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Psychological Type, Machiavellianism, and Perceived Self-Efficacy at Playing Office Politics

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ABSTRACT

Participants in management education and development programs were asked to evaluate themselves on dimensions of Machiavellianism—a mindset in which it is acceptable to treat people as a means to an end—and perceptions of their own skills in office politics. Although Thinking types generally reported stronger Machiavellian beliefs than Feeling types, participants who were younger, male, and under stress reported stronger Machiavellian beliefs than any other group, regardless of type. Further, individuals with preferences for Extraversion and Thinking reported higher levels of

self-efficacy at playing office politics than did individuals with preferences for Introversion and Feeling. These results provide insights about the relationships between psychological type and political dynamics in the workplace and suggest directions for future research.

INTRODUCTION

For years, psychological type researchers have been interested in topics related to managing organizations. Only recently, however, have researchers begun to examine the topic of office politics and the role that psychological type plays in this area. Given the significant

impact that office politics have on satisfaction and success in work-related endeavors, further research on this topic seems worthwhile (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989). Research insights would seem especially worthwhile for practitioners working in leadership coaching, team building, and career development. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to examine further the relationship of psychological type to office politics.

Previous research on psychological type and office politics has looked at (a) the type seen as the office politician (Boozer, Forte, Maddox, & Jackson, 2000) and (b) how the four mental function groups tend to perceive office politics (Boozer, 1999). Both of these studies focused on individuals' perceptions of some external object—either another person (office politician) or a behavioral mix (office politics). In contrast, the current study examined individuals' perceptions of themselves in terms of Machiavellianism and self-efficacy at office politics.

Psychological Type and Machiavellianism. We chose to examine the relationship between psychological type and Machiavellianism because this orientation represents the epitome of the political person in organizational life. From Machiavelli's (1513/1950; 1513/1966) original writings on political governance to more current treatments of the concept (e.g., Ledeen, 2000), what has remained constant is that this orientation involves issues of power and politics. Further, Christie and Geis's (1970) work, which conceptualizes Machiavellianism as an individual differences construct, has inspired research that provides a rich literature within which to consider the results from the current study.

Defining Machiavellianism involves three interrelated topics: beliefs, behaviors, and characteristics. Machiavellian beliefs focus on issues of trust and deception and essentially reflect a mindset in which it is acceptable—in certain situations—to treat people as a means to an end (Lewin & Stephens, 1994). Machiavellian behaviors reflect these beliefs; thus, individuals who score high in Machiavellian beliefs engage in a variety of persuasive and manipulative behaviors ranging from the use of flattery to deception (McHoskey,

Worzel, & Szyarto, 1998). Given these beliefs and behaviors, Machiavellians have been characterized by what Christie and Geis (1970) call the cool syndrome: emotionally detached, calculating and cynical, yet capable of being sociable and charming (at least in short-term encounters). Ethically, the Machiavellian is characterized as a “pragmatist,” reflecting the Machiavellian actor's ability to pursue self-interests realistically within a setting in which what is right or wrong behavior is ambiguous (Christie & Geis).

A literature search produced only two studies that provide any empirical support for possible relationships between psychological type and Machiavellianism. In one, Elson (1989) administered the MBTI and a measure of Machiavellianism to 86 college freshmen. The only significant result was that Ts scored higher than Fs in Machiavellianism.

Ramanaiah, Byravan, and Detwiler (1994) administered the revised NEO-Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and a measure of Machiavellianism to 185 psychology undergraduates. Machiavellians had significantly lower mean scores on the Agreeableness and Conscientiousness scales. Given that lower NEO-PI scores on Agreeableness and Conscientiousness correlate significantly with T and P preferences, respectively (Myers, McCaulley, Quenk, & Hammer, 1998), the

Ramanaiah et al. results support the hypothesis that T preferences (as well as P preferences) may be related to Machiavellianism. In fact, McCrae and Costa (1987) have proposed that Machiavellianism is a trait associated with the Agreeableness factor in their Five-Factor Model of personality (albeit with the pole they labeled Antagonism).

Although the earlier research suggests that Machiavellianism is probably associated with T preferences more than with F preferences, other research suggests caution in making this association. The McHoskey et al. (1998) research views Machiavellianism as psychopathy and other results from Ramanaiah et al. (1994) show that Machiavellianism correlates with Neuroticism, a factor not measured by the MBTI. If we put these findings together, we might conjecture that individuals with T preferences tend to be psychopathic

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more than individuals with F preferences. Such an assertion does not seem consistent with type theory, which views all preferences as equally valuable and nonpathological, given good type development (Myers et al., 1998). What does seem possible, however, is that type preferences may be expressed in such a way that they appear pathological under certain conditions, especially stressful conditions (Delunas, 1992; Quenk, 1993). For example, Pearman and Albritton (1997) contrasted the normal expression of the INTJ's auxiliary ET with its expression under stress as "critical, proactive and systematic, reasonable and analytical" versus "arrogant . . . aggressive, opportunistic," respectively. These "stressed-out" characterizations of the T function—arrogant, aggressive, and opportunistic—clearly seem more Machiavellian than the nonstressed characterizations.

The previous studies showing a relationship between type preferences and Machiavellianism have not controlled for factors such as stress level. Thus, we hypothesized that there would be no relationship between type preferences and Machiavellianism when other significant factors—such as stress-related factors—were controlled.

Type and Perceived Self-Efficacy at Playing Office Politics.

We examined the relationship between type preferences and perceptions of being skilled at playing office politics for two reasons: First, this perspective begins to address the issue of which types see themselves as the office politicians (and which types do not). Previous research has looked at the type perceived as the office politician (Boozer et al., 2000), but no research has looked at how the different types perceive their own orientations to political behavior at work. Second, by focusing on perceptions of political skill at work, we hoped to add to the emerging literature exploring the importance of these skills (Ferris, Perrewe, Anthony, & Gilmore, 2000; Perrewe, Ferris, Frink, & Anthony, 2000).

Research on political skills in work organizations remains largely conceptual and anecdotal. However, the emerging literature on this topic suggests that certain type preferences are likely to be associated with perceptions that an individual possesses these skills. For exam-

ple, Ferris et al. (2000) defined political skill as "an interpersonal style that combines social awareness with the ability to communicate well," and added that politically skilled individuals "behave in a disarmingly charming and engaging manner that inspires confidence, trust, and sincerity" (p. 25). Further, individuals with strong political skills "seek out and relish personal interactions" and are described as "calculating and shrewd about the social connections they form" (Perrewe et al., 2000, p. 117).

These characterizations suggest that political skills are related to preferences for E and T. Such characterizations as "relishing personal interactions" suggest traits related to a preference for E more than I. And, such characterizations as "calculating and shrewd" suggest T preferences rather than F preferences. On the other hand, such characterizations as "charming and engaging," and "inspires confidence, trust" and so on suggest F preferences. For example, some research suggests that F types, when perceived to be office politicians, are rated as more trustworthy than T types (Boozer et al., 2000).

Another argument for seeing E and T preferences as positively related to perceptions of political self-efficacy at work involves the view of organizational life as inherently political (Mintzberg, 1985) and biased generally toward E and T preferences (Reynierse, 1993). To the extent that these assumptions are true, we might expect individuals with preferences for E and T to feel more confident in their ability to play the organizational politics game, largely because it is an E and T kind of politics. Golden (1997) used a similar line of reasoning in discussing her work on type and self-esteem, a construct that involves issues of self-efficacy. In particular, she proposed that "North American dominant cultural bias toward an extraverted thinking style" (p. 42) would impact self-esteem. Her research tended to support this view, with lower self-esteem levels reported by individuals with I and F preferences. Given the assertions that political skill may be related to E and T preferences, we hypothesized that individuals with preferences for Extraversion and Thinking would report higher levels of self-efficacy in political behaviors.

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METHOD

Participants. Participants were selected from both corporate and university educational programs. One portion of the sample came from two private universities in the Southeast and contained both graduate and undergraduate students. Another portion came from the staff of a corporate training organization and their clients from a U.S. Government agency who attended the organization's management development programs. Participants were selected from these sources, in part, because each source had a strong commitment to using the MBTI in their training and education programs. Thus, sample members not only completed the MBTI and received feedback, but they also were exposed to type concepts in a variety of their courses.

Measurement. Participants were administered a two-page questionnaire containing items used to measure study variables. The first 20 questions came from Christie and Geis's (1970) measure of Machiavellianism—the Mach-IV. These questions use a Likert format with a seven-step response scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*). The Mach-IV measures an individual's endorsement of various Machiavellian beliefs, such as "Never tell anyone the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so."

The next items on the questionnaire also were seven-step, Likert-format items. Three items were used to measure perceptions of self-efficacy at office politics, and three measured perceptions of general life stress. The stress items were included as control measures, given the previous discussion of the possible effect of stress on the expression of type preferences. Example items were "I am skilled at playing office politics" and "My life is stressful," respectively.

The final questions asked for age, gender, psychological type, and the participant's level of confidence for each type preference. Age and gender questions were included for control purposes, because of earlier research showing their relationship to Machiavellianism (Mudrack, 1989, 1993). For the psychological type preferences, participants were asked to circle their preference (E or I, S or N, etc.) and then indicate their level of confidence for each preference on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not confident*) to 5 (*very confident*).

Procedures. In both the university and corporate settings, course instructors administered questionnaires. In the case of the corporate training staff,

the immediate supervisor administered the questionnaires. In all cases, participants were told that participation was voluntary, and their responses were anonymous.

RESULTS

Participants. Of 225 questionnaires administered and returned, 187 contained complete results and thus were used for analysis. Fifty-one percent of the respondents were female, and the mean age was 28.6 ($s = 11.9$). The participants reported strong confidence in their type preferences, with mean levels for confidence scores ranging from 4.1 ($s = 0.98$) for the J–P preferences to 4.3 ($s = 1.02$) for the E–I preferences. Participants also reported preferences for E (60.4%), S (55.1%), T (52.4%), and J (69.5%). As might be expected from this distribution, the participant sample was quite similar to a sample of administrators from the *Atlas of Type Tables* (Macdaid, McCaulley, & Kainz, 1986), although F preferences were overrepresented. (SEE TABLE 1, PAGE 5) The results seem reasonable given that the participants largely were engaged in administrative practice and study.

Measures. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and reliability coefficients (coefficient alpha) were calculated for each of the scales used in the study. The results were as follows: Mach-IV ($M = 70.12$, $s = 13.17$, $\alpha = .73$), Political Self-Efficacy ($M = 12.72$, $s = 4.01$, $\alpha = .81$) and General Life Stress ($M = 14.74$, $s = 4.64$, $\alpha = .89$). The results for the Mach-IV were consistent with other research findings (e.g., Valle & Perrewe, 2000).

Type and Machiavellianism. We used hierarchical multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between type and Machiavellianism. Participants' scores on the Mach-IV scale were designated as the dependent variable, and type preferences (dummy coded) were designated as independent variables. Participants' age, gender (dummy coded), and stress scores were used as control variables. The hierarchical analysis involved entering, as blocks, the type variables first, and then the control variables. This two-step approach allowed us to produce results for comparison with earlier studies, as well as to examine the effects of variables not included in earlier work (e.g., stress level).

The results (SEE TABLE 2, PAGE 6) were similar to previous studies (e.g., Elson, 1989); when considering only type preferences, Machiavellian scores were associated with T–F preferences only ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .01$).

TABLE 1. Psychological Types of Respondents and SRTT Comparison With Administrators.

$N = 187$ $+ = 1\%$ of N $I =$ Selection Ratio Index $*p < .05$ $**p < .01$ $***p < .001$

The Sixteen Complete Types				Dichotomous Preferences			
ISTJ $n = 20$ (10.7%) $I = 0.67^*$ +++++	ISFJ $n = 15$ (8.0%) $I = 1.31$ +++++	INFJ $n = 8$ (4.3%) $I = 1.59$ ++++	INTJ $n = 12$ (6.4%) $I = 1.19$ +++++	E 113 (60.4%) $I = 1.08$	I 74 (39.6%) $I = 0.89$	S 103 (55.1%) $I = 0.95$	N 84 (44.9%) $I = 1.07$
ISTP $n = 7$ (3.7%) $I = 1.23$ ++++	ISFP $n = 4$ (2.4%) $I = 0.76$ ++	INFP $n = 2$ (1.1%) $I = 0.25^*$ +	INTP $n = 6$ (3.2%) $I = 0.79$ +++	T 98 (52.4%) $***I = 0.82$	F 89 (47.6%) $***I = 1.32$	J 130 (69.5%) $I = 1.02$	P 57 (30.5%) $I = 0.97$
ESTP $n = 4$ (2.1%) $I = 0.73$ ++	ESFP $n = 11$ (5.9%) $I = 1.91^*$ +++++	ENFP $n = 13$ (7.0%) $I = 1.08$ +++++	ENTP $n = 10$ (5.4%) $I = 1.09$ +++++	Pairs and Temperaments			
ESTJ $n = 24$ (12.8%) $I = 0.73$ +++++	ESFJ $n = 18$ (9.6%) $I = 1.46$ +++++	ENFJ $n = 18$ (9.6%) $I = 2.34^{***}$ +++++	ENTJ $n = 15$ (8.0%) $I = 0.79$ +++++	IJ 55 (29.4%) $I = 0.98$	IP 19 (10.2%) $I = 0.72$	EP 38 (20.3%) $I = 1.17$	EJ 75 (40.1%) $I = 1.05$
				ST 55 (29.4%) $**I = 0.75$	SF 48 (25.7%) $*I = 1.38$	N F 41 (21.9%) $I = 1.25$	N T 43 (23.0%) $I = 0.94$
				S J 77 (41.2%) $I = 0.89$	S P 26 (13.9%) $I = 1.17$	NP 31 (16.6%) $I = 0.84$	NJ 53 (28.3%) $*I = 1.27$
				TJ 71 (38.0%) $**I = 0.78$	TP 27 (14.4%) $I = 0.97$	FP 30 (16.0%) $I = 0.97$	FJ 59 (31.6%) $***I = 1.62$
				IN 28 (15.0%) $I = 0.91$	EN 56 (30.0%) $I = 1.17$	IS 46 (24.6%) $I = 0.88$	ES 57 (30.5%) $I = 1.01$
				ET 53 (28.3%) $I =$ n.a.	EF 60 (32.1%) $I =$ n.a.	IF 29 (15.5%) $I =$ n.a.	IT 45 (24.1%) $I =$ n.a.

Jungian Types (E)

	n	%	Index
E-TJ	39	20.8	n.a.
E-FJ	36	19.3	n.a.
ES-P	15	8.0	n.a.
EN-P	23	12.3	n.a.

Jungian Types (I)

	n	%	Index
I-TP	13	7.0	n.a.
I-FP	6	3.2	n.a.
IS-J	35	18.7	n.a.
IN-J	20	10.7	n.a.

Dominant Types

	n	%	Index
Dt. T	52	27.8	n.a.
Dt. F	42	22.5	n.a.
Dt. S	50	26.7	n.a.
Dt. N	43	23.0	n.a.

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Table 2. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Results for Predictors of Machiavellianism and Perceived Self-Efficacy at Office Politics.

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables— β			
	Machiavellianism		Self-Efficacy	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
Type				
E-I	-.12	-.01	-.22**	-.20**
S-N	.00	.04	.00	.02
T-F	-.19**	-.13	-.33**	-.30**
J-P	.10	.06	.18	.12
Control				
Age		-.40**		-.06
Gender		.17*		.09
Stress		.16*		.10
Summary Statistics				
Step 1				
R^2		.05*		.16**
Step 2				
R^2		.23**		.17**
ΔR^2		.18**		.01

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Thinking types, on average, scored higher than did Feeling types on Machiavellianism. However, the effect of T-F preferences was lessened ($\beta = -.13, p < .10$) with the addition of the control variables in Step 2. Each of these variables was related significantly to Machiavellian scores, with age producing the largest effect ($\beta = -.40, p < .05$), followed by gender ($\beta = .17, p < .05$), and perceived stress ($\beta = .16, p < .05$). Participants who reported higher levels of stress, were younger, and were male achieved higher Machiavellianism scores.

Although T types scored higher than F types on Machiavellianism, this finding does not indicate an absolute statement by type about the level of endorsement of Machiavellian beliefs. Thus, we compared the mean scores for the T and F groups to a theoretical midpoint/mean = 80 using one-sample *t*-tests. The results indicated that mean scores for both T and F groups were significantly ($p < .01$) lower than the theoretical mean. Thus, it appears that both F and T types on average reported that they disagreed with the Machiavellian beliefs contained in the Mach-IV scale.

Type dynamics theory suggests that psychological

type effects should be explored by examining interaction effects among type preferences (Myers et al., 1998). Thus, for exploratory purposes, we conducted an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). Mach-IV scores were the dependent variable, type preferences were the independent variables, and age, gender, and stress level were the covariates. Interaction effects were examined only for the four sets of type preferences, and interactions with covariates were not examined. As with the regression analysis, no significant interaction effects were found.

Type and Perceived Self-Efficacy at Playing Office Politics. We also used hierarchical multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between type and self-efficacy perceptions. Participants' scores on the self-efficacy scale were designated as the dependent variable and, again, type preferences (dummy coded) were designated as independent variables. Participants' age, gender (dummy coded), and stress scores again were used as control variables in a two-step analysis.

Shown in TABLE 2, the results generally supported our hypothesis. On average, E and T types scored higher on self-efficacy (Step 1) than did I and F types

($\beta = -.22, p < .01$, and $\beta = -.33, p < .01$, respectively). The results also indicated an effect for J-P preferences that approached significance, with P types, on average, scoring higher on self-efficacy ($\beta = .18, p < .10$). In contrast to the analysis for Machiavellianism, however, none of the control variables had any significant relationship with self-efficacy, when they were entered in Step 2. Furthermore, the effects for the type preferences remained essentially unchanged, when examined along with control variables.

Although E and T types scored higher on the self-efficacy scale relative to I and F types, this finding does not indicate an absolute statement by type about the level of self-efficacy at playing office politics. Thus, we compared the mean scores for the E, I, T, and F groups to a theoretical midpoint/mean = 12 using one-sample *t*-tests. The results indicated that mean scores for the E and T groups were significantly ($p < .05$) larger than the theoretical mean (= 12), whereas the group means for the I and F groups did not differ significantly. Thus, it appears that E and T types on average reported a positive self-efficacy at playing office politics, whereas the I and F groups on average reported that they “neither agree nor disagree” with the self-efficacy statements (e.g., “I am skilled at playing office politics”). Further exploratory analysis, again using ANCOVA, produced no significant interaction effects for type variables relative to self-efficacy scores.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The present results provide further insight into the relationship between psychological type and political dynamics in the workplace. In particular, the results suggest at least three questions that deserve further consideration.

The first question for future research concerns the salience of specific type preferences to the domain of political dynamics at work: Are some psychological type preferences more salient than others in understanding office politics and the office politician? The results of this study and others focusing on type and office politics (e.g., Boozer et al., 2000) suggest that E-I and T-F preferences are highly salient and that S-N and J-P

preferences are less salient or nonsalient. The current study clearly indicates that E-I and T-F preferences are related to perceptions of self-efficacy at playing office politics. Previous research suggests that the office politician is perceived as E, T, (and J). Moreover, the salience of the E-I and T-F preferences seems supported by research into the related topic of type and conflict-handling styles, which consistently indicates that the E-I and T-F preferences have statistically significant relationships with scales for measuring conflict-handling styles, whereas the S-N and J-P preferences exhibit only sporadically significant correlations (e.g., Chanin & Schneer, 1984; Kilmann & Thomas, 1975; Mills, Robey, & Smith, 1985).

In part, these results portray a picture of organizational life that researchers into type, conflict handling, and office politics have painted for years: that organizational life is a political arena involving the pursuit of self-interests, often in conflict against

the interests of others, and that this organizational life largely reflects the predominant cultural bias toward E and T preferences. Thus, we might find that E and T types—because they are more confident in this arena—actually engage in more political activity and thus are seen as the office politician. While the results of this and other studies cannot methodologically support this cause and effect logic, the conceptual relationships are intriguing.

On the other hand, these results suggest a second question for consideration: Does the lack of salience for certain type preferences suggest that only certain types may behave politically at work? Indeed, if office politics largely is the pursuit of self-interest at work, then should not all types behave politically—assuming that all types work in their own self-interest, at least to some extent? The current results do not seem to rule out this possibility. For example, the results for I and F groups indicate something of a neutral perception of their political skills, not an endorsement of a negative perception. Thus, the I and F groups do not indicate that they lack these skills nor do they deny that they engage in political activities. Rather, it seems possible that all types may have their own “political styles” and dynamics that serve to elicit

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Our third question for consideration focuses on the relationship of type to what might be termed “negative” office politics: Do some preferences predispose certain types to engage in negative, even pathological, political behavior more than other types? Previous research (e.g., Elson, 1989) has indicated that T types scored higher than F types on a measure of Machiavellianism. Further, some researchers have suggested that endorsement of these Machiavellian beliefs reflects psychopathy (McHoskey et al., 1998). Taken together,

these previous findings suggest that T types may be predisposed to pathological political behavior more than F types. The current results, however, do not support this line of reasoning. Clearly the addition of relevant control variables (age, gender, perceived stress level) served to mitigate the relationship of T–F preferences to Machiavellianism. Moreover, the single-sample t-tests indicated both T and F groups on average disagreed significantly with the Machiavellian beliefs. On the whole, the current results seem more supportive of type theory that suggests that all type preferences—given good type development—are nonpathological.

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