being" (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p. 698), POS reflects an employee's global assessment of all organization members who control resources and rewards (Eisenberger et al., 1986). POS "may be used by employees as an indicator of the organization's benevolent or malevolent intent in the expression of exchange of employee effort for reward and recognition" (Lynch, Eisenberger, & Armeli, 1999, pp. 469–470). Rhoades and Eisenberger's (2002) meta-analysis indicated that POS is modestly related to job performance.

Much of the work examining the link between POS and performance has been based on exchange theory. Gouldner (1960) suggested that employees have the responsibility to react positively to favorable treatment from their employer. Eisenberger and his colleagues (e.g., Armeli, Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Lynch, 1998; Eisenberger et al., 1986) argued that high POS leads to an obligation to repay the organization for its attention to socioemotional needs. This motivating responsibility to reciprocate yields increased effort and greater performance (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990).

High levels of organizational support provide aid to workers (Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001), not only in terms of socioemotional needs but also in terms of equipment, funding, technology, ideas, and physical assistance (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Without such resources, achieving quality and quantity performance expectations is difficult. Accordingly, we offer an explanation of the relationship between POS and job performance to augment that based on social exchange theory. POS provides resources that enable workers to accomplish work objectives. Considering POS in terms of resource allocation, we apply trait activation theory to explain the joint relationship between social skill and POS on job performance.

Trait Activation Theory

Trait activation theory (e.g., Haaland & Christiansen, 2002) and research assessing situation strength (e.g., Weiss & Adler, 1984) are perspectives that attempt to identify aspects of environments that influence the impact of individual differences on behavior. Trait activation is "the process by which individuals *express* [italics added] their traits when presented with trait-*relevant* [italics added] situational cues" (Tett & Burnett, 2003, p. 502). The activation of ability and skill traits is likely to occur in situations that require competencies related to the trait for effective performance.

We offer as an example a scenario in which POS may activate traits needed to acquire organizational resources. An employee reporting high levels of organizational support may perceive that managers are positioning workers to be successful by providing sufficient resources and facilitating cooperation through recognition and rewards. In such environments, there is little need to activate social skills to maximize task effectiveness. In contrast, low POS, by definition, implies that managers are neither providing sufficient resources nor promoting a climate of cooperation to meet organizational objectives. In such situations, workers may recognize that they must apply traits required to acquire the necessary resources to accomplish work objectives.

Trait activation theory is an improvement over the situation-strength approach because it articulates not only when but also how situations influence the relationship between individual differences and performance. A situation can be weak and also possess low levels of trait and/or skill relevance (Tett & Burnett, 2003). For example, management may offer few prescriptions for

promotion to sales manager (i.e., a weak situation). However, if the individual is uninterested in becoming the sales manager, the situation is irrelevant, and the likelihood of trait and/or skill expression is low. In such cases, traits and/or skills have a minimal influence on behavior.

The Present Study

The idea that situations affect the activation of individual differences is not new. Theorists have long acknowledged the importance of situational characteristics as predictors of trait-based responses (G. W. Allport, 1937; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953; Woodworth, 1937). The central question underlying the present study is, "What role do differences in POS have in activating individual differences in social skill?" On the basis of elements of two theoretical approaches—conservation of resources (COR) theory and discrepancy-arousal theory—and theoretical work outlining the constructs of discriminative facility and self-regulation, we propose that low levels of POS are likely to activate social skill, whereas high levels are not.

In developing COR theory, Hobfoll and his colleague (e.g., Hobfoll, 1989, 2001; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001) argued that workers strive to obtain and maintain resources that serve as means to attain goals. On the basis of this premise, we suggest that workers are likely to conserve the resources—time and energy—needed to deploy social skill at a high level only when necessary. Further, advocates of discrepancy-arousal theory suggest that an incongruity between what is needed from and provided by the environment stimulates individuals to initiate tactics to ensure that salient outcomes are achieved (Capella & Greene, 1982, 1984; Kluger & DeNisi, 1998). The lack of sufficient resources to accomplish work objectives, a characteristic of a low-POS environment, likely stimulates workers to expend social skill for the purpose of demonstrating work contribution and attaining important outcomes. In other words, low POS reflects a situation in which there is a discrepancy between the level of resources needed to meet objectives and the level of resources provided externally. In situations of low POS, high levels of social skill are needed to meet the socioemotional needs of coworkers and obtain cooperation, information, and other tangible materials required for task success. In contrast, high-POS environments provide resources needed for workers to successfully complete tasks, including those typically provided by the use of social skill. For example, POS cultivates communication and cooperation (i.e., helping) between coworkers that often take the form of helping behaviors (Erdogan, Kraimer, & Liden, 2004; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). As such, when the needed resources are provided by the organization, workers are unlikely to activate social skill because (a) the competency is largely not required and (b) workers want to conserve their reservoir of personal resources.

Our application of COR and discrepancy-arousal theories provides an explanation as to why low-POS situations are likely to activate social skill and high-POS situations are not. The processes of discriminative facility and self-regulation describe how such decisions are made. Discriminative facility describes individuals as encoding situations in psychologically contextualized and conditional terms (Chiu, Hong, Mischel, & Shoda, 1995). Wright and Mischel (1987) noted that conditional encoding involves the development of a contingency relation between the situational cue,

the response, and the outcome. Often expressed in *if–then* terms (Mischel, Shoda, & Mendoza-Denton, 2003), if individuals possess appropriately high levels of discriminative facility (e.g., social skill), then they are better able to determine whether resources provided by the external environment are sufficient to ensure that salient goals are obtainable (Cheng, 2003). Once this level is achieved, behaviors are calibrated (Mendoza-Denton, Ayduk, Mischel, Shoda, & Testa, 2001) to ensure that they do not cause resources to become distracted or jeopardized. Applying Mischel and colleagues' (Mischel et al., 2003; Wright & Mischel, 1987) terminology, we suggest that workers may think, "If I am receiving adequate support from the organization to be successful, then I need not spend resources to deploy high levels of social skill."

Self-regulation is a term often used synonymously with social competence (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Wood, Saltzberg, & Goldsamt, 1990). It represents the conceptual bridge that connects activation theory, discrepancy-arousal theory, COR theory, and discriminative facility. Regulation involves "comparing one's current state with a goal or standard. If there is a discrepancy, one may adjust one's behavior to meet the standard" (Wood et al., 1990, p. 900). This definition incorporates "individuals' active appraisals of situational characteristics, the choice among alternative behaviors in response to changing contingencies" (i.e., high levels of discriminative facility; Cheng, 2003, p. 426) and the ability to adjust behavior in the presence or absence of a discrepancy in self-regulation's theoretical underpinnings.

In support of COR's influence on activation, Baumeister and colleagues (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998; Baumeister & Vohs, 2004; Muraven, Baumeister, & Tice, 1999) argued that self-regulation is an effortful activity that taps finite resources, such that evaluating and modifying thoughts, behaviors, and communication patterns inherently decreases the attentional focus that can be dedicated to other activities (Ellis & Ashbrook, 1988). Hence, when individuals are receiving the resources needed to meet their work objectives, they are likely to conserve their socioemotional resources instead of unnecessarily expending them.

The foregoing discussion points to interactive joint effects of social skill and POS on job performance. Individuals exert effort to acquire resources needed to meet performance objectives when others fail to offer support. In contrast, when such resources are provided, workers are likely to conserve their own resources and refrain from deploying high levels of social skill. Thus, social skill is likely to account for greater amounts of variance in job performance in situations characterized by low POS.

> *Hypothesis:* POS moderates the relationship between social skill and job performance. The positive relationship between social skill and job performance is stronger among workers reporting low rather than high levels of POS.

Method

Samples and Procedure

We collected data from two samples. Sample 1 consisted of 64 male (47%) and 72 female (53%) retail sales representatives in the Southern United States. Respondents in Sample 2 were 80 male (69%) and 35 female (31%) customer service employees of a telecommunications firm located in the Southeastern United States. To our knowledge, neither organization was experiencing significant turbulence at the times data were collected.

On our behalf, human resources officials in both organizations sent memoranda to managers requesting that they ask their subordinates to participate in our study. With a few exceptions in which we spoke directly with participants, employees were divided into small groups and asked to report to a training room at their respective sites. On arrival, they were informed of the study, provided a chance to ask questions, and given an opportunity to discontinue their involvement in the project. Job performance ratings were collected from the workers' immediate supervisors. Supervisory span of control ranged from 1 to 10 workers. We trained supervisors to complete the performance evaluation rating form and explained that their responses would be used for research purposes only. We matched the supervisor and employee data forms using identity numbers derived for the study. Supervisor and employee forms and results were not made available to others in the organizations.

We were unable to ascertain how many employees actually received notification of the opportunity to participate, and we were not given access to demographic data from the organizations' human resources information system. As a check for possible response bias, we inquired about the representativeness of our samples. Human resources representatives in both organizations indicated that the demographic characteristics of the respective sample were consistent with those of their respective organizations' business line populations at the time of data collection.

Measures

Social skill. We assessed social skill using the seven-item (Sample 1: $\alpha = .89$; Sample 2: $\alpha = .90$) Ferris et al. (2001) measure. Items (e.g., "In social situations, it is always clear to me exactly what to say and do") were presented on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores reflect higher levels of social skill.

POS. We measured perceptions of organizational support with the nine-item short form version (Sample 1: $\alpha = .93$; Sample 2: $\alpha = .94$) of the Survey of Perceptions of Organizational Support (Eisenberger et al., 1990). Items (e.g., "Even if I did the best job possible, the organization would fail to notice"; reverse coded) were presented on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores reflect more favorable perceptions of support.

Job performance. We assessed job performance with six items (Sample 1: $\alpha = .88$; Sample 2: $\alpha = .85$): (a) "[employee name] finds creative and effective solutions to problems"; (b) "[employee name] adapts readily to changing rules or requirements"; (c) "[employee name] assumes a sense of ownership in the quality of personal performance"; (d) "[employee name] strives to meet deadlines"; (e) "[employee name] encourages coworkers to do more than what is expected"; and (f) "[employee name] creates effective working relationships with others." Supervisors rated their employees on each item using the following scale: 1 (*weak or bottom 10%*), 2 (*fair or next 20%*), 3 (*good or next 40%*), 4 (*very good or next 20%*), or 5 (*best or top 10%*). Items were summed to yield a total performance score for each worker.

Data Analyses

We used moderated multiple regression analysis (Cohen & Cohen, 1983) to test the effects of POS on the social skill–job performance relationship. In the first step, we entered age and gender to minimize the spurious effects of these demographic variables. In the second step, we entered the main effects of social skill and POS. In the third step, we entered the Social Skill × POS interaction term.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

We present the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of all variables in Table 1. As shown, both POS (Sample 1: $r = .21$, $p < .01$; Sample 2: $r = .24$, $p < .01$) and social skill (Sample 1: $r = .24$, $p < .01$; Sample 2: $r = .25$, $p < .01$) were related to job performance ratings. Also, POS and social skill (Sample 1: $r = .34$, $p < .01$; Sample 2: $r = .24$, $p < .01$) were correlated, albeit modestly.

Moderated Regression Results

Table 2 reports the standardized regression results. The addition of the main effects of social skill and POS at Step 2 added significant incremental variance (Sample 1: $\Delta R^2 = .08$, $p < .01$; Sample 2: $\Delta R^2 = .08$, $p < .01$). Although not shown in Table 2, the standardized regression coefficients were significant for social skill in both samples (Sample 1: $\beta = .21$, $p < .01$; Sample 2: $\beta = .20$, $p < .05$), but for POS, the coefficient was significant only in Sample 2 ($\beta = .20$, $p < .05$) and approached significance in Sample 1 ($\beta = .14$, $p < .10$). As hypothesized, the Social Skill × POS interaction terms added significant incremental variance at Step 3 in both samples (Sample 1: $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $p < .05$; Sample 2: $\Delta R^2 = .03$, $p < .05$). These effect sizes (ΔR^2) are at the high end of those typically found for interactions in nonexperimental studies (Champoux & Peters, 1987; Chaplin, 1991; Evans, 1985).

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the interactions of Samples 1 and 2, respectively. We plotted three levels of POS: at 1 *SD* below the mean, at the mean, and at 1 *SD* above the mean (Aiken & West, 1991). Both figures indicate that social skill was positively related to job performance among workers reporting low POS; the simple slopes were significantly different from zero: Figure 1, $t(5, 124) = 3.33$, $p < .01$; Figure 2, $t(5, 124) = 2.16$, $p < .05$ (Aiken & West, 1991). However, the slopes of the regression lines of the workers

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations

	Sample 1		Sample 2						
Variable	M	SD	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	29.62	10.82	37.25	17.06	—	.20*	−.13	.08	−.09
2. Gender	1.52	0.50	0.74	0.43	.02	—	−.12	.06	.19*
3. Organizational support	3.16	0.90	3.31	1.01	.04	−.03	—	.24**	.24**
4. Social skill	3.39	0.63	3.75	0.71	−.12	−.02	.34**	—	.25**
5. Performance	3.36	0.95	3.55	0.80	.16	.31**	.21*	.24**	—

Note. Sample 1 ($N = 136$) correlations are shown below the diagonal; Sample 2 ($N = 115$) correlations are shown above the diagonal. For Sample 1, gender was coded 1 for men and 2 for women; for Sample 2, gender was coded 0 for men and 1 for women.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Moderated Multiple Regression Results

Predictor	Sample 1	Sample 2
Step 1		
Gender	.33**	.21*
Age	.15†	−.11
Adjusted total R^2	.09**	.03†
Step 2		
Perceived organizational support	.98*	1.11*
Social skill	.79**	.69**
Adjusted total R^2	.17**	.11**
ΔR^2	.08**	.08**
Step 3 Support × Social Skill	−1.17*	−1.15*
Adjusted total R^2	.20**	.14*
ΔR^2	.03*	.03*

Note. The standardized regression coefficients presented are those derived at the third step.
† $p < .10$.   * $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.

reporting high POS were not significantly different from zero: Figure 1, $t(5, 105) = .85$, *ns*; Figure 2, $t(5, 105) = −.23$, *ns*.

Discussion

Social skill was positively related to job performance among workers reporting low levels of POS. Conversely, the relationship was nonexistent among workers reporting high levels of POS. It is likely that low POS reflects characteristics of situations described by advocates of trait activation theory as promoting the influence of ability and skill traits on performance. Unlike high-POS environments, low-POS settings likely compel individuals to use social skill to enlist cooperation and acquire the resources needed to meet performance expectations. In other words, because low-POS environments offer an insufficiency of resources, high levels of social skill are needed to meet the socioemotional needs of coworkers and obtain cooperation, information, and other resources from the organization to ensure that rewards deemed desirable are obtained.

We have contributed to the social skill literature by examining situational influences on the social skill–job performance relationship. Dulewicz and Higgs (2000) observed that the examination of organizational contexts is "severely underrepresented" (p. 349) in terms of explaining relationships between interpersonal effectiveness and benefits to the organization. Systematic consideration of the work context may be critical for understanding the role that social skill plays in determining job performance and perhaps other work outcomes as well.

The results presented here also contribute to the POS literature. Previous studies have shown that individual differences and POS yield interactive effects on job performance (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 1986). We have extended the POS literature not only by adding individual differences in social skill to that list but also by augmenting previous exchange theory-based explanations of relations between POS and performance with a focus on POS as providing resources that enable performance.

This study contributes to the trait activation theory literature in three ways. First, by extending its conceptualization to include an ability factor, we found support for Tett and Burnett's (2003) vision of "an ability-activation process essentially parallel" (p. 512) to what they had proposed for personality traits. Second,
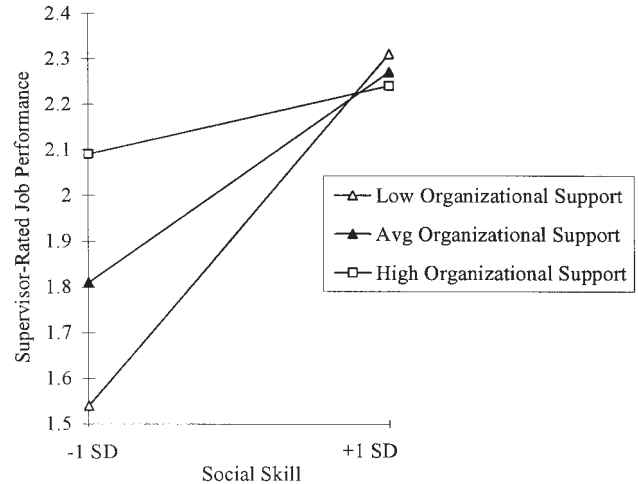

Figure 1. Performance regressed on social skill scores for low, average, and high organizational support groups in Sample 1. $Y = (1.2 − 0.26)X + (1.03 − 2.43)$. Low score = 1 *SD* below the mean; high score = 1 *SD* above the mean. Only scores ± 1 *SD* from the mean of social skill scores are plotted.

initial work in this area has been conducted largely in contrived laboratory settings with student participants (Tett & Guterman, 2000; Tett & Murphy, 2002). Results reported in this study provide support for activation theory by confirming its basic tenets in two distinct organizational environments. Third, our inclusion of such sociocognitive conceptualizations as discrepancy-arousal, COR, and discriminative facility theories may expand the foundation on which future research in this area can be built.

Strengths and Limitations

Strengths. The present study has at least four strengths. One is the use of second-source performance data. Although not objective
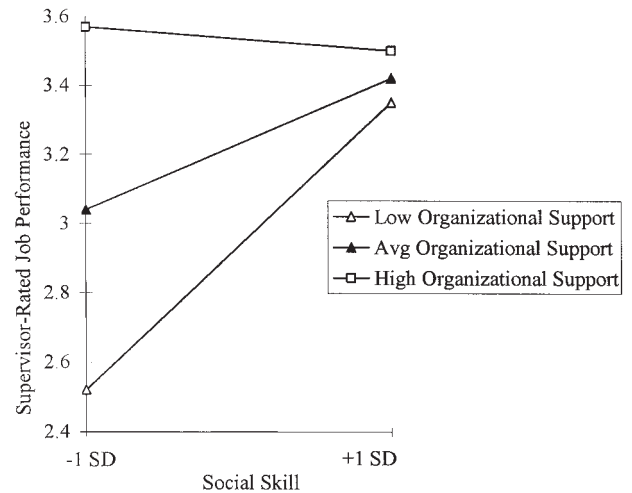

Figure 2. Performance regressed on social skill scores for low, average, and high organizational support groups in Sample 2. $Y = (0.78 − 0.18)X + (0.88 − 0.25)$. Low score = 1 *SD* below the mean; high score = 1 *SD* above the mean. Only scores ± 1 *SD* from the mean of social skill scores are plotted.

measures, the performance indices approximated the issues captured in performance management systems used in work organizations. A second strength is the use of samples from the sales and service sectors, which are of particular relevance to organizational scientists and human resources practitioners. Jobs are becoming increasingly service oriented, and these occupations are highly dependent on employee social skill for meeting customer demands.

Third, because we found relationships of social skill with job performance and POS with job performance that are consistent with recent reports (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Witt & Ferris, 2003), it is likely that our data are representative of, and generalize to, other samples. Fourth, the consistency of the form and magnitude of the interactions found in the two samples provide evidence of replication, as advocated by Golding (1975). This "constructive replication" (Lykken, 1968) provides some confidence that we detected true effects rather than artifactual effects reflecting a particular work context and/or individuals.

An interesting and important strength of this study was our finding that social skill and POS predicted a measure of job performance that included both task and contextual components. Prior work suggested that task performance is best predicted by cognitive ability, whereas contextual performance is best predicted by interpersonally oriented measures, such as personality and social acuity (e.g., Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Likewise, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) detected a stronger relationship of POS with extra-role performance than with in-role performance. In light of changes in the workplace (e.g., rise of service-oriented jobs, organizational redesign, and the changing definitions of jobs), which have resulted in task and contextual activities being conceptualized as equally important dimensions of contribution, corroborating POS–social skill direct and interactive effects on a measure that accurately reflects performance in contemporary environments is a strength.

Limitations. As is the case in most studies, there are limitations that warrant mention. First, we assessed both social skill and POS by self-report. Some previous work provided support for us doing so. Riggio and Riggio (2001) noted that self-report of interpersonal skill has an advantage over behavioral and observer measures in that respondents may provide information about processes made available through feedback, which are unobservable by others. They also maintained that self-report measures of related constructs (e.g., emotional states and personality traits) have been well accepted in the literature and are, thus, appropriate for examining both behavior and psychological judgments. In addition, Ferris et al. (2001) found that self-reports of social skill were unrelated to self-reports of social desirability, and Witt and Ferris (2003) found that self-reports of social skill were significantly associated with observer reports of social skill. However, we emphasize three potential problems with this approach. First, self-report of skill may be potentially affected by response biases (Cronbach, 1990). Second, self-report of skill may be less valid than assessments made by others. For example, low self-monitors potentially lack self-insight into their own social skill. Third, report of both social skill and POS may reflect affect. Without external assessment to validate the self-report assessments of social skill and POS, we could not rule out an alternate explanation— that is, that the activation of social skill may be a function of affect rather than contextual cues. Multisource social skill and POS data would have strengthened confidence in our findings, and we en-

courage researchers to gather multisource data regarding social skill as well as POS, which would provide some validation of environmental perceptions.

A second limitation is that we were able to gather data at only one point in time, which did not allow us to assess the strength and direction of POS–social skill relationships longitudinally. Third, we were unable to assess the actual demographic representativeness of the samples and therefore could not rule out response bias.

Directions for Future Research

We propose four directions toward which future research should proceed. First, replication using other measures is needed. Many social effectiveness constructs are related, yet distinct (Ferris et al., 2002). Further, POS and supervisor trust possess unique performance predictors (Ambrose & Schminke, 2003). The literature would benefit from examining the relationships assessed in the present study using measures of other constructs of social acuity (e.g., political skill) and perceptions of support (e.g., leader–member exchange). It would be premature to conclude that the interaction between social acuity and environmentally provided support relates to performance in a manner similar to that found in the present investigation across the range of related constructs.

Second, efforts to understand the nature of the relationship between social skill and POS may have utility. Because these constructs were at least moderately correlated in the present research (i.e., rs of .24 to .34), it is apparent that some association exists. Although it is inappropriate to claim causality, we suggest that social skill may lead to support, and vice versa. The only apparent way to identify the nature of this relationship is to assess how it evolves over time, as it is unlikely to be static. Longitudinal research is needed to gauge the magnitude, direction, and most importantly the evolution of this relationship over time.

Third, research building on Tett and Burnett's (2003) trait activation theory model may help differentiate between organizational, social, and task sources of ability-relevant cues. Social psychologists have initiated efforts aimed at developing taxonomies of situations (e.g., Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Ten Berge & De Raad, 2002). In the organizational sciences, this would be a daunting task for researchers because it is often difficult to determine where one contextual source ends and the other begins. For example, consider the situation in which an employee learns that a new computer is the reward for exemplary effort. It would be important to identify whether the employee considers this to be a social cue (i.e., "I need to show the boss I'm worthy of praise") or a task cue (i.e., "With the new computer, I'd better be good or I'm not likely to get another"). Using measures and methods that allow for the investigation of information gathered from multiple levels would be useful in this regard.

Fourth, we encourage researchers pursuing work in this area to examine the Social Skill × POS interaction on different aspects of performance across several professions. The form of the interaction that we found may be more likely to hold on contextual performance than on core task or overall performance in jobs for which high levels of social skill are required for core task performance (e.g., hospice or social worker). Research is needed to identify the types of jobs and dimensions of performance on which social skill and POS have interactive effects.

Conclusion

The present study contributes to an emerging literature linking social skill with job performance. Recent research has demonstrated that social skill has both main and interactive effects on job performance, indicating that the effect of social skill on performance is dependent on other personal characteristics (Ferris et al., 2001; Witt & Ferris, 2003). The present study indicates that the effect of social skill on performance is perhaps also dependent on situational characteristics; that is, the activation of social skill may be a function of the level of perceived organizational support.

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