

Career Growth Potential: Examining the Roles of Political Skill, Social Resource Acquisition, and Ingratiation

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of political skill on career growth potential through social resource acquisition and the moderating role of ingratiation among civil servants. Drawing on Social Resource Theory, the study proposes that politically skilled employees are better able to acquire valuable social resources, thereby enhancing their career growth potential. A quantitative approach was employed using purposive sampling, involving 137 civil servants from the West Sumatra Provincial Government. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that political skill has a positive and significant effect on both social resource acquisition and career growth potential. Social resource acquisition also positively influences career growth potential. However, ingratiation has no significant direct effect on career growth potential and does not significantly moderate the relationship between social resource acquisition and career growth potential. These findings suggest that interpersonal competence and access to valuable social resources are more important determinants of career growth than ingratiation behavior. This study contributes to the career development literature by extending Social Resource Theory and provides practical implications for public organizations in promoting career advancement through the development of employees' political skills and workplace social resources.

Keywords: political skill; social resource acquisition; ingratiation; career growth potential; public sector.

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Introduction

Background Empirical evidence has demonstrated that political intelligence/skills and networks are potential factors (Cullen, Gerbasi, & Chrobot-Mason, 2018). For instance, employees who possess exceptional political acumen frequently perceive relationships with other organizational members as opportunities to capitalize on (McAllister, Ellen, & Ferris, 2018). Different interpersonal abilities are possessed by individuals who are politically skilled, which enables them to exhibit their behavior in a manner that fosters trust and benevolence, resulting in beneficial interpersonal relationships (Epitropaki et al., 2016).

According to the social resource theory (Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981), political skills are critical interpersonal competencies that supervisors can leverage to gain access to the resources required for career advancement. Chiesa, Heijden, Mazzetti, Mariani, and Guglielmi (2020) have consistently demonstrated that political skills are substantial predictors of career-related benefits, such as actual promotions, perceived job suitability, and promotability ratings.

The research investigates two categories of resources that employees can acquire interpersonally from their supervisors, as the career context of interest and key skills are situated within the interpersonal domain. Initially, the expressive network resources that are concentrated on supervisors are composed of robust interpersonal relationships that employees establish with their supervisors. These relationships, in turn, offer emotional support, friendship, confirmation, and feedback on work-related matters. Secondly, supervisor developmental feedback includes information regarding cultural norms, extra-role expectations, and role expectations, all of which are intended to facilitate the long-term growth of employees (Li, Harris, Boswell, & Xie, 2011).

Despite the numerous studies that have attempted to investigate the comprehensive advantages of social resources (Bozionelos, 2003; Wolff & Moser, 2009), the results regarding their instrumental value in attaining career objectives remain inconsistent (Bozionelos & Wang, 2006; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Consequently, the mere existence of resources may not be sufficient to elucidate the relationship between political skills and the potential for career growth. The argument is that the degree to which individuals will integrate, utilize, and leverage the social resources acquired through the practice of their political skills to improve their career growth opportunities may vary.

Research indicates that employees can more effectively position themselves by utilizing strategic and directed influence tactics, such as expressing gratitude, to capitalize on the expressive network resources and developmental feedback they have acquired. This is a strategy that is intended to improve the potential for career growth of employees, as determined by their supervisors' evaluation of their readiness to capitalize on career growth opportunities (e.g., job enrichment, promotions, training and development).

Politically adept employees can establish connections with an individual's interpersonal appeal and solicit assistance from others through relationship building (Kumar & Beyerlein, 1991). This strategy is essential for enabling employees to navigate through the informal connections they have formed with their supervisors, thereby enabling them to modify their resource usage to achieve career growth, given the emphasis on interpersonal ingratiation (Liden & Mitchell, 1988).

The fundamental aspect of political influence behavior is the upward influence strategies employed by career aspirants to further their professional objectives (Derr, 1988; Kipnis and Schmidt, 1988; Kipnis et al., 1980; Porter et al., 1981). For instance, Derr (1988) observes that career politics arise at the intersection of internal career aspirations and external career realities. Although numerous upward influence strategies have been identified in the literature (Kipnis et al., 1980; Schriesheim and Hinkin, 1990). Ingratiation is the primary focus of this investigation. The reason for this is that ingratiation is a construct that is distinct from its own causes (Aryee et al., 1993) and consequences. Consequently, it is worthwhile to investigate ingratiation in isolation from other influence strategies.

Furthermore, Liden and Mitchell (1988) observed that the use and efficacy of ingratiation as an influence tactic have been the primary focus of much influence over subordinates in organizations. Jones (1964) defined the concept as "a collection of strategic behaviors that are intended to influence specific individuals with respect to the attractiveness of one's personal attributes." Nevertheless, this investigation implements Tedeschi and Melburg's (1984) definition of ingratiation as "a collection of assertive strategies designed to secure the approval of others." ingratiation behavior is defined by Tedeschi and Melburg (1984) as proactive behavior that is employed to increase the probability of receiving the desired reward in the future.

The literature has identified four distinct categories of ingratiation behavior (Tedeschi and Melburg, 1984). The initial approach involves performing favors in accordance with Gouldner's (1960)

reciprocity standard. The objective of favor-doing is to establish an identity as a person who is friendly, helpful, and caring. However, it can also induce a sense of obligation in the recipient. The second type of ungrateful behavior is opinion alignment, which can encompass a range of activities, from a simple agreement with the articulated opinion to more intricate attempts to articulate the position that the intended individual may hold. The third type is an additional device that involves evaluative statements that enhance communication.

Tedeschi and Melburg (1984) noted that praise, approval, and flattery generally elevate the self-esteem of recipients, and this affirmative evaluative communication has been demonstrated to augment the recipient's fondness for the source. Ultimately, self-presentation involves articulating verbal assertions aimed at convincing the audience of the speaker's attributes, characteristics, intentions, and favorable disposition. Jones and Wortman (1973) observed that self-presentation encompasses two interconnected attributes: (a) offering a clear depiction of an individual's traits and actions, and (b) exhibiting conduct that suggests the individual possesses specific traits. In the context of career management, ingratiation behavior depicts career candidates as proactive cognitive and emotional beings, whose expectations, attributions, and social information processing lead to differing degrees of political sensitivity and decisions to pursue particular political objectives (Vredenburg and Maurer, 1984). Recent research have demonstrated the advantageous effects of ingratiation behavior.

Gould and Penley (1984) indicated that viewpoint congruence and other enhancements were considerably positively correlated with wage progression. Judge and Bretz (1994) differentiated between supervisor-oriented tactics and job-oriented tactics, noting that supervisor-oriented techniques favorably impacted both intrinsic and extrinsic success. The concept of supervisor-focused methods is theoretically analogous to ingratiation as employed in this study. Kipnis and Vandever (1971) illustrate that ingratiation is regarded as a prominent strategy for achieving organizational advancement and success. Ingratiation, as a strategy of political influence, impacts career advancement through the psychosocial mechanisms of influence or likability (Cardy and Dobbins, 1986; Ferris et al., 1994; Ralston, 1985; Wayne and Ferris, 1990), which is reflected in the performance evaluations subordinates obtain from their superiors.

Robust empirical data substantiates the pivotal function of ingratiation in attaining career-related advantages (Sibunruang, Garcia, & Tolentino, 2016; Wu, Kwan, Wei, & Liu, 2013). This research ultimately seeks to investigate the reasons behind the differential career advancement experienced by certain employees. This study employs social resource theory (Lin et al., 1981) as a holistic theoretical framework to elucidate the interplay between interpersonal competence (i.e., political skills), social resources (i.e., expressive network resources and developmental feedback from supervisors), and interpersonal influence behavior (i.e., ingratiation) in fostering employees' potential career advancement.

This research contributes to the literature on career advancement as follows. The proposed research model is based on the existing career circumstances of public servant employees and numerous prominent characteristics of their work culture context. Weng & Zhu (2020) assert that investigations into career advancement necessitate a more nuanced approach, as the notion of a career encompasses interactions among individual employees, organizations, and society.

Consequently, job advancement is invariably affected by the context and circumstances in which it transpires. This study elucidates various unexamined mechanisms that reveal the advantages of political skills for professional advancement. For instance, in advocating for professional aspirations. Prior studies have predominantly highlighted the significance of instrumental network resources (e.g.,

Blommaert, Meuleman, Leenheer, & Butkē.viC Sebuah, 2020; Bozionelos, 2003; Peng & Luo, 2000; Seibert, Sargent, Kraimer, & Kiazad, 2017), which facilitate exposure to senior management and provide access to job-related information and professional counsel, whereas the potential of expressive network resources remains largely unexplored.

he assertion is that expressive resources offer psychosocial support through intimate partnerships, which not only cultivate trust but also enable the interchange of significant resources (Brass, 1984). Trust is an essential element in the sharing and exchange of advantages between individuals in a relationship (Bradach & Eccles, 1989). We acknowledge supervisory developmental feedback as a crucial element in professional advancement. Research to date has identified the behavioral effects of developmental feedback, including task performance, altruistic conduct, and creativity (Li et al., 2011; Zhou, 2003). The forward-looking aspect of this feedback is crucial in guiding employees' focus and motivation towards long-term results, such as career advancement.

Hypothesis Development

Political Skills on Social Resource Acquisition.

The research conducted by (Hataya Simburuang et al., 2021) found that Political Skills have a positive effect on Social Resource Acquisition (expressive network resources focused on supervisors and supervisor development feedback). Resource acquisition is the result of building relationships and informal connections formed among individuals within a specific social network (Seibert et al., 2001). Guided by social resource theory (Lin et al., 1981), 'social resources are embedded in the contact positions individuals achieve thru their social networks' (p. 395).

H1: Political skills have a positive influence on the Acquisition of Social Resources

Acquisition of Social Resources on Career Growth

Potential Expressive network resources focused on supervisors show the close relationships formed between employees and supervisors (Bozionelos, 2006). Such beneficial interpersonal relationships tend to offer more nuanced information that is important in achieving personal goals, facilitate quick feedback exchanges regarding work-related issues, and allow access to a greater amount of support. This result is largely due to the mutual trust shared among closely connected members (Bradach & Eccles, 1989).

H2: The acquisition of social resources positively affects career growth potential.

Personal strengths and career growth potential.

Career advancement requires individuals to take a proactive role in influencing people and events (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005; Wayne et al., 1997). Taking over their job roles to develop personal strengths freely gives individuals a strong presence in the work environment, resulting in a clearly favorable impression by superiors. Such an impression, according to the sponsored-mobility career success model (Cooper et al., 1993; Turner, 1960), is likely to convince supervisors of the employee's elite status, resulting in favorable ratings of their career growth potential.

Furthermore, the increased decision-making latitude and personal control over their work activities, along with the greater interpersonal influence demonstrated by politically skilled individuals (i.e., reflecting their personal power), should also help them complete tasks more effectively and compete with others in the career tournament. According to the career success mobility contest model

(Turner, 1960), such a track record will enhance an individual's ability to facilitate career growth, which will be reflected in the potential supervisor's ranking.

H 3: Political Skills have a positive influence on career growth potential

Ingratiation and career growth potential.

Cultivating Favor for Professional Advancement Potential Ingratiation, as a strategy for political leverage, impacts professional advancement through the psychosocial mechanisms of influence or appeal, as evidenced by the performance evaluations subordinates obtain from their superiors (Cardy and Dobbins, 1986; Ferris et al., 1994; Ralston, 1985; Wayne and Ferris, 1990). Contemporary literature on performance appraisal indicates a notable transition from focusing on appraisal formats to prioritizing the cognitive processes associated with performance evaluation (Landy and Farr, 1980).

This perspective on performance evaluation emphasizes the evaluator's emotions for the subject, potentially influencing the precision of the assessment. Wayne and Ferns (1990) indicated through their laboratory research that negative behaviors, including compliance and favorable acts, affect supervisors' responses to employees and their performance assessments. This occurs because when a supervisor retrieves information from memory to assess a subordinate's performance, the recalled actions may be skewed towards prototypes that signify employee classification (Feldman, 1981; Ilgen and Feldman, 1983).

H 4: Ingratiation has a positive influence on career growth potential.

Ingratiation -> acquisition of social resources and career growth potential.

Expressive network resources and developmental feedback provided by supervisors have the potential to enhance employees' career growth potential; these resources can be further utilized to optimize individual opportunities for career advancement. For example, employees can engage in goal-directed strategic influence behaviors, such as expressing gratitude, toward their direct supervisors. Ingratiation is a set of interpersonal behaviors that aim to enhance one's interpersonal attractiveness and ultimately gain assistance from others (Kumar & Beyerlein, 1991; Westphal & Stern, 2007). Examples of ingratiation include giving compliments, showing agreement with others' opinions, and doing favors for someone (Higgins & Judge, 2004; Kumar & Beyerlein, 1991). Overall, ingratiation has been proven to yield many positive outcomes, including positive performance ratings, career success, and increased opportunities for board appointments (Aryee, Wyatt, & Stone, 1996; Sibunruang et al., 2016; Westphal & Shani, 2016).

H5 : Ingratiation strengthens the relationship between the acquisition of social resources and career growth potential.

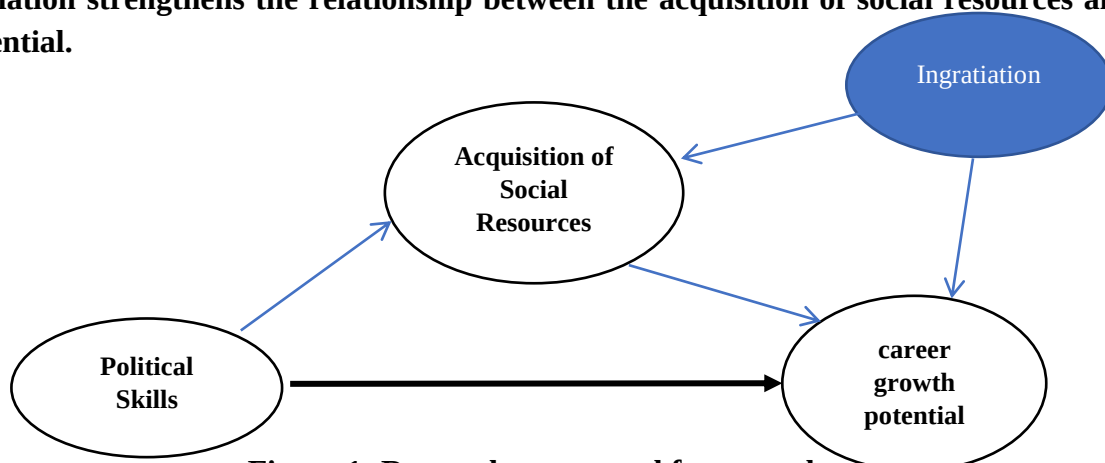


Figure 1: Research conceptual framework

Methods

Sample, Sampling Technique, and Data Collection

The respondents in this study are civil servants (ASN) in the West Sumatra Provincial Government, totaling 137 people. The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling. The data collection method employed in this research is thru the use of a questionnaire as the sole tool for data collection. Operational Definition of Variables Career Growth Potential Career growth potential is the process by which individuals develop new skills and abilities and take on new responsibilities and enriched job roles to achieve future career goals and objectives (Liu et al., 2010). Two items developed by Bedeian, Kemery, and Pizzolatto (1991) were adapted to measure the career growth potential of subordinates, as assessed by their direct supervisors.

Political Skills Political skills refer to "the ability to effectively understand others in the workplace, and use that knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal or organizational goals" (Ferris, Treadway, et al., 2005). Political skills use an 18-item scale developed by Ferris et al. (2005). **Acquisition of Social Resources** The acquisition of social resources is classified into two categories: (1) Expressive Network Resources Focused on Supervisors, which indicates the close relationships formed between employees and supervisors (Bozionelos, 2006). (2) Supervisor Development Feedback, which refers to the extent to which supervisors provide their employees with useful or valuable information that enables employees to learn, develop, and make improvements in their work (Zhou, 2003, p. 415). **Ingratiation** Ingratiation is a set of interpersonal behaviors that seek to enhance someone's interpersonal attractiveness and ultimately gain assistance from others (Kumar & Beyerlein, 1991; Westphal & Stern, 2007).

Results and Discussion

According to Ghazali (2020), hypothesis testing is conducted by comparing the T-statistic value with the T-table value of 1.96 at a significance level of P-value = 0.05. If the T-statistic value is greater than the T-table, it can be concluded that the independent variable has a significant effect on the dependent variable. The results of the hypothesis testing are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Result of Hypothesis

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Decision
H1 : Political Skills → acquisition of social resources	0.603	0.611	0.051	11.914	0.000	Accepted
H2 : acquisition of social resources → career growth potential	0.065	0.056	0.107	2.609	0.002	Accepted
H3 : Political Skills → career growth potential	0.427	0.419	0.074	5.742	0.000	Accepted
H4 : Ingratiation → career growth potential	0.009	0.000	0.102	0.091	0.927	Rejected

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values	Decision
H5 : Ingratiation x acquisition of social resources -> career growth potential	0.090	0.083	0.112	0.805	0.421	Accepted

Source: Primary Data Processing, 2026

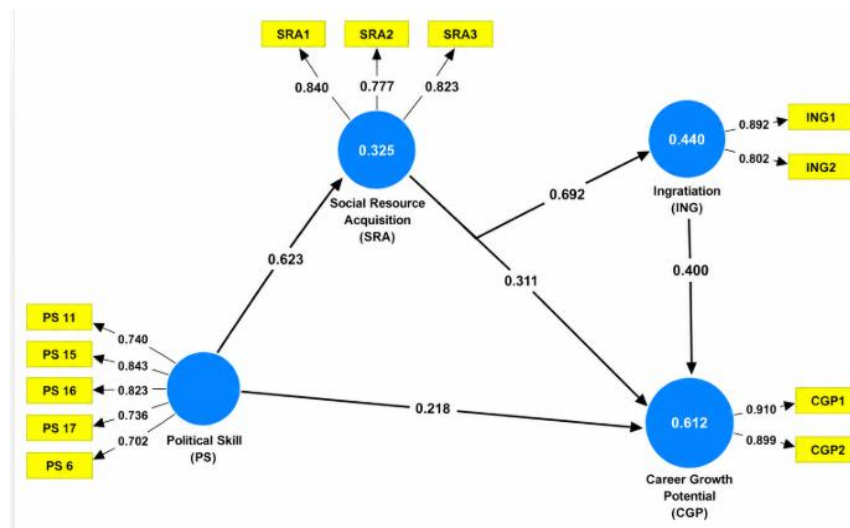


Figure 2: Measurement Framework Mode

Based on the results of hypothesis testing using SEM-PLS analysis, it can be seen that the relationships between variables in this study show varied results, both significant and non-significant. Hypothesis decision-making is conducted by examining the T statistics and P values. A hypothesis is accepted if the T statistics value is greater than 1.96 and the P values are less than 0.05. Conversely, a hypothesis is rejected if the P values are greater than 0.05. The results of this test provide an overview of how political skills, social resource acquisition, and ingratiation play a role in enhancing career growth potential. The results of the test on Hypothesis 1 (H1) indicate that political skills have a positive and significant effect on social resource acquisition. This is evident from the coefficient value of 0.603, a T statistic value of 11.914, and a P value of 0.000, leading to the acceptance of the hypothesis. The results indicate that the higher the political skills possessed by an individual, the greater their ability to acquire social resources in the workplace. If individuals with good political skills tend to be able to build effective communication, establish extensive relationships, understand social situations, and positively influence others. These abilities facilitate individuals in obtaining support, access to information, assistance, and professional relationships that can become social resources within the organization.

Next, Hypothesis 2 (H2) shows that the acquisition of social resources has a positive and significant impact on career growth potential with a coefficient value of 0.065, a T statistic value of 2.609, and a P value of 0.002. Although the influence value is relatively small, the result still shows a positive contribution, thus the hypothesis is accepted. If individuals have good social resources, such as support from colleagues, professional networks, access to information, and strong relationships within the organization, they will have a greater chance of obtaining career development opportunities. These social resources can help individuals obtain strategic information, promotion opportunities, and support that fosters career advancement in the future.

In Hypothesis 3 (H3), the test results show that political skills have a positive and significant impact on career growth potential with a coefficient value of 0.427, a T-statistics value of 5.742, and a P-value of 0.000. Therefore, the hypothesis is accepted. These results indicate that political skills are one of the important factors in enhancing an individual's career growth opportunities. If individuals with good political skills are usually more capable of building a professional image, expanding their work network, influencing the organizational environment, and demonstrating effective interpersonal skills. These conditions make it easier for individuals to gain trust, recognition, and career development opportunities compared to those who lack political skills.

Unlike the previous hypothesis, Hypothesis 4 (H4) shows that ingratiation does not have a significant impact on career growth potential. This is evident from the coefficient value of 0.009, the T statistics value of 0.091, and the P values of 0.927, leading to the rejection of the hypothesis. The results indicate that ingratiation behavior or attempts to curry favor with others do not significantly enhance the potential for career growth. Career growth within an organization is more influenced by competence, work ability, performance, and the individual's tangible contributions rather than behaviors that are solely oriented toward social image. Additionally, excessive ingratiation can be perceived negatively by the work environment, thus not having a real impact on a person's career development.

Then, in Hypothesis 5 (H5), the test results show that ingratiation is unable to moderate the relationship between the acquisition of social resources and the potential for career growth. This is evident from the coefficient value of 0.090, the T statistics value of 0.805, and the P value of 0.421, leading to the rejection of the hypothesis. These results indicate that the presence of ingratiation neither strengthens nor weakens the influence of social resource acquisition on career growth potential. Although individuals possess good social resources, ingratiation behavior still does not provide any significant additional influence on career advancement. In an organizational environment, professional relationships built on the basis of competence, trust, and work quality tend to be more valued compared to relationships built solely thru ingratiating behavior or interpersonal image.

Conclusions

This study examined the relationships among political skill, social resource acquisition, ingratiation, and career growth potential within the public sector. The findings demonstrate that political skill is a critical determinant of career growth potential, both directly and indirectly through the acquisition of social resources. Employees with strong political skills are more capable of building effective workplace relationships, accessing valuable information, and obtaining organizational support, all of which contribute to greater opportunities for career advancement. In addition, social resource acquisition positively influences career growth potential, highlighting the importance of supportive interpersonal networks in facilitating employees' professional development.

Contrary to expectations, ingratiation neither exerts a significant direct effect on career growth potential nor moderates the relationship between social resource acquisition and career growth potential. These findings suggest that career advancement in the public sector is driven more by employees' interpersonal competence, credibility, and access to meaningful social resources than by impression management or favor-seeking behaviors.

Theoretically, this study extends Social Resource Theory by demonstrating that political skill enhances career growth through employees' ability to acquire valuable social resources. Practically, the findings encourage public organizations to invest in developing employees' political skills, communication abilities, and collaborative networks rather than emphasizing ingratiation as a strategy for career advancement. Future studies are encouraged to examine additional mediating or moderating

variables, such as organizational support, leader-member exchange, or career adaptability, and to validate the proposed model across different organizational contexts and sectors.

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