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Administração Pública e Gestão Social, vol. 15, núm. 3, 2023

Universidade Federal de Viçosa

Disponível em: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=351575316010>

Political Skill and Reputation for the Performance of Private Agents in Interacting with Regulatory Agencies

Habilidade Política e Reputação para o Desempenho de Agentes Privados na interação com Agências Reguladoras
Habilidad Política y Reputación por el Desempeño de los Agentes Privados en la Interacción con las Agencias Reguladoras

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Recepción: 31 Julio 2022

Aprobación: 01 Julio 2023

Publicación: 24 Agosto 2023



Acceso abierto diamante

Abstract

Research Objective: to analyze the relationship between political skill, individual reputation and the performance of private agents in their interactions with regulatory agencies.

Theoretical Framework: this research departs from the Political Skill and Individual Reputation constructs to analyze the Performance of private agents in the interaction with regulatory agencies.

Method: this research is quantitative, analyzing primary data collected from employees of Brazilian federal regulatory agencies who deal directly with representatives of regulated companies. The questionnaires were applied face-to-face and assessed the respondent's perception of a private sector representative with whom they had a direct relationship in their activities. The scales were adapted from Ferris et al. (2005) for Political Skill, from Zinko, Gentry and Laird (2016) for Personal Reputation, and from Borman and Motowidlo (1993) for Performance evaluation. The analysis techniques included factor analysis and multiple linear regression analysis.

Results: The results showed that not all dimensions of political ability and individual reputation were significantly associated with performance in the analyzed work environment, corroborating the need to study the constructs from a multidimensional perspective. Reputation plays a mediating role in the relationship between political skill and performance, suggesting that the individual's political skill may not be a sufficient condition for maintaining performance in the analyzed environment.

Originality: the work addresses the context of interaction between regulatory agencies and private representatives, exploring characteristics of the private agent that will drive its performance in the defense of interests against public organizations.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions: the results reinforce the multidimensional characteristics of Political Ability and Reputation, in addition to identifying which dimensions of the constructs are associated with performance. A mediation relationship of Integrity and Social Reputation are observed on the relationship between the dimensions of Political Ability and Performance. These results put the role of Political Ability into perspective since its association with performance implies the development of a positive reputation. In addition to contributing to studies on political ability and reputation, the results allow guiding the actions of private organizations in their interaction with regulatory agents.

Keywords: Political skills, Reputation Performance, Regulatory agencies.

Resumen

Objetivo: analizar la relación entre la capacidad política, la reputación individual y el desempeño de los agentes privados en sus interacciones con los organismos reguladores.

Marco teórico: esta investigación parte de los constructos Capacidad Política y Reputación Individual para analizar la actuación de los agentes privados en la interacción con los órganos reguladores.

Metodología: se trata de una investigación cuantitativa, con análisis de datos primarios recopilados de empleados de agencias reguladoras federales brasileñas que tratan directamente con representantes de empresas reguladas. Los cuestionarios se aplicaron cara a cara y evaluaron la percepción del encuestado sobre un representante del sector privado con quien tenía una relación directa en sus actividades. Las escalas fueron adaptadas del trabajo de Ferris et al. (2005) para Habilidad Política, de Zinko, Gentry y Laird (2016) para Reputación Personal, y de Borman y Motowidlo (1993) para evaluación de desempeño. Para el análisis se utilizaron técnicas de análisis factorial y regresión lineal múltiple.

Resultados: los resultados refuerzan las características multidimensionales de Habilidad Política y Reputación, además de identificar qué dimensiones de los constructos se asocian con el desempeño. Se observa una relación de mediación de la Integridad y la Reputación Social sobre la relación entre las dimensiones de Habilidad Política y Desempeño. Estos resultados ponen en perspectiva el papel de la Habilidad Política, ya que su asociación con el desempeño implica el desarrollo de una reputación positiva. Además de contribuir a estudios sobre habilidad política y reputación, los resultados permiten orientar las acciones de las organizaciones privadas en su interacción con los agentes reguladores.

Originalidad: el trabajo aborda el contexto de interacción entre las agencias reguladoras y los representantes privados, explorando las características del agente privado que orientarán la actuación en la defensa de los intereses frente a las organizaciones públicas.

Aportes Teóricos y Prácticos: los resultados encontrados refuerzan las características multidimensionales de la Habilidad Política y la Reputación, además de identificar que las dimensiones de la Reputación tienen un efecto mediador en la relación entre la Habilidad Política y el Desempeño.

Palabras clave: Habilidades políticas, Reputación Actuación, Agencias regulatorias.

Resumo

Objetivo da Pesquisa: analisar a relação entre habilidade política, reputação individual e desempenho de agentes privados em suas interações com órgãos reguladores.

Enquadramento Teórico: a presente pesquisa parte dos construtos Habilidade Política e Reputação individual para analisar o desempenho de agentes privados na interação com órgãos reguladores.

Metodologia: trata-se de uma pesquisa quantitativa, com análise de dados primários coletados de funcionários de agências reguladoras federais brasileiras que lidam diretamente com representantes de empresas reguladas. Os questionários foram aplicados de forma presencial e avaliaram a percepção do respondente sobre um representante da iniciativa privada com quem se relacionasse diretamente em suas atividades. As escalas foram adaptadas dos trabalhos de Ferris et al. (2005), para Habilidade Política, de Zinko, Gentry e Laird (2016), para Reputação Pessoal, e de Borman e Motowidlo (1993) para avaliação do desempenho. Para análises foram empregadas as técnicas de análise fatorial e regressão linear múltipla.

Resultados: os resultados evidenciaram que nem todas as dimensões da habilidade política e da reputação individual se associaram de forma significativa ao desempenho no ambiente de trabalho analisado, corroborando a necessidade do estudo dos construtos sob uma perspectiva multidimensional. Verificou-se que a reputação individual exerce uma função mediadora da relação entre habilidade política e desempenho, sugerindo que a habilidade política do indivíduo pode não ser condição suficiente para manutenção do desempenho no ambiente analisado.

Originalidade: o trabalho aborda o contexto de interação entre agências reguladoras e representantes privados, explorando características do agente privado que orientarão o desempenho na defesa de interesses frente às organizações públicas.

Contribuições Teóricas e Práticas: os resultados reforçam as características multidimensionais da Habilidade Política e da Reputação, além de identificarem quais dimensões dos construtos estão associadas ao desempenho. Observa-se uma relação de mediação da Reputação de Integridade e Social sobre a relação entre as dimensões da Habilidade Política e o Desempenho. Esses resultados põem em perspectiva o papel da Habilidade Política, uma vez que sua associação ao desempenho passa pelo desenvolvimento de uma reputação positiva. Além de contribuir com os estudos sobre habilidade política e reputação, os resultados possibilitam a orientação da atuação de organizações privadas na interação junto a agentes reguladores.

Palavras-chave: Habilidades políticas, Reputação Desempenho, Agências Reguladoras.

INTRODUCTION

The context in which regulatory agencies operate can be characterized as a political arena (Campos, Ávila & da Silva Jr., 2000), marked by conflicts of interest and power struggles between organizations that seek to influence the regulation processes (Hanegraaff, Ploeg & Berkhout, 2020). In this competitive environment, there is a need for interaction with different government actors, civil society representatives, and private actors for good performance in the work environment (Davidovitz & Cohen, 2021, Bustos, 2021). The governance of regulatory agencies requires participation and interaction between public and private organizations to identify problems, share information, and discuss and search for alternatives that allow guiding State intervention (Fraussen & Beyers, 2016; Rex, 2018; Benoît, 2021).

Although from an ideal perspective, the governance of regulatory agencies should allow access to all interested parties and avoid over- or under-representation of interests, one may observe that different organizations achieve different levels of access to regulatory bodies and their decision-makers (Fraussen & Beyers, 2016; Hanegraaff, Ploeg & Berkhout, 2020). Recent research sought to identify attributes of interest groups with better access to decision-makers and identified characteristics such as technical expertise, access to information and knowledge, representativeness, legitimacy, access to resources, and the possibility of supporting policy implementation (Irwin & Githinji, 2015; Fraussen & Beyers, 2016). The interaction between regulatory agencies and private agents occurs through the relations between employees of private organizations and public officers who work in the agencies (Albareda, 2020). Few studies assessed how the characteristics of private-sector representatives influence their interactions with government officers (Irwin & Githinji, 2015). Focusing specifically on individuals in advocacy situations before regulatory agencies, the role of Political Skill and Personal Reputation stands out.

Political Skill may be understood as the ability to effectively understand others in the work environment and use such knowledge to influence behavior toward achieving personal or organizational goals (Ferris et al., 2005). Empirical research often shows the benefits of Political Skills in the workplace (Treadway et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2014; Munyon et al., 2015), as well as in social interactions (Wang & Hall, 2019). Individuals with high political ability are more likely to achieve better working performance, job satisfaction, and career success. Individuals with high political capacity are more likely to achieve better performance and job satisfaction, as well as career success (Cullen, Gerbasi & Chrobot-Mason, 2018; Kwon, 2020; Chen, Jiang & Wu, 2021) because they are noticed as information and knowledge sources by their colleagues, benefiting themselves from such dependency (Ferris et al., 2005; Cullen et al., 2018). They are also more likely to recognize and take advantage of opportunities since they can perceive relevant information in the environment in which they operate (Ferris et al., 2007; Russell et al., 2016; Wihler et al., 2017).

Reputation, in turn, is the social representation of something or someone, formed from a set of information and beliefs built by a community (Bromley, 2001). It can be understood as the identity created from the perception of a group so that the individual has limited control of his reputation since it is built by third parties' perception (Ferris et al., 2005). According to Cavazza, Guidetti and Pagliaro (2014), constructing a positive reputation in the work environment is challenging, time-consuming, and complicated to maintain since a single deviation can compromise the entire effort. Nevertheless, reputation is a powerful social control tool (Cavazza, Pagliaro, & Guidetti, 2014) that considerably influences factors such as performance and career success (Zinko et al., 2017).

Given the above, this research aims to contribute to the literature on the interaction between private agents and public organizations. In this sense, this research aims to analyze the relationship between Political Skill, Personal Reputation, and Performance of private-sector agents in their interactions with regulatory agencies. To achieve the proposed objective, the article is divided as follows. The following section presents the theoretical framework that guides the paper's development. Next, the research method is presented. The results and analyzes are introduced in the fourth section. Finally, the conclusions are displayed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Political Skill

Studies on Political Skill are relatively recent in the literature. Interest in the subject arises from the acknowledgment that organizations as political arenas in which interactions and power games are constant, and the exercise of influence and persuasion are essential facets (Pfeffer, 1981; Mintzberg, 1985). Based on these premises, the concept of Political Skill arises, where individuals inserted in relational contexts seek to persuade others while they are also influenced (Good & Schwegker Jr., 2022).

The Political Skill concept has been applied to several contexts and appears especially applicable to the analysis of relations between public and private organizations in the context of the governance structure of regulatory Agencies. Human resources are critical for the effectiveness of advocacy efforts (Fraussen & Beyers, 2016). At a micro level of analysis, the individual's characteristics and attributes, especially those related to the ability to negotiate, influence, and persuade, can be decisive in convincing decision-makers and, therefore, in the success of the defense of interests.

Political skill emphasizes the individual's cognitive and interpersonal characteristics, encompassing a comprehensive set of social skills that help the individual navigate different organizational environments, gather support, and resource access (Kimura, 2015; Kimura, Bande & Fernández-Ferrín, 2018; Good & Schwegker Jr., 2022). People with high political skills tend to present behaviors that indicate an increased self-awareness about the social environment in which they are inserted, being able to modify their behaviors to better adapt to the situation, demonstrating sincerity, inspiring confidence, and influencing the behavior of others (Ferris et al., 2005; Banister & Meriac, 2014).

Several concepts of political skill have been proposed over the years (Chen, Jiang & Wu, 2021). Kimura (2015) points out that recent studies usually use the definition proposed by Ferris et al. (2005): political skill is the ability to comprehend others effectively and to use such knowledge to influence people to act in favor of personal or organizational goals (Ferris et al., 2005). Political skill is positively associated with several social effectiveness constructs (Banister & Meriac, 2014; Wang & Hall, 2019), yet it differs from other constructs by focusing on particularly efficacious skills in the work environment (Kwon, 2020).

Empirical research usually characterizes Political Skill as a multidimensional construct composed of four distinct but related dimensions: (i) Social Astuteness; (ii) Interpersonal Influence; (iii) Networking Ability; and (iv) Apparent Sincerity (Ferris et al., 2005; Banister & Meriac, 2014; Kimura, Bande & Fernández-Ferrín, 2018; Kwon, 2020; Chen, Jiang & Wu, 2021).

Social Astuteness refers to the ability to interpret your own behavior accurately, as well as that of others in different social contexts. It concerns the capacity for discernment and self-awareness (Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris et al., 2007). For Wang and Hall (2019) Social Astuteness deals with the ability to understand social interactions and accurately interpret one's own and other's behavior. Similarly, Good and Schwegker Jr. (2022) argue that individuals with social astuteness are strong in observing others and interpreting their interactions, indicating that they have a higher social network understanding and self-awareness. Individuals with social astuteness can participate in different social occasions, observe others and perceive subtle social situations to adjust their behaviors according to their influence goals (Chen, Jiang & Wu, 2021).

Interpersonal Influence corresponds to the ability to adapt and properly calibrate behavior to each situation, to influence and obtain specific responses from other people (Ferris et al., 2005; Pfeffer, 2010). Wang and Hall (2019) understand personal influence as the ability to exert influence and obtain the desired responses from other people through effective communication, being pleasant, developing harmony, and making others feel at ease. For Cheng, Jiang and Wu (2021), interpersonal influence is defined as the ability to change the expectations of others in a subtly and convincingly. Kimura (2015) summarizes interpersonal influence as the ability to exert an influence on others subtly and convincingly and to adapt and appropriately calibrate one's behavior to each situation to obtain specific responses from other people.

The Networking Ability deals with the ability to identify and develop networks of relationships, build alliances and coalitions, as well as identify important contacts and build relationships (Ferris et al., 2005; Wang & Hall, 2019). The Networking Ability reflects people's ability to establish and manage various networks and contacts, exchanging knowledge, information, and resources relevant to achieving organizational and personal goals (Russell et al., 2016; Wihler et al., 2017; Good & Schwegker Jr., 2022). People with high political skills are more likely to understand others, identify those who have valuable resources or assets, and build friendly, trusting, and beneficial relationships (Kimura, 2015; Chen, Jiang & Wu, 2021).

Finally, Apparent Sincerity refers to the fact that individuals with high political ability are perceived as people with high levels of integrity, authenticity, and sincerity, even in a context of manipulation (Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris et al., 2007). The behavior of politically skilled people is often seen as honest and sincere, inspiring confidence (Chen, Jiang & Wu, 2021) and enabling the effective practice of influence, as their actions appear genuine and upright (Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris et al., 2007). Individuals with Apparent Sincerity inspire confidence because their actions are not seen as coercive or manipulative, enabling the exercise of influence over others (Good & Schwegker Jr., 2022).

Although it is typically applied in an intra-organizational context, recent studies have used Political Skill in an inter-organizational perspective, maintaining the view that the construct and its dimensions are positively associated with performance in the work environment (Treadway et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2014; Cullen et al., 2018; Chen, Jiang & Wu, 2021). Kimura, Bande and Fernández-Ferrín (2018) confirmed the influence of political skill on sellers' performance due to their ability to relate to consumers and readily adapt to environmental changes. Good and Schwegker Jr. (2022) analyzed the relationship between political skill and salespeople's performance. For the authors, skilled sellers use their interpersonal skills to understand buyers and influence their decisions. Results indicate that political skill is positively associated with building customer relationships and sales performance (Good & Schwegker Jr., 2022).

Personal Reputation

Reputation has been the object of study in public organizations with a focus on its effects on legitimacy, autonomy, and organizational power (Bustos, 2021). Specifically for regulatory agencies, reputation influences the trust of those regulated, facilitating cooperation, and knowledge and information exchange, so that reputation is understood as an asset for these public organizations in their relationship with society (Capelos et al., 2016; Bustos, 2021; Davidovitz & Cohen, 2021; Peci, 2021). This argument also seems valid from an inverse perspective since relationships often involve reciprocity (Yang, 2005). The reputation of individuals representing private organizations is an asset in their relationship with public organizations, for it facilitates access, knowledge and information exchange, and cooperative relationships (Nastase & Muumans, 2020).

Like Political Skill, Personal Reputation also exerts a relevant influence on the work environment performance (Laird et al., 2013; Zinko et al. 2012). Cavazza, Guidetti and Pagliaro (2014) indicate that individuals with a favorable reputation are more likely to access resources through collaboration and social interaction. Graham, Harvey and Puri (2015) identify the manager's reputation as a determining factor for resource access. Zinko et al. (2017) present evidence that reputation can make a difference in the exchange of information between individuals who do not know each other personally. A positive reputation within a group increases the chances of achieving better performance and creating favorable impressions that lead to better performance evaluations (Blickle et al., 2011). Yang, Volet and Mansfield (2018) indicate the supervisor's reputation is a determining factor for students to choose the Doctoral program. Zinko et al. (2012) showcased that a good reputation can also provide more power to the individual, greater autonomy, and career progress. Individuals with a favorable reputation are more likely to be effective in influencing others since they are seen as more trustworthy (Hochwarter et al., 2007; Yang, Volet & Mansfield, 2018).

In addition to influencing performance in the social context, a reputation is a tool for social control (Cavazza, Guidetti & Pagliaro, 2014). Individuals are concerned with the image formed and projected from themselves for a group to which they belong, so they moderate their attitudes and shape their behavior to adapt to each environment for fear of social sanctions (Duran, 2016). When analyzing the voluntary registration process of lobbying and advocacy organizations in the European Union, Nastase and Muumans (2020) identified reputational concerns and benefits as the main driver of the behavior.

Personal reputation refers to a shared collective perception of an individual's attributes (Laird et al., 2013). Reputation is composed of favorable and unfavorable perceptions of different audiences that emerge from past actions and results (Capelos et al., 2016; Peci, 2021), so that reputation is a multifaceted concept, indicating that the same person or organization can have more than one reputation depending on the attributes considered and the target audience (Bromley, 2001; Bustos, 2021). Individuals may have different reputations in different groups. The reputation that an individual carries in the firm he works for is different from the one he has in the family environment or among friends. Even within the same organization, personal reputation may vary in the departments and sectors of the firm (Ferris et al., 2007; Laird et al., 2013).

Mui, Halberstadt and Mohtashemi (2003) proposed a tree of reputation typologies in which the concept is separated into the group and the individual reputation. Usually, reputation study focuses on the organization, but Bustos (2021), in a literature review on the subject in the field of public administration, indicates the need for studies focusing on individual reputation. For Mui, Halberstadt and Mohtashemi (2003) personal reputation can be divided into direct and indirect. Direct reputation refers to perceptions derived from the evaluator's experience and direct observation. Indirect reputation refers to a reputation based on second-hand evidence, such as that acquired through "word of mouth" (Mui, Halberstadt and Mohtashemi, 2003).

Although organizational and personal reputations interact, they may be studied separately (Capelos et al., 2016). Focusing specifically on the individual, Zinko, Gentry and Laird (2016) built a multidimensional model that assesses reputation from three different perspectives that are not necessarily correlated: (i) Task Reputation; (ii) Social Reputation; and (iii) Integrity Reputation. Diverse reputation can affect performance dissimilarly (Capelos et al., 2016). Zinko, Gentry and Laird (2016) argue for the need for studies considering the distinct personal reputation dimensions.

The Task Reputation dimension concerns the personal reputation based on the results obtained from performing assignments (Zinko, Gentry & Laird, 2016). It is based on the perception of competence, knowledge, and effective delivery of results (Capelos et al., 2016). Irwin and Githinji (2015) emphasize the role of competence and technical expertise in the access of interest groups to those responsible for public policies.

Social Reputation is interlinked with conviviality and social interactions with other actors (Ferris et al., 2005). The work environment involves interdependence, and people depend on each other to achieve their personal and organizational goals. The ability to interact plays a fundamental role in how individuals are seen by colleagues and stakeholders. In this context of continuous interplay, social reputation is formed based on interactions (or lack thereof) with other people (Zinko, Gentry & Laird 2016).

The personal reputation built based on integrity (Integrity Reputation) refers to how integrous (or not) the individual is perceived. It reflects an ability to demonstrate empathy and communicate honestly (Capelos et al., 2016). Integrity Reputation is an essential component of personal reputation and is a relevant attribute in different social contexts, whether at work, in the family, or the religious community (Zinko et al., 2012). Integrity is a necessary component of reputation, for it allows the public to go beyond the perception of other behaviors and develop expectations about the individual's actions in any situation (Zinko, Gentry & Laird 2016).

Relationship between Individual Reputation and Political Skill

As previously argued, Political Skill and Personal Reputation are both positively associated with individual performance in the work environment and provide several benefits. Beyond these associations, research indicates that Political Skill is positively associated with Personal Reputation (Liu et al., 2007; Laird, Zboja & Ferris, 2012; Zinko & Rubin, 2015). Developing a personal reputation involves taking deliberate actions to generate and maintain positive impressions of the created identity (Laird, Zboja & Ferris, 2012). Politically skilled individuals have a high ability to develop relationships, are perceived as sincere and authentic, even in manipulation environments, and have the ability to accurately interpret other people's behavior and adapt their attitudes to influence (Banister & Meriac, 2014; Good & Schepker Jr., 2022). Consequently, these individuals inspire greater confidence and transmit signals that lead to a favorable image to others, resulting in higher personal reputation assessments (Ferris et al., 2005; Laird et al., 2013).

Individuals with a high level of political ability combine a keen understanding of social situations with the ability to adjust their behavior to meet changing needs, aspects that inspire confidence and allow influence and control over others (Liu et al., 2007). In addition to direct observation influencing reputation, there is another contributing factor. Political Skill allows individuals to communicate their success sincerely and effectively, thus improving their image and reputation (Laird et al., 2013; Russel et al., 2016). This implies that political ability shapes the way other people perceive and evaluate an individual's reputation (Munyon et al., 2015).

Besides, it is possible to observe personal reputation playing a relevant role in the relationship between Political Skill and Performance. Laird et al. (2013) concluded that political skill provides employees with the ability to highlight their performance favorably, resulting in the formation of positive perceptions of personal reputation. Job performance was positively associated with the personal reputation of politically skilled employees but not with individuals with low political ability levels (Laird et al., 2013). These findings indicate a relevant role of personal reputation in the relationship between political ability and performance. Other studies evidence that reputation plays a mediating role between political skill and performance. Liu et al. (2007) found that the relationship between political ability and job performance was fully mediated by personal reputation.

In these cited studies, Reputation and Political Skill were approached as single-dimension constructs. Advances in research with the constructs have demonstrated the multidimensionality of Political Skill (Ferris et al., 2005; Banister & Meriac, 2014; Kimura, Bande & Fernández-Ferrín, 2018; Chen, Jiang & Wu, 2021) and Personal Reputation (Mui, Halberstadt & Mohtashemi, 2003; Capelos et al., 2016; Zinko, Gentry & Laird 2016). Analysis focusing on the constructs' dimensions may evidence different relationships that better detail the interaction between Personal Reputation and Political Skill (Liu et al., 2007). The present research aims to fulfill this theoretical gap and contribute to the political skill and reputation literature. Figure 1 summarizes the relationships proposed in this theoretical framework.

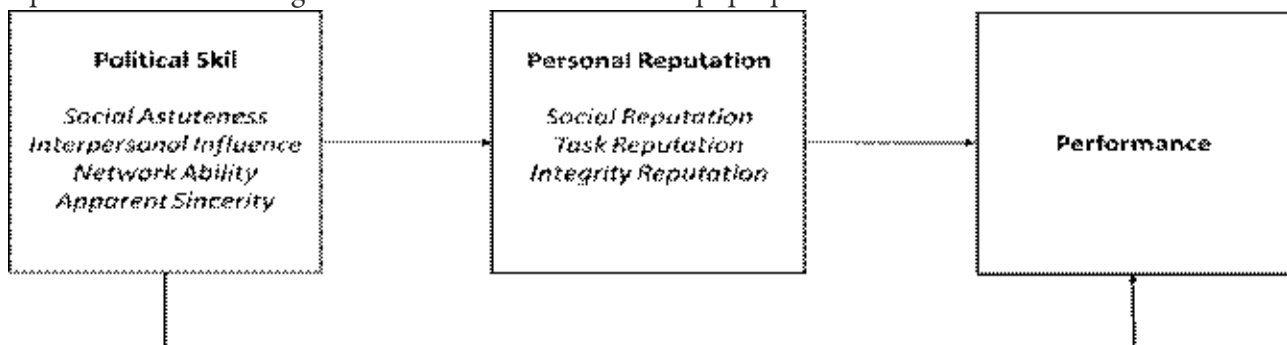


Figure 1
Theoretical Background Synthesis
Source: The authors.

METHOD

Sample and Data Collection

The present study was carried out with information collected through questionnaires applied to employees of Brazilian federal regulatory agencies that deal directly with representatives of regulated companies and interest groups. Four regulatory agencies in the infrastructure sector were surveyed: the National Land Transport Agency (ANTT), the National Civil Aviation Agency (ANAC), the National Waterway Transport Agency (ANTAQ), and the National Electric Energy Agency (ANEEL). The questionnaires were applied in person between June and July 2019 and sought to assess the respondent's perception of a private sector representative with whom he had a direct relationship in his professional activities. Third-party assessments were employed by Laird et al. (2013), Laird, Zboja and Ferris (2012), and Kwon (2020) in studies on reputation, political ability, and performance. The final sample had 82 responses. Table 1 summarizes the number of responses obtained from each Regulatory Agency.

Table 1
Respondents

Agency	Questionnaires
ANTT	33
ANAC	19
ANTAQ	19
ANEEL	11
Total	82

Measures

Political Skill. Political Skill assessment was carried out from a multidimensional perspective, seeking to assess the four dimensions of the construct: Social Astuteness, Interpersonal Influence, Network Ability, and Apparent Sincerity. The Political Skill Inventory (PSI) scale (Ferris et al., 2005) was used since it has already been widely used and validated in previous research on the subject (Chen, Jiang & Wu, 2021).

Personal Reputation. As in the previous construct, Personal Reputation was also evaluated from a multidimensional perspective, based on the measurement of three dimensions: Social Reputation; Task Reputation; and Integrity Reputation. The scale created by Zinko, Gentry and Laird (2016) was used, which encompasses the different dimensions of reputation.

Performance. This research deals with the environment of interaction between civil servants and representatives of regulated companies/ interest groups so that performance was evaluated from a contextual perspective. Contextual performance is associated with interactions with other individuals and behaviors that demonstrate self-discipline, persistence, and willingness to strive at work. It involves behavioral patterns that support the psychological and social context in which task activities are carried out (Scotter, Motowidlo & Cross, 2000). The scale created by Borman and Motowidlo (1993) was used for contextual performance assessment. Items were rated on a scale of 1 (not at all likely) to 7 (extremely likely).

The questions of the first two constructs were evaluated on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). This scale is commonly used in the field of applied social studies (Bryman, 2008) and has a number of points that allow a greater sensitivity of the scale, avoiding the central point, at the same time that it does not demand too much effort from the respondent (Lee and Lings, 2008). Before the application, the scales were adapted to the research context and were submitted for evaluation by four Ph.D. researchers with experience in research on the constructs for verifying the suitability and pertinence of the items for measuring the constructs. The questionnaire was submitted to a pre-test with respondents with a profile similar to the surveyed population to check for problems in understanding the questions and scales used. Chart 1 presents the constructs and items used for measurement.

Chart 1: Constructs and Questions

Construct	Questions
Task Reputation	Q1 This person is known to be an expert in their field. Q2 This person is often asked to advise on work-related matters. Q3 People look to this individual when facing technical issues at work. Q4 This person understands the technical “paths” and procedures of the job.
Social Reputation	Q5 This person wants everyone around to feel nice. Q6 People like this person to be present at social events. Q7 This person is well liked by others. Q8 This person is popular.
Integrity Reputation	Q9 This individual is seen as a person of high integrity. Q10 This person is known to be honest and respectable. Q11 People feel that they can trust this individual. Q12 This person has high character and morals.
Network Ability	Q13 This person spends a lot of time and effort at work relating to other people. Q14 This person finds it easy to build relationships with influential people at work. Q15 This person has a large network of reliable colleagues at work. Q16 At work, this person has good relationships with important people. Q17 This person knows how to use well her relationships at work.
Interpersonal Influence	Q18 This person is able to make people feel comfortable and at ease around her. Q19 This person is able to communicate easily and effectively. Q20 It is easy for this person to develop a good relationship with most people. Q21 This person is good at getting people to like her.
Social Astuteness	Q22 This person understands people very well. Q23 This person is able to perceive the hidden motives and intentions of others. Q24 This person is skilled at introducing herself to others. Q25 This person knows how to say or do the right things to influence others. Q26 This person is able to perceive how others are feeling without being told.
Apparent Sincerity	Q27 This person tries to be truthful in what she says and does when communicating. Q28 People believe this person is sincere in what she says and does. Q29 This person is genuinely interested in people.
Performance	Q30 At work, what is the probability that this person will strictly comply with the instructions of the company he works for? Q31 At work, how likely is this person to cooperate with other team members? Q32 At work, how likely is this person to volunteer for additional tasks? Q33 At work, how likely is this person to look for challenging tasks? Q34 At work, how likely is this person to offer to help others to do some work? Q35 At work, how likely is this person to support and encourage a co-worker with a problem? Q36 At work, what is the probability that this person will take the initiative to solve a problem at work? Q37 At work, how likely is it that this person voluntarily does more than the job requires?

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using factor and multiple regression analysis. Factor analysis was used to summarize the questionnaire variables and verify the factors proposed by the theory. As established in the theoretical framework, Political Skill and Reputation are constructs composed of different dimensions, therefore the variables concerning each construct were analyzed together. Thus, a factorial analysis was performed for each construct and a specific one for Performance. All factor analyses were performed using the principal components technique. The extraction of factors was based on the Eigenvalue. Factors with eigenvalues with values greater than one were extracted. Varimax rotation was used to reinforce that the variables had high-factor loadings in a single factor and improve interpretation. The variables with lower loadings were suppressed. Furthermore, following Hair Jr. et al. (2010) guidelines, Barlett's sphericity test and the KMO indicator were used to verify the adequacy of the factorial analysis. Variables with commonalities below 0.5 were removed.

Once the factors were created, multiple regression analysis was used to verify the association between the created factors and the Performance. Several models were tested to identify the individual associations of the constructs and performance and to check for possible associations between the factors of Political Skill and Reputation. To test the potential mediation relationship of Reputation on the relationship between Political Skill and Performance, regression analyzes were carried out adopting Reputation factors as dependent variables and Political Skill factors as independent variables. The following section presents the results of the statistical analyses.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS DISCUSSION

Factor Analysis

The results of the factorial analysis with the variables on Political Skill resulted in the creation of four factors that explain 74.94% of the original data variance. The KMO coefficient and Barlett's test showed acceptable results (0.851 and $p < 0.00$) according to Hair Jr. et al. (2010) standards. Variables with commonalities below 0.5 or with high factor loading in more than one factor were excluded. Finally, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was applied to assess the suitability of the scales used to measure the factors (Table 2).

Table 2
Factor Analysis – Political Skill variables

Variables	Factor Loadings			
	Influence	Astuteness	Sincerity	Network
Q21 This person is good at getting people to like her.	.857			
Q18 This person is able to make people feel comfortable and at ease around her.	.812			
Q19 This person is able to communicate easily and effectively.	.747			
Q20 It is easy for this person to develop a good relationship with most people.	.711			
Q25 This person knows how to say or do the right things to influence others.		.785		
Q26 This person is able to perceive how others are feeling without being told.		.763		
Q23 This person is able to perceive the hidden motives and intentions of others.		.773		
Q24 This person is skilled at introducing herself to others.		.562		
Q27 This person tries to be truthful in what she says and does when communicating.			.931	
Q28 People believe this person is sincere in what she says and does.			.883	
Q13 This person spends a lot of time and effort at work relating to other people.				.792
Q14 This person finds it easy to build relationships with influential people at work.				.628
Q16 At work, this person has good relationships with important people.				.631
Cronbach 's Alpha	0.853	0.751	0.882	0.613

Note: Note: factor loadings below 0.5 were omitted.

The created factors are aligned with the works of Ferris et al. (2005) and Ferris et al. (2007), so the first factor created brings together variables that deal with the agent's influence capacity, the factor being called Interpersonal Influence. The second factor brings variables related to the social astuteness of individuals, being called Social Astuteness. The third factor is composed of variables related to the individual's noticeable sincerity, so it was named Apparent Sincerity. Finally, the fourth and last factor aggregates variables on the ability to build contact networks which was called Networking Ability. The reliability of the factors was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha. All resulting values are within the parameters considered adequate by Hair Jr. et al. (2010).

Factor analysis with the Reputation construct variables (Table 3) showed adequate KMO coefficient and Barlett's test (0.834 and $p < 0.00$ respectively) and resulted in the creation of 3 factors that explain 81.64% of the original variance. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient showed acceptable values for all factors. The factors correspond to what was proposed by Zinko et al. (2016). so they were called Integrity Reputation, Task Reputation, and Social Reputation.

Table 3
Factor Analysis – Reputation Variables

Variables	Factor Loadings		
	Integrity	Task	Social
Q10 This person is known to be honest and respectable.	.904		
Q12 This person has high character and morals.	.889		
Q9 This individual is seen as a person of high integrity.	.818		
Q11 People feel that they can trust this individual.	.771		
Q2 This person is often asked to advise on work-related matters.		.896	
Q1 This person is known to be an expert in their field.		.878	
Q3 People look to this individual when facing technical issues at work.		.846	
Q4 This person understands the technical “paths” and procedures of the job.		.717	
Q6 People like this person to be present at social events.			.875
Q8 This person is popular.			.798
Q5 This person wants everyone around to feel nice.			.769
Cronbach’s Alpha	.903	.862	.835

Note: Note: factor loadings below 0.5 were omitted.

Finally, factor analysis was performed with the variables associated with the Performance construct. The results (Table 4) showed adequate KMO coefficient and Barlett's test (0.928 and $p < 0.00$ respectively) and indicated the creation of a single factor, called Performance, which explains 73.88% of the original variance. Cronbach's Alpha also showed adequate results, indicating the reliability of the adopted scale.

Table 4
Factor Analysis – Performance Variables

Variables	Factor Loadings
	Performance
Q34 At work, how likely is this person to offer to help others to do some work?	.901
Q37 At work, how likely is it that this person voluntarily does more than the job requires?	.888
Q34 At work, how likely is this person to offer to help others to do some work?	.875
Q36 At work, what is the probability that this person will take the initiative to solve a problem at work?	.858
Q32 At work, how likely is this person to volunteer for additional tasks?	.841
Q34 At work, how likely is this person to offer to help others to do some work?	.832
Q31 At work, how likely is this person to cooperate with other team members?	.818
Cronbach's Alpha	.927

For variable summarizing for subsequent analyses, the factors created were transformed into values from the average of the variables that compose them, according to Hair Jr. et al.'s (2010) guidelines.

Regression Analysis

After the creation of the factors, no missing values were detected, but four observations were eliminated because they were outliers. Multicollinearity diagnosis was performed using Pearson's correlation and did not show the presence of high correlations between the factors. The data were then used in multiple regression analysis, adopting Performance as the dependent variable and the factors related to Political Skill and Personal Reputation as independent variables. Table 5 presents the results.

Table 5
Regression Analysis – Dependent Variable Performance

Construct	Factors	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Political Skill	Apparent Sincerity	0.353**	(-)	0.094	0.088
	Network Ability	-0.930	(-)	-0.102	(-)
	Interpersonal Influence	0.320**	(-)	0.167	0.158
	Social Astuteness	0.163	(-)	0.088	(-)
Reputation	Task	(-)	0.153	0.126	(-)
	Social	(-)	0.413***	0.298**	0.327**
	Integrity	(-)	0.300**	0.241**	0.274**
Constant		1.984**	1.597**	1.280*	1.576**
R ²		0.412	0.512	0.545	0.521
ANOVA Sig.		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Note: Standardized beta coefficients presented.

Legend: * statistically significant at $p < 0.1$; ** statistically significant at $p < 0.05$; *** statistically significant at $p < 0.01$; (-) variable not inserted in the model.

The first model tested included factors related to the Political Skill construct. The results encountered indicated that only the factors Interpersonal Influence and Apparent Sincerity are positively associated with performance in the work environment. These significant results corroborate the perspective that Political Skill is positively associated with Performance (Treadway et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2014; Munyon et al., 2015) also in the advocacy environment.

The individual with high Apparent Sincerity is able to act by demonstrating frankness and honesty in a genuine way, inspiring trust (Banister & Meriac, 2014; Chen, Jiang & Wu, 2021; Good & Schwegker Jr., 2022), even when there are ulterior motives in their attitudes (Ferris et al., 2012). By allowing individuals to be viewed favorably (Kimura, 2015), Apparent Sincerity enables the practice of influence (Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris et al., 2007). The results confirm these perspectives also for the environment of interaction with public officers so that the cognitive ability to appear sincere and arouse confidence are relevant for a good performance in the interaction with employees of regulatory agencies.

Interpersonal Influence, in turn, corresponds to the ability to adapt and calibrate behavior properly to each situation (Ferris et al., 2005; Pfeffer, 2010) to communicate effectively for persuasion and, thus, obtain specific responses (Kimura, 2015; Wang & Hall, 2019). Interpersonal Influence is responsible for making the selected behavior of politically qualified individuals more effective (Whiler et al., 2017). According to Wang and Hall (2019) and Kwon (2020), this dimension refers to communication competence. Those with the ability to influence have a particular way of communicating, which positively interferes with the quality of their relationships and performance perceptions (Liu et al., 2014). In an environment of competition for access to the regulatory agency (Hanegraaff, Ploeg & Berkhout, 2020; Davidovitz & Cohen, 2021), such as the one analyzed, this characteristic tends to stand out, which explains the positive association found.

Despite Social Astuteness being described as a relevant dimension of political skill (Kwon 2020) associated with job performance (Munyon et al. 2015), the results found did not corroborate this perspective. This dimension refers to the ability to accurately interpret one's own behavior as well as that of others in different social contexts (Chen, Jiang & Wu, 2021; Good & Schwegker Jr., 2022). The Networking Ability, in turn, deals with the ability to identify and build relationships with relevant contacts (Whiler et al., 2017; Chen, Jiang & Wu, 2021; Good & Schwegker Jr., 2022), resulting in benefits for the individual (Ferris et al., 2005; Wang & Hall, 2019).

Social Astuteness and Networking ability did not show a statistically significant association with Performance. In both cases, the lack of significance can be explained by public agencies' standardized service procedures that ensure equal treatment between private agents (Campos et al., 2000). This feature would reduce possible variations in social contexts and would mainly drive the behavior of public and private agents, diminishing the role of Social Astuteness and Networking Ability and their influence on performance.

The second model tested deals only with factors related to Personal Reputation. The findings indicate that only Social Reputation and Reputation for Integrity were positively associated with Performance. Concerns and benefits with reputation induce the behavior of individuals (Cavazza, Guidetti & Pagliaro, 2014; Nastase & Muumans, 2020). Considering that it is an environment of constant interaction, the ability to make people feel comfortable (which is related to Social Reputation) and to be perceived as honest and sincere (which is associated with Integrity Reputation) (Capelos et al., 2016; Zinko, Gentry & Laird 2016) are confirmed as individual assets directly related to their performance in the work environment.

Differently, the Task Reputation, which is the reputation based on the results obtained in the execution and performance of their activities (Capelos et al., 2016; Zinko, Gentry & Laird 2016), did not present significant results. Competence and technical expertise are usually described as resources employed by interest groups to access public agencies and decision-makers (Irwin & Githinji, 2015; Fraussen & Beyers, 2016). Such a perspective does not seem to be supported by the results. Eventually, in the analyzed context,

a favorable reputation in terms of technical capacity and knowledge is a minimum necessary condition for access, not being reflected in a differential capable of differentiating the performance of private agents.

Models 3 and 4 jointly tested the Political Skill and Reputation factors. All variables were included in Model 3, whereas in Model 4 only the variables with statistical significance in any of the previous models were included. Results showed that only Social Reputation and Integrity Reputation maintained a significant and positive association with performance. Interpersonal Influence and Apparent Sincerity factors (related to Political Skill), initially statistically significant (according to Model 1), became non-significant with the inclusion of Personal Reputation factors. These results indicate that Reputation dimensions have a mediation effect on the relationship between Political Skill and Performance.

The relationship between Political Skill and Performance is mediated by individual reputation, suggesting that, in the analyzed context, political skill is an antecedent of reputation and that its influence on the individual's perception of performance occurs from the construction of a reputation in the work environment. This perspective corroborates the arguments of Laird, Zboja and Ferris (2012) and Laird et al. (2013) that the individual's political skill positively influences the perception of other people and the construction of reputation.

The mediating role of Personal Reputation on the relationship between Political Skill and Performance had already been previously described in the literature (Liu et al., 2007), however, the authors treated the constructs as unidimensional. Personal Reputation and Political Skill are multidimensional concepts (Ferris et al. 2005; Zinko, Gentry & Laird, 2016). Addressing the construct's dimensions turn it possible to detail the mediating effect and observe that, at least in the context of the regulatory agencies, the mediation relationship occurs between specific dimensions of the constructs. This finding constitutes a theoretical contribution from the present work.

For testing the association between Political Skill and Personal Reputation factors (Banister & Meriac, 2014; Zinko & Rubin, 2015; Good & Schwegker Jr., 2022), two complementary models were tested assuming Personal Reputation factors with statistically significant results as dependent variables and Political Skill factors with significant results as independent variables. Table 6 presents the results.

Table 6
Regression Analysis – Dependent Variable Reputation Factors

Construct	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	
		Social Reputation	Integrity Reputation
Political Skill	Apparent Sincerity	0.300**	0.614***
	Interpersonal Influence	0.486***	0.076
Constant		0.481	2.174***
R ²		0.478	0.431
ANOVA Sig.		0.000	0.000

Note: Standardized beta coefficients presented.

Legend: * statistically significant at $p < 0.1$; ** statistically significant at $p < 0.05$; *** statistically significant at $p < 0.01$.

Both models tested proved to be significant and with an expressive capacity to explain the dimensions of Reputation (R^2 coefficient of 0.47 and 0.43). The results show that the Apparent Sincerity factor is positively associated with Social Reputation and Integrity Reputation. The ability to appear sincere is fundamental to how the reputation for being a person of integrity and honesty is projected onto other individuals (Laird et al., 2013; Russel et al., 2016). Sincerity allows politically qualified individuals to merge any ulterior motives if they are present (Ferris et al., 2012). Thus, people with high levels of Apparent Sincerity are perceived by others as sincere and honest, even when they are not, generating a positive Integrity Reputation. Therefore, it is possible to state that those who manage to appear sincere in their actions are more likely to be seen by the public as beings of high integrity.

The Interpersonal Influence factor, in turn, is significantly and positively associated with the Social Reputation factor but does not show significant results with the Integrity factor. Interpersonal Influence is understood as the individual's ability to adapt their behavior and exert influence to change the expectations of others in a subtle and convincing way (Kimura, 2015; Cheng, Jiang & Wu, 2021). Social Reputation, in turn, concerns the reputation developed from living and interacting in the social environment (Ferris et al., 2005; Zinko, Gentry & Laird, 2016), so that the positive association between the constructs seems natural. Unlike the Reputation of Integrity, which requires the development of an image perceived as honest, frank and upright (Capelos et al., 2016; Zinko, Gentry & Laird 2016). While the first reputation derives from affability in interactions, the second imposes a higher expectation of behavior.

FINAL REMARKS

This paper aimed to analyze the relationship between Political Skill, Personal Reputation, and Performance of private agents in their interactions with regulatory agencies. The interaction between public and private-sector agents in the context of regulatory policies is still an incipient theme in Brazil. There are no national surveys focused on identifying the relevant attributes of private agents for their job performance interacting with regulatory agencies. To achieve the objective, information was collected on the perception of employees of regulatory agencies about a representative of the private sector with whom they relate directly in their professional activities.

The results corroborate the perspective that both Political Skill and Personal Reputation are positively associated with a positive perception of the private agent's performance in their interactions with public organizations. In the present research, Political Skill and Personal Reputation were evaluated from a multidimensional perspective, which made it possible to specify which dimensions are effectively relevant to performance in the analyzed work environment, besides highlighting the interactions between the dimensions of the constructs.

When analyzing the dimensions of Political Skill, the results indicate that only the dimensions of Interpersonal Influence and Apparent Sincerity were significantly related to performance. Considering the dimensions of Personal Reputation, only the dimensions of Social Reputation and Integrity Reputation were significantly associated with the criterion variable. These results corroborate the perspective that different contexts may demand distinct aspects of Political Skill and Personal Reputation and that these constructs should be analyzed from a multidimensional perspective since their dimensions' influence may vary.

These results contribute to the field of studies by filling a gap identified in the literature and expanding discussions to the context of intra-organizational relationships between public and private actors in a regulatory environment. The results also indicated a mediating effect of the significant dimensions of Individual Reputation on the dimensions of Political Skill, indicating that the relationship between political ability and performance occurs indirectly from a positive reputation. The evidence of the interaction between the dimensions of the analyzed constructs and the identification of which dimensions

are associated with performance in the studied environment are contributions of this work to the literature.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest characteristics to be enhanced by representatives of private organizations working with regulatory agencies. Despite being a politicized field of action, beyond political skill, it is necessary to develop a positive reputation. Specifically, the results suggest that the exclusive presence of political ability may not be a sufficient condition for maintaining performance in the analyzed context. There is a need for efforts to build and maintain a positive image by private organizations in their relationships with public organizations in regulatory environments.

This research has its limitations. The sample is small and was collected in a non-random way, which does not allow population inferences about the results found. Given these limitations, although the results corroborate the literature, further research on public-private relationships in the context of regulatory agencies is still needed to confirm or refute the findings presented here. Even though the results do not allow population inference, they establish research hypotheses to be tested in future studies.

The political skill, individual reputation, and performance of private agents were analyzed from the perspective of the public interlocutor. Other analysis perspectives of (regulated firms, for instance) or combinations of points of view could be used to analyze the same proposed relationships. Likewise, there are many ways to measure and analyze an individual's performance. Future research may assess the influences of political skill and personal reputation on different forms of individual performance in inter-organizational relationships. Furthermore, future longitudinal studies may evaluate how these behavior patterns may change or not over time and in which situations.

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