

Employees' perceptions of their manager's authentic leadership

Considering managers' political skill and gender

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to test whether managers' political skill is relevant for employees' authentic leadership perceptions. Political influence theory assumes that political tactics seek to affect others' interpretations of a person or situation. Thus, what matters for employees' perceptions of their manager's authentic leadership may be whether the manager actively seeks to show behavior that can be interpreted as authentic leadership. Combining political influence theory and gender stereotypes research, it is further suggested that manager gender moderates the employees' interpretation of political influence attempts that are ambiguous.

Design/methodology/approach – Managers ($n=156$; 49.5 percent female) completed measures of their political skill. Employees ($n=427$; 39.1 percent female) completed measures of the manager's authentic leadership.

Findings – Managers' apparent sincerity was positively related to employees' perceptions of managers' authentic leadership; managers' networking ability was negatively related to employees' perceptions of female managers' authentic leadership, but not of male managers.

Research limitations/implications – The methodology does not allow claims about causality.

Originality/value – Findings add knowledge of authentic leadership, such as difficulties that female managers face, and show the value of a fine-grained approach to political skill. Female managers should be aware that networking might have disadvantageous side effects. Conversely, sincere behavior attempts seem favorable for authentic leadership perceptions.

Keywords Gender, Quantitative, Organizational politics, Leadership style

Paper type Research paper

The dynamism of modern business is often stated to have necessitated a shift in what is required for managers to be effective (Luthans and Slocum, 2004). In contrast to top-down leadership, what is considered indispensable for today's manager is to be regarded as genuine so that in a dynamic world, employees know where they stand with their boss. Thus, it is not surprising to see an increasing interest in the concept of authentic leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Ilies *et al.*, 2005). Authentic leadership is often described as a pattern of behavior that includes showing an understanding of one's impact, strengths and weaknesses (self-awareness), showing one's true self to others (relational transparency), analyzing relevant information to support making decisions in non-biased ways (balanced processing) and behaving in a way that accords with one's values (internalized moral perspective).

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Although favorable consequences of authentic leadership have been well established (Banks *et al.*, 2016), there is still a need to identify manager-level characteristics that predict employees' authentic leadership perceptions. For example, considering the impact of employees' perception of their manager's authentic leadership, it is significant to understand whether managers can be trained to show behaviors that yield perceptions of authentic leadership (e.g. Goffee and Jones, 2005) and whether certain characteristics such as gender make it more difficult for managers to craft impressions of their authentic leadership (Eagly, 2005). These insights could aid recruitment, selection and training activities of organizations that seek to reap the benefits of authentic leadership.

Building on political influence theory (Ferris and Judge, 1991), this research tests relationships between dimensions of managers' political skill and employees' perceptions of managers' authentic leadership. According to this theoretical perspective, political behaviors seek to influence others' interpretation of a person or situation, rather than to create an accurate representation of reality. Thus, managers may be able to carefully craft their employees' perceptions of their authentic leadership. Conversely, if managers do not carefully craft their image, for example, by showing behaviors that are open to the opposite interpretation, they may harm their employees' positive perceptions of authentic leadership. This is partly because employees cannot easily recognize whether managers are or are not actually authentic leaders (Douglas *et al.*, 2005). Accordingly, there may be other ways in which managers – to a greater or lesser degree – skillfully engage in crafting perceptions of their authentic leadership. This research examines managers' political skill.

Ferris *et al.*'s (2005) conceptualization of political skill consists of four dimensions. Some of these behavioral skills are likely to help a manager in being perceived as authentic; others may hinder a manager in being seen as authentic. Moreover, considering that behaviors are open to interpretation when they do not carefully craft others' interpretation, this research further draws upon gender stereotypes research (e.g. Rudman and Glick, 2008), which suggests that manager political tactics are differentially interpreted by employees depending on whether the manager is a man or a woman. Political skill has been proposed to be a factor in women not advancing in organizations as much as men (Perrewé and Nelson, 2004). Women may find politics distasteful or may feel that it does not fit gender prescriptions (Doldor *et al.*, 2013). Others have suggested that women's disadvantaged position may lead them not to be taught political effectiveness (Ferris *et al.*, 1996). Given that political behavior is ubiquitous in organizations and that political behavior is essential to manager effectiveness, examining subordinates' interpretations could prove useful in aiding (female) managerial success. That is, instead of women potentially differing in their political behaviors and skills, we are suggesting that, compared with men's, women's political behavior could also be interpreted differently by their subordinates.

Authentic leadership – a brief review

Several conceptualizations of authentic leadership have arisen (e.g. Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Ilies *et al.*, 2005) and were developed into a four-component framework by Walumbwa *et al.* (2008). First, self-awareness reflects the notion that authentic leaders know who they are and how others see them. Second, balanced processing refers to authentic leaders' tendency to seek out and to review relevant information in their attempts to make decisions in less biased ways. Third, internalized moral perspective means that authentic leaders act in accordance with their core values and demonstrate consistency between their actions and their purported values. Fourth, relational transparency implies being genuine in their interactions with others. The theory holds that these four components are to some extent distinct, but that there is also a higher order authentic leadership concept, which has been supported by Avolio *et al.*'s (2018) recent re-analysis on the original validation data of the questionnaire and is further echoed by recent research from others (e.g. Liang, 2017).

Studies have related authentic leadership to various beneficial employee-level psychological processes (e.g. Mehmood, Hamstra, Nawab and Vriend, 2016; Wong and Cummings, 2009) and behavioral outcomes such as in-role job performance and organizational citizenship behavior (e.g. Mehmood, Nawab and Hamstra, 2016; Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008). In contrast to the consequences, the leader-level predictors of employees' perceptions of authentic leadership have received less attention. Variables, such as psychological capital, leaders' self-knowledge and self-consistency, and their self-monitoring have been related to self-perceptions of authentic leadership (Jensen and Luthans, 2006; Peus *et al.*, 2012; Sendjaya *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, leaders' authentic personality has been found to predict their team's perceptions of authentic leadership (Liang, 2017). These findings align with the theoretical perspective that authentic leadership draws upon positive capacities (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008), that such leaders hold a strong awareness of their beliefs and values, and that they behave in a way that is consistent with their feelings or values (Ilies *et al.*, 2005).

Building on political influence theory (Ferris and Judge, 1991), the current research takes a different approach by asking what factors may help or hinder a manager in being perceived as showing authentic leadership. Specifically, this research tests the relevance of managers' political skill and their gender in relation to employee perceptions of manager authentic leadership.

Political skill and authentic leadership perceptions

Ferris and Judge (1991) political influence theory views political influence behavior as an attempt to manage the meaning that others attach to a particular situation or person, that is, their interpretations of what they see and hear. The implication of this theoretical perspective is that realities about persons or situations are not objective, but, rather, that skillful political behavior can be used to carefully craft the interpretations that others make. In accordance with this theory, political skill can be defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ahearn *et al.*, 2004, p. 311; Ferris *et al.*, 2005). Thus, political skill involves both ability and active attempts at using these abilities.

Political skill (Ferris *et al.*, 2005) consists of four dimensions and recent research shows that it is important to examine the components separately (Shi *et al.*, 2011; Brouer *et al.*, 2015). First, social astuteness refers to being able to sense others' intentions and understand how to present oneself to others in order to influence them. Second, interpersonal influence refers to the notion that people may be good at making others feel comfortable and getting others to like them by calibrating their behavior to the influence target. Third, networking ability refers to spending time and effort in getting to know important people, being well connected, and being good at building relationships. Although anyone in the organization could be the target of such networking, the fact that it targets influential others who can be useful to the manager suggests that this behavior is less likely to target a focal manager's subordinates. Fourth, apparent sincerity refers to the intention to show a genuine interest in other people and to attempt to come across to others as being sincere in words and actions.

Much research on political skill accords with Ferris and Judge's (1991) theory in the sense that such research uses self-reports of political skills, which capture the attempts at influencing others' interpretations of a situation. They assess what the individual influencer seeks and actively attempts to attain (e.g. to appear sincere) and, thus, capture the political nature of the attempts, the motivation to affect others' interpretations for one's own benefit. Another element inherent in this approach is that, aligning with political influence theory, behavior that does not actively direct others to a certain interpretation is open to interpretation. In turn, this implies that interpretations may be affected by other factors such as the appropriateness of a particular behavior for a particular actor, in a particular situation, or the extent to which the behavior violates the expectations of perceivers.

When it comes to managers crafting interpretations of their authentic leadership, it is further important to acknowledge that people cannot easily recognize whether someone is true to his/her inner values, and what matters to others' perceptions of a person's authenticity is whether the person shows behavior that can be interpreted as authentic (Douglas *et al.*, 2005). In other words, employees are only able to draw conclusions about a manager's authentic leadership based on observable manager behavior. Such behavior may have clear implications for employees' interpretation that the manager is an authentic leader, or such behavior may be irrelevant to interpretations of authentic leadership, but such behaviors may also leave room for employees to make their own interpretations. This is precisely why it is interesting to apply the political influence perspective (Ferris and Judge, 1991) to authentic leadership.

Of the political skill dimensions, the most clearly positively associated with authentic leadership should be apparent sincerity. As employees cannot easily draw valid conclusions about whether authenticity is real or fake, what matters for their conclusions concerning their manager's authentic leadership is how the manager behaves. When managers rate themselves high in apparent sincerity, it implies that they try actively to appear to others as being genuine. This indicates that managers scoring high on this dimension, more often than those scoring low on this dimension, will show behaviors that seem genuine. In other words, managers scoring high on this dimension actively craft employees' interpretation of them as managers, with an emphasis on trying to create the interpretation that the manager is genuine:

H1. Managers' apparent sincerity is positively related to their employees' authentic leadership perceptions.

In contrast, managers' networking does not necessarily seek to construct their direct reports' interpretations. Instead, to gain access to information, exert influence and effect change within organizations, networking targets others who are able to help the manager to get things done or to get ahead (potentially for his/her work unit; yet it is not likely that employees are aware of whether the manager's intentions are self-serving or for the good of the work unit). In terms of political influence theory, therefore, rather than actively crafting the interpretation that employees have of them, instead, it may be that networking is more ambiguous and open to employees' interpretation than is apparent sincerity. This interpretation could be especially detrimental for female managers.

Gender and networking behavior

Political behavior is ubiquitous in organizations but this neutral observation does not take into account that politics often mainly serves high-status groups and individuals. Traditionally underrepresented groups may particularly suffer from the influence of politics in organizations. As such, it has been suggested that the difficulties women face in getting ahead and rising in the hierarchy could have something to do with their engaging less in political behaviors (e.g. Ferris *et al.*, 1996; Perrewé and Nelson, 2004). Women may be less motivated to engage in political behaviors for a variety of reasons: they may not see political behavior as relevant, they may find politics distasteful and they may feel that political behavior violates the prescriptive stereotypes of their gender (e.g. Doldor *et al.*, 2013; Perrewé and Nelson, 2004). Others further suggest that women may have had less opportunity to hone their political skills because their disadvantaged position within mainly masculine organizations and cultures has given them few opportunities to learn how to play the political game (Ferris *et al.*, 1996).

Among the four skill dimensions, networking behavior may be a particularly interesting one to consider in the context of gender because networking is vital in getting ahead. Although we do not dismiss the possibility that women in organizations have fewer chances to practice their political skills, our focus was on individuals who have already attained a

managerial position and, of those individuals, we suggest that subordinates may interpret networking behavior differently depending on whether the manager is a man or a woman. While not being the target of networking attempts, employees nonetheless may observe the manager's networking behavior. They may see the manager engaging in networking behavior with influential others, but it may also be that spending a lot of time and effort networking with influential people in the organization makes the manager absent toward his/her direct reports. Thus, networking may create the impression that the manager is not focused on his/her employees and, rather, may make the manager appear as being more selfishly concerned about career advancement (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2013; Feldman and Weitz, 1991).

This interpretation of networking decreases perceptions of authentic leadership more for female managers than it does for male managers. Gender stereotypes research (e.g. Rudman and Glick, 2008) indicates that people stereotypically believe that women ought to be concerned about positive relationships and social harmony. Men ought to be concerned about achievement and status. The interpretation of networking behavior such as absence toward one's work unit and being potentially selfishly motivated is not problematic for male managers because they are "allowed" to more selfishly pursue achievement and status. Because of the female gender stereotype, however, this interpretation is problematic for female managers because they are consequently perceived as deviating from their gender stereotype and behaving in a more stereotypically male way. In the eyes of employees, doing so would be disingenuous relative to female gender stereotypes (see Eagly, 2005). Indeed, Doldor *et al.*'s (2013) study indicated that many women felt conflicted about political behavior, viewing it as excessively self-interested and stereotypically masculine. Supporting our argumentation, the authors further suggested the presence of a double bind that would lead women to be disliked as political actors. Note that networking behavior is considerably more overtly political than the other three dimensions of political skill. Therefore:

- H2. The relation between networking ability and authentic leadership perceptions is moderated by manager gender, for women it is negative, for men it is not.

Hypotheses on the other two dimensions of political skill were not specified. Although social astuteness implies accurate understanding of social situations that might help a person in the process of managing others' impressions, understanding does not have direct bearing on a manager's observable behavior. Interpersonal influence implies the ability to calibrate one's influence behavior in order to elicit a desired response. Arguably, a person high in interpersonal influence may be able to adapt behaviorally in a way that creates an impression of authentic leadership. However, adaptation to situations also implies observably inconsistent behavior across different situations, which may easily appear to others as disingenuous. In short, interpersonal influence seems to hold not only potential benefits, but also potential costs when it comes to authentic leadership perceptions. For these reasons, hypotheses for these two dimensions were not specified.

Method

Participants and procedure

Manager participants were 156 managers employed at several for-profit organizations in Pakistan, such as banks, telecommunication organizations and small business firms. Because manager gender was a key variable in this research, recruitment ensured that the proportion of male and female managers approximately equal (49.4 percent female). In total, 170 mid-level managers were approached (face-to-face by the first author) at their workplace, out of which 156 participated, yielding a response rate of 91.2 percent. Their age ranged between 27 and 59 years ($M = 38.52$, $SD = 6.04$) and their organizational tenure ranged between 1 and 25 years ($M = 7.12$, $SD = 4.49$). Of the participants, 12.2 percent held a completed bachelor's degree (14 years of schooling), 51.9 percent held a completed MA

(16 years of schooling) and 35.9 percent held a completed MPhil (18 years of schooling) or PhD degree. Manager participants completed a questionnaire assessing political skill.

Manager participants were rated on authentic leadership by two to five employees who reported directly to them ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 0.70$). The employee participants' ($n = 427$; 39.1 percent female) ages ranged from 21 to 56 years ($M = 28.04$, $SD = 6.81$) and their organizational tenure ranged from 1 to 19 years ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 3.85$). Of the direct reports, 39.6 percent held a completed bachelor's degree, 45.4 percent held a completed MA and 15.0 percent held a completed MPhil or PhD degree.

Measures

Managers' political skills

The Political Skill Inventory developed by Ferris *et al.* (2005) measured the four political skill dimensions of social astuteness ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.45$; $\alpha = 0.78$), interpersonal influence ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.33$; $\alpha = 0.78$), networking ability ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.41$; $\alpha = 0.80$) and apparent sincerity ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.62$; $\alpha = 0.70$). Example items are "I always seem to instinctively know the right thing to say or do to influence others" (social astuteness), "I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others" (interpersonal influence), "I spend a lot of time and effort at work networking with others" (networking ability) and "When communicating with others, I try to be genuine in what I say and do" (apparent sincerity). Participants responded to the items on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

The current research hypotheses were premised on the assumption that the political skill dimensions are treated as four distinct variables (Brouer *et al.*, 2015; Shi *et al.*, 2011), rather than as an overall index. To empirically examine the tenability of this assumption, a set of confirmatory factor analyses were conducted. The assumption would be tenable if either an orthogonal model (a model with four un-correlated factors) or an oblique model (a model with four correlated factors) would be superior to a single-factor model and superior to a higher order model (a model with four factors and a higher order political skill factor; see Credé and Harms, 2015). In contrast, if a single-factor model or a higher order model was to show the best fit, it would indicate that political skill should or could be conceptualized as an overall index. Several sets of errors were allowed to co-vary within, but not between factors, in order to allow for covariance caused by, for example, high item content overlap (Cole *et al.*, 2007). The assumption was supported (see Table I). The oblique model (Model 1) showed a better fit to the data than the alternative models, and all the items loaded significantly onto their assigned factor. This model fits the data better than a single-factor model, $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 373.22$, $p < 0.001$, better than a higher order model, $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 6.93$, $p = 0.031$ and better than an orthogonal model, $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 36.61$, $p < 0.001$.

Employees' perceptions of authentic leadership

The 16-item Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (Walumbwa *et al.*, 2008; Avolio *et al.*, 2018) was used ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.77$; $\alpha = 0.84$). An example item is "My supervisor makes decisions based on his or her core values." Participants responded on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 5 (frequently, if not always). Whereas political skills are measured at the leader level, authentic leadership perceptions are assessed using several employees' ratings of the same manager. To determine whether the responses by several direct reports converged and could be aggregated, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted and ICC1, ICC2 and R_{wg} were calculated. The ANOVA was significant, $F(155, 271) = 1.79$, $p < 0.001$. ICC1 and ICC2 were 0.22 and 0.44, respectively, and the average (multi-item scale) R_{wg} was 0.78. These modest statistics show that aggregation is acceptable (Klein and Kozlowski, 2000).

Contrary to political skill, the assumption (Avolio *et al.*, 2018; Liang, 2017) is that a higher order authentic leadership factor is conceptually and empirically meaningful. Following the logic as above (Credé and Harms, 2015), theory would be supported if the higher order

Table I.
Confirmatory factor
analyses results

Model	χ^2	df	<i>p</i>	CFI	TLI	GFI	RMSEA
<i>Political skills</i>							
Model 1	208.04	121	< 0.001	0.907	0.883	0.876	0.068
Model 2	581.26	127	< 0.001	0.516	0.417	0.683	0.152
Model 3	214.97	123	< 0.001	0.902	0.878	0.872	0.069
Model 4	244.65	127	< 0.001	0.875	0.849	0.862	0.077
<i>Authentic leadership</i>							
Model 1	153.60	100	< 0.001	0.952	0.942	0.896	0.059
Model 2	151.78	98	< 0.001	0.952	0.941	0.897	0.060
Model 3	573.18	104	< 0.001	0.580	0.516	0.635	0.171
Model 4	273.96	104	< 0.001	0.848	0.825	0.813	0.103
<i>Measurement model</i>							
Model 1	291.43	191	< 0.001	0.907	0.887	0.860	0.058
Model 2	415.21	195	< 0.001	0.762	0.717	0.784	0.092
Model 3	443.50	195	< 0.001	0.769	0.726	0.800	0.091
Model 4	513.91	195	< 0.001	0.703	0.648	0.753	0.103
Model 5	400.17	195	< 0.001	0.809	0.774	0.799	0.082
Model 6	789.67	201	< 0.001	0.452	0.370	0.658	0.137

model is superior to a single-factor model and to an orthogonal model (both of which are more parsimonious than the higher order model) and if the higher order model fits equally well as the less parsimonious oblique model. Table I shows that this was indeed the case. The higher order model fit (Model 1) was no worse than the oblique model fit (Model 2), $\Delta\chi^2(2) = 1.82$, $p = 0.403$. Furthermore, the higher order model fits better than the single-factor model (Model 3), $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 419.58$, $p < 0.001$, and better than the orthogonal model (Model 4), $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 120.36$, $p < 0.001$. Finally, in the hypothesized model, all items loaded significantly onto their assigned factors and the first-order factors all loaded significantly onto the higher order factor. Note that because the hypotheses are tested at Level 2, CFAs for authentic leadership were conducted at the aggregated item level. Using aggregated items tends to yield the underestimation of model fit (Dyer *et al.*, 2005) and, thus, provides a conservative test.

Results

Measurement model

The above CFAs did not yet test the distinctiveness of authentic leadership vs political skill. The measurement model CFA is complicated by the higher order structure of authentic leadership. To test whether authentic leadership is distinct from the four political skills, we used partial aggregation (Bagozzi and Heatherton, 1994). The four sub-dimensions of authentic leadership were modeled as observed variables of a (first-order) latent authentic leadership factor. This enables testing a five-factor model in which the four political skills and the one authentic leadership factor are distinguished. This model was compared to five alternatives: four models in which authentic leadership forms a joint factor with each of the four respective political skills, and one single-factor model in which the observed variables of political skill (items) and those of authentic leadership (sub-dimensions) form a single factor.

The hypothesized five-factor measurement model (Model 1) was superior to the alternative models, that is, a model in which authentic leadership and social astuteness formed one factor (Model 2), $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 159.78$, $p < 0.001$, a model in which authentic leadership and interpersonal influence formed one factor (Model 3), $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 152.07$, $p < 0.001$, a model in which authentic leadership and networking ability formed one factor (Model 4), $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 222.48$, $p < 0.001$, a model in which authentic leadership and apparent sincerity formed one factor (Model 5), $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 108.74$, $p < 0.001$ and a single-factor model

(Model 6), $\Delta\chi^2(10) = 498.24$, $p < 0.001$. Finally, in the measurement model, all observed variables loaded significantly on their assigned factor and the standardized estimates were all at least 0.36.

Hypothesis tests

Table II provides the zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics for the study variables. Note the positive correlation ($r = 0.18$) between apparent sincerity and authentic leadership and negative correlation of networking ability and authentic leadership ($r = -0.13$).

Multiple linear regression analysis was employed to test *H1*, using the four political skills variables as predictor variables, entered simultaneously and employees’ perceptions of authentic leadership as dependent variable. First, supporting *H1*, managers’ apparent sincerity positively related to employees’ perceptions of authentic leadership, $B = 0.11$, $SE = 0.03$, $\beta = 0.31$, $t(151) = 3.45$, $p = 0.001$. Second, managers’ networking ability negatively related to employees’ perceptions of authentic leadership, $B = -0.10$, $SE = 0.04$, $\beta = -0.26$, $t(151) = -2.86$, $p = 0.005$. Neither social astuteness, $B = 0.03$, $SE = 0.03$, $\beta = 0.09$, $t(151) = 1.04$, $p = 0.302$, nor interpersonal influence significantly related to perceptions of authentic leadership, $B = -0.03$, $SE = 0.03$, $\beta = -0.08$, $t(151) = -0.97$, $p = 0.335$.

Next, *H2* – the moderating role of gender in the negative relationship between manager networking and authentic leadership perceptions – was tested. Note that the correlation in Table II ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that, compared to female managers, male managers are perceived as higher in authentic leadership. Moderated multiple regression analysis was conducted with the predictors networking (standardized), manager gender (0 = female, 1 = male) and the interaction between networking and gender. Most importantly, this interaction (see Figure 1) was significant, $B = 0.20$, $SE = 0.09$, $\beta = 0.35$, $t(152) = 2.30$, $p = 0.023$. Further analysis indicated that the link between networking behavior and authentic leadership was significant and negative for female managers, $B = -0.16$, $SE = 0.06$, $\beta = -0.28$, $t(152) = -2.57$, $p = 0.011$, but was neither negative nor significant for male managers, $B = 0.04$, $SE = 0.06$, $\beta = 0.08$, $t(152) = 0.69$, $p = 0.491$. Additionally, the manager gender difference in employees’ perceptions of authentic leadership was only significant for those managers who used a high amount of networking (1 SD above the mean), $B = 0.51$, $SE = 0.12$, $\beta = 0.91$, $t(152) = 4.22$, $p = 0.00004$ but was not significant for those who used a low amount of networking (1 SD below the mean), $B = 0.12$, $SE = 0.12$, $\beta = 0.21$, $t(152) = 0.97$, $p = 0.333$. In sum, networking only predicts lower perceptions of authentic leadership among female managers.

All analyses were conducted both with and without demographic control variables (as in Table II, manager gender, manager age and manager organizational tenure) but as the

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Manager gender	0.51	0.50								
2. Manager age	38.51	6.04	0.11							
3. Manager tenure	7.12	4.49	-0.01	0.58						
4. Social astuteness	4.48	1.45	-0.07	-0.08	-0.14	<i>0.78</i>				
5. Interpersonal influence	4.14	1.33	-0.08	-0.14	-0.13	0.06	<i>0.78</i>			
6. Networking ability	4.14	1.41	-0.08	-0.05	-0.11	0.13	0.16	<i>0.80</i>		
7. Apparent sincerity	4.26	1.62	0.21	0.03	0.00	-0.22	0.04	0.42	<i>0.70</i>	
8. Authentic leadership	3.71	0.77	0.29	0.10	0.03	-0.02	-0.10	-0.13	0.18	<i>0.84</i>

Notes: $n = 156$. Gender is coded 0 for female, 1 for male. Cronbach’s α s are presented in italic. $r_s \geq 0.29$, $p_s < 0.001$; $r_s \geq 0.21$, $p < 0.01$; $r_s \geq 0.18$, $p_s < 0.05$

Table II.
Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between the study variables

Figure 1.
The interactive effect
of networking ability
and gender on
authentic leadership
perceptions



significance of the results was unaffected by the inclusion of control variables, reports show results that do not include control variables. Organizational tenure may be of special interest to mention in this regard: though not significantly, it was negatively correlated with several of the political skill dimensions. In Analysis 1, we regressed authentic leadership on the four skill dimensions and then added tenure as a predictor and showed that tenure had no significant relation with authentic leadership, $B = 0.00$, $SE = 0.01$, $\beta = 0.00$, $t(150) = 0.07$, $p = 0.947$, and the coefficients for all the other predictors remained identical when tenure was included. Similarly, the interaction between gender and networking on authentic leadership perceptions was unaffected by including tenure as a control variable.

Discussion

This study examined whether the dimensions of managers' political skill and their gender are associated with their employees' perceptions of their manager's authentic leadership, with the purpose to shed light on factors that may help or hinder managers in creating perceptions of their authentic leadership. A positive link to authentic leadership only occurred for apparent sincerity, which entails acting on opportunities that allow a manager to come across as sincere. Employees do not readily have access to accurate information about a manager's actual sincerity or genuineness. In line with political influence theory, what should matter for employees' perceptions is, thus, whether the manager actively seeks to create an impression of genuineness by acting in ways that appear sincere.

Also in line with the hypotheses, female managers', but not male managers', networking was negatively related to employees' perceptions of authentic leadership. Networking is open to employees' interpretation because influential people in the organization are purposefully targeted and these are less likely to be a focal manager's subordinates. A manager who frequently networks with important people in the organization might be seen as absent to the work unit and as self-serving, which is likely to be seen as disingenuous, but the latter is more a problem for women than for men. In short, in accordance with political influence theory (Ferris and Judge, 1991) what may help both male and female managers to be seen by subordinates as an authentic leader is to engage in active attempts to make subordinates see managers' apparently sincere behavior. What, conversely, may hinder female managers – but not male managers – in being seen as an authentic leader is to engage in a lot of networking behavior.

Implications for theory and research

These findings contribute to an understanding of manager characteristics that are related to employees' perceptions of manager authentic leadership. Considerable research has attested to the notion that authentic leadership can be affected by authentic personality and by other characteristics that draw on positive resources; it has not, however, considered that employees' perceptions do not necessarily reflect the reality of manager traits and characteristics, that managers' observable behavior is the basis of employees' perceptions and that behaviors are open to careful crafting or to interpretation. Based on these considerations, in contrast, the current research revealed that authentic leadership perceptions might also (positively or negatively) be associated with certain political skill dimensions (see Douglas *et al.*, 2005). Yet, important to note is that only apparent sincerity was positively related to employees' perceptions of manager authentic leadership.

The findings on networking in this context may be particularly interesting because the networking dimensions are considerably externally oriented, as compared to the other political skill dimensions. An important task for most managers is to accrue resources from outside of the work unit so as to create the conditions for the work unit to be able to do their job. Accomplishing this managerial task requires networking with influential people in the organization, so it is not farfetched to state that most managers need to network with influential others. The finding that networking has detrimental implications for perceptions about female managers' authentic leadership is important and calls for future research on, generally, how employees perceive managers' externally oriented behaviors such as networking.

This research contributes to a gendered perspective on political behavior as well. Previous researchers and theorists have suggested that a lower willingness or ability to engage in politics may hinder women in getting ahead or rising in the organizational hierarchy (Doldor *et al.*, 2013; Ferris *et al.*, 1996; Perrewé and Nelson, 2004). Although we did not study "getting ahead" as an explicit outcome, one's ability to create perceptions of being a good, authentic leader, may be relevant to one's ability to get ahead in the organization because being perceived as an authentic leader may spur follower positive attitudes, motivation, performance and so forth. Adding to previous research on gender and political behavior, our study indicates not so much that women are not willing to engage in networking but, rather, even when they do, this may harm their employees' perceptions of them. Hence, this research illustrates the double bind that women face when it comes to leadership and political behavior (Doldor *et al.*, 2013).

Our rationale mainly considers the networking targeted toward influential people, and we suggested that this type of behavior likely leaves less time for actively maintaining relationships with one's subordinates. The latter, however, could also be an interpretation of networking behavior and there may be managers who engage in more relationship maintenance with various others – be they influential or not – in the organization including their own subordinates. It would be interesting for further research to unpack this difference in the motives underlying networking behaviors and the targets of these managerial behaviors.

The current findings strongly support the political influence perspective on politics in organizations (Ferris and Judge, 1991), as it indicates that political behaviors – in particular apparent sincerity – can be successfully wielded to construct the interpretation or meaning of the manager as showing authentic leadership. It also supports this theory through the finding that networking's association with authentic leadership perception was negative and was moderated by manager gender. This indicates that networking is open to interpretation and that it will be interpreted and evaluated differentially depending on who shows it.

The investigation of the dimensions of political skill, rather than the single political skill score, was supported by the analyses in the current research as well as other recent work (Brouer *et al.*, 2015; Shi *et al.*, 2011) and the finding that the dimensions have different associations with authentic leadership perceptions attests to the importance of taking a

more fine-grained approach to political skill. The moderating role of gender also highlights that it may be important for novel research to consider various moderators that may influence the outcomes associated with the political skill dimensions. For example, this could be particularly relevant to consider for the dimension of networking ability. As alluded to above, networking is important for the work unit. It could be that managers' intention underlying this behavior is important to consider, or that the extent to which intentions or even the necessity of gathering resources through networking are openly communicated toward employees may be important moderators of this relationship. This certainly falls within the perspective of influence theory, but extant political skills literature does not make distinctions among networking behavior with different intentions. Hence, this would be an interesting avenue for future research.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be discussed. Most importantly, claims regarding causality should be omitted because – though the study did not rely on single-source data – the predictor and criterion were assessed using questionnaires and measured at the same time. One implication is that the direction of the causal relationship could be reversed. For example, while it may not seem likely that employees' perceptions of authentic leadership cause a manager to behave more sincerely, such a reverse-causal relation cannot be ruled out. Another implication is that third variables or confounds cannot be ruled out. For example, it is possible that the negative relationship between networking ability and authentic leadership is actually caused by another variable such as leaders' authentic personality: being authentic could lead to perceptions of authenticity and decrease a manager's tendency to engage in (career-advancing) networking behaviors in attempts to live up to employees' perceptions.

Practical implications

Favorable outcomes accrue when employees perceive their manager to be authentic (Banks *et al.*, 2016). Organizations seeking to reap the benefits of authentic leadership would be helped by being able to recruit, assess and select individuals who have the potential to be perceived as authentic. The current findings indicate that managers' political skill of apparent sincerity is associated with such perceptions on the part of their employees. Hence, a straightforward implication of this research is that political skill inventories may be used in the selection of authentic leaders in addition to other individual characteristics such as authentic personality (Liang, 2017).

At the same time, Ferris *et al.* (2007) suggest that a major advantage of political skill – relative to personality traits – is that it can be more readily developed through training and experience. Assuming that this is the case, organizations would then have the ability to train managers to behave in ways that appear more sincere. These recommendations should be carefully considered, however, especially in the context of all four political skills, because the current research suggests that female manager's frequent networking behavior could backfire and hinder perceptions of authentic leadership. In any case, managers may need to become aware of the possible interpretation that their direct reports attach to their – probably very important and useful – networking behavior. For men, networking was neither detrimental nor beneficial in predicting their subordinates' perceptions of authentic leadership. For women, networking appeared to be detrimental. Managers, but especially female managers, may need to take the extra step to clarify to their subordinates why it is important for the work unit that they network with influential others in the organization, in order to prevent subordinates from detrimental interpretations. Further research is needed, but it likely would not hurt if managers were encouraged to share with their employees their intentions when engaging in frequent networking behavior outside the work unit. It might make a

difference if female managers would be able to convince their employees that their networking behavior is in the best interest of relationships within the work unit. In addition, managers may be encouraged and trained to reap the benefits of authentic leadership perceptions by trying to be open and sincere toward their employees.

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