

# THE ROLES OF POLITICAL SKILL AND INTRINSIC MOTIVATION IN PERFORMANCE PREDICTION OF ADAPTIVE SELLING

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## ABSTRACT

*Previous studies have long recognized and examined adaptive selling behavior as an effective selling behavior in current selling situations. Although some studies assumed and revealed moderating factors that affect the effectiveness of adaptive selling behavior, few studies examined an individual's skill as a moderator on this effect. This study focuses on political skill as a type of skill that has been recently found to have positive effects on sales performance. In addition, this study includes intrinsic motivation as an additional moderator that enables political skill to be invested for effective selling behavior. Our analysis of 249 salespeople and 145 supervisors in a matching sample largely supports our hypotheses that the positive effects of adaptive selling behavior on sales performance are the highest when both political skill and intrinsic motivation are high.*

## Keywords:

Adaptive selling behavior, Political skill, Intrinsic motivation, Sales performance.

## **1. Introduction**

The model of adaptive selling developed by Weitz et al. (1986) suggested that not only adaptive selling behavior enhances sales performance but also its implementation is not necessarily a sufficient condition for achieving a high level of sales performance. A better understanding of the effectiveness of adaptive selling requires a contingency perspective that includes the moderators affecting the influence of adaptive selling behavior on sales performance. Although some empirical studies tested the moderating effects of situational factors, few studies have examined how a salesperson's skill influences the effectiveness of adaptive selling behavior (Frank & Park, 2006; Giacobbe et al., 2006).

In this study, we aim to address this research agenda by examining how political skill influences the relationship between adaptive selling behavior and sales performance. Previous studies have recognized the political nature of organizational life and revealed that political skill positively affects individual performance. Political skill can be regarded as one of the most important individual skills at work because recent studies reported that it explains more variance in individual performance than other types of abilities and skills (Blickle et al., 2011; García-Chas et al., 2015; Semadar et al., 2006). Moreover, some studies found the contribution of political skill to the enhancement of salespersons' performance (Blickle et al., 2012; Li et al., 2017). However, prior studies have not provided us with an understanding of how political skill enhances a salesperson's performance as they failed to examine the relationship between political skill and actual selling behavior. This study addresses this research gap by examining the effect of political skill on the outcomes of adaptive selling behavior.

However, recent studies suggested that when individuals are insufficiently motivated toward work, the politically-skilled ones use their skill to enhance their own career success regardless of—and sometimes at the expense of—their contribution to the organization (Harris et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2016). Therefore, this study includes the intrinsic motivation to work as another moderator.

Using an original data set of supervisor–salesperson dyads in Spain, this study specifically examined how salespersons' political skill and intrinsic motivation affect the contribution of adaptive selling behavior to sales performance. By examining the three-way interactions of the focal variables, this study can provide us with a novel insight through the integration of two separate streams of research: (a) adaptive selling and (b) political skill in sales contexts.

## **2. Hypothesis Development**

### ***2.1. Adaptive Selling***

Adaptive selling is defined as the “altering of sales behaviors during a customer interaction or across customer interactions based on perceived information about the nature of the selling situation” (Weitz et al., 1986: p. 175). By using different sales presentations across sales encounters and making adjustments during the encounters, salespersons who engage in adaptive selling tend to achieve high levels of sales performance (Spiro & Weitz, 1990). Although Weitz et al.'s (1986) original model of adaptive selling assumes that the effectiveness of adaptive selling behavior depends on the characteristics of sales situations,

empirical studies have shown that adaptive selling behavior leads to high sales performance in wide situations. In fact, a meta-analysis confirmed the positive effect of adaptive selling behavior on sales performance (Frank & Park, 2006). Román and Iacobucci (2010) stated that although personal selling is much more costly than many of today's electronic alternatives, personal selling might still be the most effective means of marketing communication. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that adaptive selling behavior is one of the key behaviors for a salesperson to be a high performer.

## **2.2. Performance Dimensions**

Since adaptive selling behavior is a kind of personal selling behavior, its effectiveness can be evaluated by individual-level performance. Griffin et al. (2007) proposed and validated three dimensions of individual-level performance: (a) individual task proficiency, (b) individual task adaptivity, and (c) individual task proactivity. These dimensions can serve as an integrative framework of individual performance since they cover performance in formalized, as well as emergent roles thereby reflecting the situation of work contexts that involve uncertainty.

Individual task proficiency is defined as “the degree to which an employee meets the known expectations and requirements of his or her role as an individual” (Griffin et al., 2007, p. 331). Individual task adaptivity is “the degree to which individuals cope with, respond to, and/or support changes that affect their roles as individuals” (p. 331). And individual task proactivity refers to “the extent to which individuals engage in self-starting, future-oriented behavior to change their individual work situations, their individual work roles, or themselves” (p. 332).

These dimensions can be a measure of the effectiveness of adaptive selling behavior. Task proficiency has been the focus of traditional performance management system, and thus it can be regarded as a measure of salesperson's performance, including the result of adaptive selling. Task adaptivity reflects a worker's effectiveness in dealing with uncertain situations. Task proactivity is required in work where individuals need to identify improved ways of working under their own initiative, without relying on directions from supervisors. In short, task adaptivity and task proactivity reflect the effectiveness in work that requires flexible and proactive behavior. Therefore, both task adaptivity and task proactivity can be a performance measure of adaptive selling behavior.

## **2.3. Moderators**

However, execution of adaptive selling behavior may not necessarily lead to a high level of individual performance measured by Griffin et al.'s framework. The reason is that empirical findings have shown mixed results in the relationship between adaptive selling behavior and sales performance (see Giacobbe et al., 2006, for a review).

Weitz et al.'s (1986) model assumes the existence of moderators that affect the effectiveness of adaptive selling behavior. Specifically, it proposes the characteristics of the selling environment and the abilities (knowledge) and skills (information collection) of the salesperson as moderators. Although some empirical studies revealed the moderating effects of the selling situation on the relationship between adaptive selling behavior and

sales performance (Giacobbe et al., 2006; Porter et al., 2013), prior studies have provided us with little understanding of the moderating effects of salespersons' skill.

**Political Skill:** Weitz et al. (1986) argued that salespeople's procedural knowledge enhances the effectiveness of adaptive selling. However, the development of procedural knowledge may not be sufficient for effective adaptive selling. Adaptive selling requires salespeople to calibrate their sales approach to sales situations. By definition, such calibration should be based on their keen understanding of information that can be obtained through the interactions with customers. Therefore, as Lankau and Scandura (2002) argued, procedural knowledge is not a sufficient learning outcome for adaptive selling in the current business environment. They suggested two important types of personal learning. First, is the "relational job learning" that is defined as "increased understanding about the interdependence or connectedness of one's job to others" (Lankau & Scandura, 2002, p. 780). Another is the "personal skill development" that means "acquisition of new skills and abilities that enable better working relationships" (p. 780).

Because it is a skill that can be developed through these types of personal learning (Blass & Ferris, 2007) and may be important for adaptive selling, this study focuses on political skill. The literature on adaptive selling has not investigated political skill, which is defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use this understanding to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ferris et al., 2005, p. 127). Although previous studies showed positive effects of political skill on salespeople's performance (Blickle et al., 2012; Li et al., 2017), they did not examine the relationship between political skill and concrete sales behavior. By examining the interaction effects of adaptive selling behavior and political skill, this study addresses this research gap.

Political skill is conceptualized as a skill that consists of four dimensions: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity. Based on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991) and social capital theory (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), we can infer that each of these dimensions allows a salesperson to effectively implement adaptive selling behavior. Social cognitive theory suggests that individuals regulate their behavior based on information and cues from self, others, and environments (Bandura, 1991). Political skill promotes such regulation. Social astuteness enables a salesperson to keenly understand both himself/herself and others and calibrate as well as adjust the sales approach to different and changing sales situations. A salesperson high in interpersonal influence can appropriately adapt and calibrate his/her behavior to each sales situation to elicit favorable responses from customers.

Social capital theory suggests that social capital in the form of high levels of trust work as a resource for individuals (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). A salesperson with a high level of networking ability can effectively develop trusting relationships with customers. Such trusting relationships provide him/her with deeper understandings of each customer that contributes to adaptive selling. Because apparent sincerity enables a salesperson to appear to customers as having high levels of integrity, authenticity, sincerity, and genuineness, adaptive selling behavior will not be perceived as tactical or deceitful. In addition, these four dimensions of political skill contribute to building high-quality relationships with supervisors and colleagues (Epitropaki et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2010, 2012). Utilizing such

relationships, politically-skilled salespersons can acquire information and resources that are useful for effective implementation of adaptive selling.

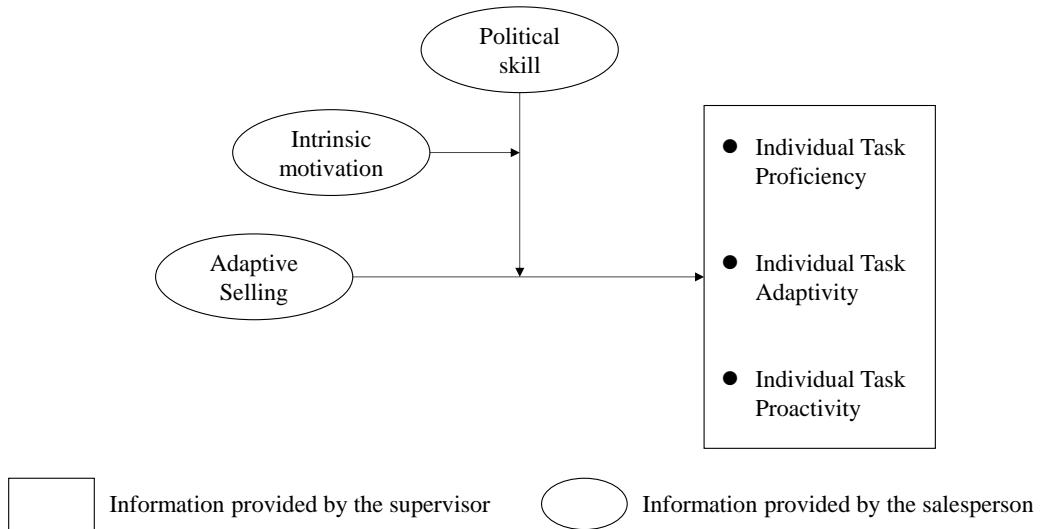
***Intrinsic Motivation:*** The argument in the previous section assumes that politically-skilled salespersons use their political skill to implement adaptive selling behavior and to develop foundational resources useful for adaptive selling. However, prior studies suggested that politically-skilled individuals do not necessarily use their political skill to achieve high levels of task performance or career success within an organization. For example, Yang et al. (2016) found that the negative relationship between work–family conflict and affective commitment was stronger in employees who were high in political skill than in those who were low in political skill. A more concrete example for the argument is provided by Harris et al. (2009). Their study showed that in a low-LMX situation, politically-skilled employees are more likely to seek employment elsewhere than those that are not politically skilled. These studies suggested that when the current work environment is not personally attractive, a politically-skilled individual does not devote his/her political skill to achieve high levels of task performance.

Therefore, we can assume that when salespeople are intrinsically motivated to the current work, they are likely to use their political skill to enhance their effectiveness of selling activities. On the contrary, when they are not intrinsically motivated, they are likely to use their political skill not for selling activities, but for other activities, such as ingratiation toward supervisors and external networking (Fang et al., 2015; Tocher et al., 2012; Treadway et al., 2007). Consistent with these arguments, results of recent empirical studies in management and other fields indicated that individuals' skills leads their high performance only when their intrinsic motivation is high (Hill et al., 2016; Logan et al., 2011). Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

*Hypotheses (a)-(c):* Political skill and intrinsic motivation interact to affect the positive relationship between adaptive selling behavior and a salesperson's performance: (a) task proficiency, (b) task adaptivity, and (c) task proactivity. Specifically, they operate as a three-way interaction: (1) when both political skill and intrinsic motivation are high, the positive relationship between adaptive selling behavior and salesperson's performance will be stronger; (2) when both political skill and intrinsic motivation are low, the relationship between adaptive selling behavior and salesperson's performance will be weaker; and (3) when either political skill or intrinsic motivation is high and other is low, the relationship will be moderate.

We summarize our model in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: Proposed model.



### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Sample and Procedure

We collected the data from salespeople and their supervisors working for 145 enterprises located in Spain. The selected enterprises met the following criteria: (1) the enterprises had commercial recognition and had been in business for at least ten years; (2) the salespeople performed the sales activities described in Marshall et al. (1999), and (3) the salespeople attended to business customers. The sample covered a variety of industries, including manufacturing, technology, financial services, construction, wholesale, retail, and insurance. The final sample consisted of 249 matched supervisor-salesperson dyads, which included 249 salespersons and 145 supervisors. Of the 249 salespersons, 71.9% were male, the average age was 39.1 years, and the average sales experience was 11.7 years. Of the supervisors, 83.4 were male and their average age was 45.3 years.

#### 3.2. Measures

The salesperson survey contained measures of adaptive selling behavior, political skill, intrinsic motivation, sales experience, and demographic questions. The supervisor survey contained scales measuring salesperson's performance. The questionnaire items were initially written in English and then translated into Spanish using the back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1986). All variables were measured by 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree").

**Adaptive Selling Behavior:** To assess the respondents' adaptive selling behavior, we used Robinson et al.'s (2002) five-item scale. The respondents were asked to rate the degree of their adaptive selling behavior. Sample items are: "When I feel that my sales approach is

not working, I can easily change to another approach” and “I like to experiment with different sales approaches.” The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for this scale was .79.

**Political Skill:** To assess the respondents’ political skill, we used 18 items of the Political Skill Inventory (PSI) developed by Ferris et al. (2005). Sample items are: “I spend a lot of time and effort at work networking with others”; “I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me”; and “I have good intuition or savvy about how to present myself to others.” The reliability of this measure was sufficient ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

**Intrinsic Motivation:** Intrinsic motivation was measured using a three-item scale developed by Evans et al. (2007). Sample items are: “(I) Obtain a sense of accomplishment from my work.” and “(I) Feel a sense of personal growth and development in my work.” The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for this scale was .87.

**Salesperson’s Performance:** Salesperson’s performance was measured using a nine-item scale developed by Griffin et al. (2007) based on the supervisor survey data. This scale comprises three items for individual task proficiency ( $\alpha = .86$ ), three items for individual task adaptivity ( $\alpha = .87$ ), and three items for individual task proactivity, respectively ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

**Control Variables:** Using a sample of engineers, García et al. (2015) showed a significant positive relationship between professional experience and Griffin et al.’s (2007) three dimensions of individual performance. Therefore, in addition to demographic variables such as age and gender, we controlled sales experience in the analysis. Gender was coded with men as 1 and women as 0. Age and sales experience were measured by years.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with a maximum likelihood estimation demonstrated good fit of the data to a six-factor correlated model ( $\chi^2 = 909.73$ ; d.f. = 532;  $\chi^2$ /d.f. = 1.71;  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA = .05; TLI = .90; CFI = .91; IFI=.91). All factor loadings were significant. We compared relative fit of this six-factor model with alternate models including five factors and four factors. On every occasion, the fit of the six-factor model was significantly better than the fit of any alternative model<sup>1</sup>. To assess discriminant validity, Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) approach was used. The confidence intervals for the correlation between pairs of variables were calculated. As none of the intervals included the value one, discriminant validity between the constructs was assumed.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and correlations) of all variables. As for control variables, gender correlates negatively with individual task proficiency ( $r = -.17$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and individual task proactivity ( $r = -.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ), suggesting that in our sample, female salespeople are higher in task proficiency and task proactivity than male salespeople. Neither age nor sales experience has significant correlations with each of three individual performance dimensions. Adaptive selling, political skill, and

<sup>1</sup> Five-factors model (AS, ITP, ITProa, ITA, IM+PS):  $\chi^2 = 1189.30$ ; d.f. = 535;  $\chi^2$ /d.f. = 2.22;  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA = .08; TLI = .83; CFI = .85; IFI=.85; Four-factors model (AS, IM, PS, ITP+ITProa+ITA):  $\chi^2 = 1167.35$ ; d.f. = 539;  $\chi^2$ /d.f. = 2.16;  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA = .07; TLI = .84; CFI = .85; IFI=.85

intrinsic motivation significantly and positively correlate with all individual performance dimensions.

**TABLE 1: Descriptive Statistics of and Correlations among Study Variables.**

	<i>M</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>
1. Age	39.1	8.0								
2. Gender	0.7	0.5	.20*							
3. Sales experience	11.7	7.9	.77*	.11						
4. Adaptive selling	5.8	0.8	.05	-.01	.13*					
5. Political skill	5.4	0.8	.19*	.13	.12	.37**				
6. Intrinsic	5.6	0.9	.26*	.10	.24*	.28**	.47**			
7. Task proficiency	5.8	1.0	-.01	-	.12	.19**	.21**	.22**		
8. Task adaptivity	5.6	1.1	-.02	-.07	.05	.19**	.19**	.18**	.70**	
9. Task proactivity	5.4	1.2	-.04	-	.06	.23**	.14*	.19**	.55**	.56**

\*\* p < .01, \* p < .05

#### 4.2. Hypothesis Testing

We tested our hypotheses using the PROCESS Macro (Model 3; Hayes, 2013). The three-way interaction of adaptive selling behavior, political skill, and intrinsic motivation was a significant predictor of task proficiency ( $B=.33$ ,  $p<.01$ ), thus confirming hypothesis (a). Adding the three-way interaction provided an incremental increase in  $R^2$  of .03 ( $p<.01$ ). We used a technique for probing the calculation of regions of significance via the Johnson–Neyman technique (Table 2). Among employees reporting intrinsic motivation below 3.72 (3.6% of participants), political skill reduced the positive effect of adaptive selling behavior on individual task proficiency. For those with intrinsic motivation scores above 6.13 (21.4%), political skill augmented the positive effect of adaptive selling behavior on task proficiency. For those salespeople with intrinsic motivation scores above 3.72 and below 6.13, political skill did not moderate the relationship between adaptive selling behavior and task proficiency. Thus, the moderating effect of political skill on the relationship between adaptive selling behavior and individual task proficiency is, in itself, dependent on the salesperson’s intrinsic motivation.

**TABLE 2: Conditional Effect of Political Skill x AS\* on ITP at Values of Intrinsic Motivation.**

<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
2.0000	-1.0972	.4427	.0139	-1.9693	-.2250
2.2500	-1.0142	.4163	.0156	-1.8344	-.1941
2.5000	-.9312	.3901	.0178	-1.6998	-.1627
2.7500	-.8433	.3642	.0207	-1.5657	-.1309
3.0000	-.7653	.3385	.0247	-1.4321	-.0985
3.2500	-.6823	.3132	.0303	-1.2993	-.0654
3.5000	-.5994	.2883	.0387	-1.1674	-.0314
3.7235	-.5252	.2666	.0500	-1.0504	.0000
3.7500	-.5164	.2641	.0517	-1.0366	.0038
4.0000	-.4334	.2405	.0728	-.9073	.0404



<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
4.2500	-.3505	.2180	.1093	-.7800	.0791
4.5000	-.2675	.1969	.1756	-.6554	.1204
4.7500	-.1845	.1776	.2999	-.5344	.1653
5.0000	-.1016	.1608	.5283	-.4183	.2152
5.2500	-.0186	.1474	.8997	-.3089	.2717
5.5000	.0644	.1383	.6419	-.2080	.3368
5.7500	.1473	.1344	.2741	-.1174	.4121
6.0000	.2303	.1362	.0922	-.0381	.4987
<b>6.1340</b>	<b>.2748</b>	<b>.1395</b>	<b>.0500</b>	<b>.0000</b>	<b>.5496</b>
<b>6.2500</b>	<b>.3133</b>	<b>.1435</b>	<b>.0300</b>	<b>.0306</b>	<b>.5960</b>
<b>6.5000</b>	<b>.3962</b>	<b>.1555</b>	<b>.0114</b>	<b>.0900</b>	<b>.7025</b>
<b>6.7500</b>	<b>.4792</b>	<b>.1712</b>	<b>.0055</b>	<b>.1420</b>	<b>.8164</b>
<b>7.0000</b>	<b>.5622</b>	<b>.1896</b>	<b>.0033</b>	<b>.1886</b>	<b>.9358</b>

\*AS=Adaptive selling, ITP=Individual task proficiency.

Regarding individual task adaptivity, the three-way interaction term was not significant ( $B=.14$ ,  $p=.16$ ). Thus, hypothesis (b) was not supported. Specifically, political skill affects the strength of the relationship between adaptive selling behavior and individual task adaptivity, regardless of the salesperson's intrinsic motivation.

The three-way interaction of adaptive selling behavior, political skill, and intrinsic motivation was also a significant predictor of task proactivity ( $B=.44$ ,  $p<.001$ ), thus confirming hypothesis (c). Adding the three-way interaction provided an incremental increase in  $R^2$  of .05 ( $p<.001$ ). According to the Johnson–Neyman regions of significance (Table 3), among salespeople reporting intrinsic motivation below 3.90 (3.6% of participants), the interaction of political skill and adaptive selling was negatively related to individual task proactivity so that political skill reduced the positive effect of adaptive selling on individual task proactivity. For those with intrinsic motivation scores above 5.65 (54.0%), political skill augmented the positive effect of adaptive selling behavior on task proactivity. For those salespeople with intrinsic motivation scores above 3.90 and below 5.65, political skill did not moderate the relationship  $p$  between adaptive selling behavior and task proactivity. Thus, we can conclude that the moderating effect of political skill on the relationship between adaptive selling behavior, and individual task proactivity is contingent on the salesperson's level of intrinsic motivation.

TABLE 3: Conditional Effect of Political Skill x AS\* on ITProa at values of intrinsic motivation.

<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
<b>2.0000</b>	<b>-1.3448</b>	<b>.4523</b>	<b>.0033</b>	<b>-2.2360</b>	<b>-.4537</b>
<b>2.2500</b>	<b>-1.2342</b>	<b>.4254</b>	<b>.0041</b>	<b>-2.0722</b>	<b>-.3962</b>
<b>2.5000</b>	<b>-1.1236</b>	<b>.3986</b>	<b>.0052</b>	<b>-1.9088</b>	<b>-.3383</b>
<b>2.7500</b>	<b>-1.0129</b>	<b>.3721</b>	<b>.0070</b>	<b>-1.7459</b>	<b>-.2799</b>
<b>3.0000</b>	<b>-.9023</b>	<b>.3458</b>	<b>.0097</b>	<b>-1.5836</b>	<b>-.2210</b>
<b>3.2500</b>	<b>-.7916</b>	<b>.3200</b>	<b>.0141</b>	<b>-1.4220</b>	<b>-.1613</b>
<b>3.5000</b>	<b>-.6810</b>	<b>.2946</b>	<b>.0217</b>	<b>-1.2614</b>	<b>-.1006</b>
<b>3.7235</b>	<b>-.5704</b>	<b>.2698</b>	<b>.0356</b>	<b>-1.1019</b>	<b>-.0389</b>
3.7500	-.5021	.2549	.0500	-1.0042	.0000

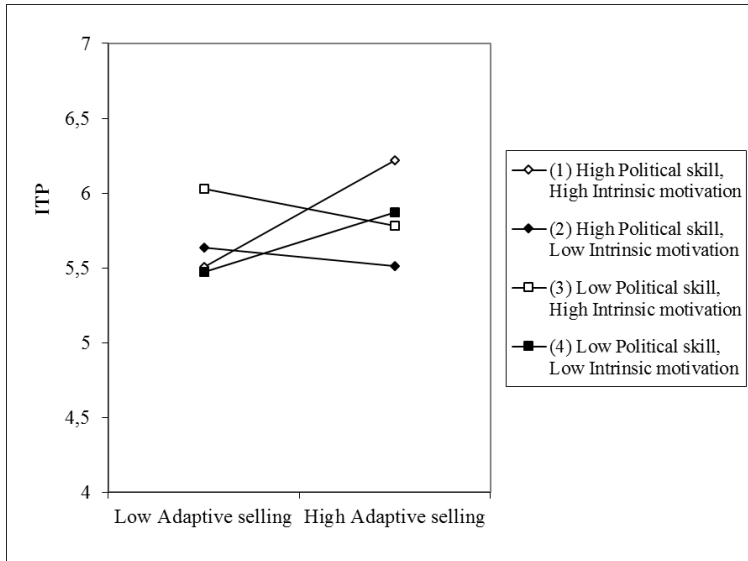
<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Effect</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
4.0000	-.4597	.2458	.0626	-.9439	.0245
4.2500	-.3491	.2228	.1185	-.7880	.0898
4.5000	-.2384	.2012	.2371	-.6348	.1579
4.7500	-.1278	.1815	.4819	-.4853	.2297
5.0000	-.0172	.1643	.9169	-.3408	.3065
5.2500	.0935	.1506	.5353	-.2032	.3901
5.5000	.2041	.1413	.1499	-.0742	.4824
<b>5.6500</b>	<b>.2722</b>	<b>.1382</b>	<b>.0500</b>	<b>.0000</b>	<b>.5444</b>
<b>5.7500</b>	<b>.3147</b>	<b>.1373</b>	<b>.0228</b>	<b>.0442</b>	<b>.5853</b>
<b>6.0000</b>	<b>.4254</b>	<b>.1392</b>	<b>.0025</b>	<b>.1512</b>	<b>.6996</b>
<b>6.2500</b>	<b>.5360</b>	<b>.1466</b>	<b>.0003</b>	<b>.2472</b>	<b>.8249</b>
<b>6.5000</b>	<b>.6467</b>	<b>.1589</b>	<b>.0001</b>	<b>.3337</b>	<b>.9596</b>
<b>6.7500</b>	<b>.7573</b>	<b>.1749</b>	<b>.0000</b>	<b>.4128</b>	<b>1.1018</b>
<b>7.0000</b>	<b>.8679</b>	<b>.1938</b>	<b>.0000</b>	<b>.4862</b>	<b>1.2497</b>

\*AS=Adaptive selling, ITProa=Individual task proactivity.

Plots for the two significant three-way interactions (task proficiency and task proactivity) are displayed in Figure 2 and Figure 3. The effect of adaptive selling behavior on task proficiency is larger for politically-unskilled salespeople who also have low levels of intrinsic motivation (Figure 2, slope 4). This effect is greatest for those employees who are high in political skill and intrinsic motivation (slope 1). The slope difference test (Dawson & Richter, 2006) shows a significant slope difference between slope 1 and slope 2 ( $t=1.98$ ;  $p=.04$ ) confirming that for politically-skilled salespeople, intrinsic motivation moderates the relationship between adaptive selling behavior and individual task proficiency. In addition, there is a significant slope difference between slope 1 and slope 3 ( $t=2.42$ ;  $p=.01$ ), showing that, for high intrinsic motivation individuals, the level of political skill makes a difference to the association between adaptive selling behavior and individual task proficiency.

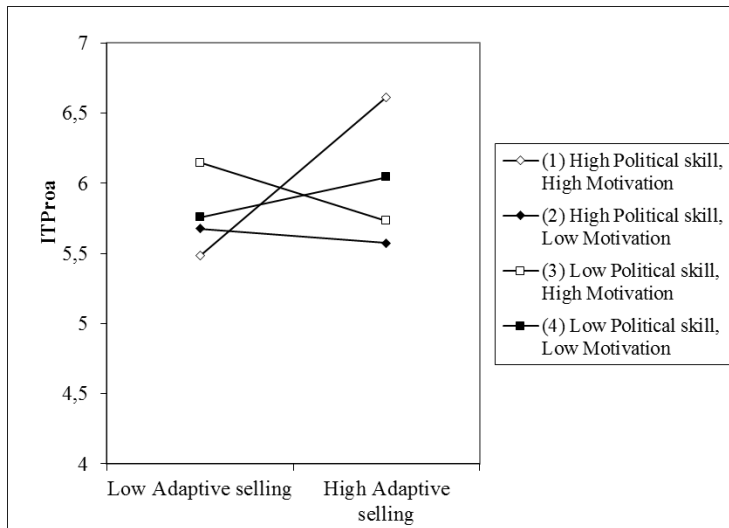
Regarding task proactivity, the results are quite similar to task proficiency. The effect of adaptive selling behavior on task proactivity is larger for politically-unskilled individuals who are also low motivated (Figure 3, slope 4). However, the greatest effect is for those salespeople who are both high in political skill and highly intrinsically motivated (slope 1). The slope difference test (slope 1 and 4) showed that this difference was significant ( $t=2.32$ ;  $p=.02$ ). In addition, the significant difference between slope 1 and slope 2 ( $t=3.02$ ;  $p<.001$ ) confirmed that for politically-skilled individuals, the level of intrinsic motivation makes a difference to the relationship between adaptive selling behavior and task proactivity. Moreover, for those salespeople who have a high level of intrinsic motivation, their political skills moderate the relationship between adaptive selling behavior and individual task proactivity (the difference between slope 1 and slope 3:  $t=3.96$ ;  $p<.001$ ).

FIGURE 2: Three-way Interaction Effects on ITP\*.



\*ITP=Individual task proficiency.

FIGURE 3: Three-way Interaction Effects on ITPProa\*.



\*ITP=Individual task proficiency.

## **5. Discussion**

This study examined the interactive moderating effects of political skill and intrinsic motivation on the relationship between adaptive selling behavior and salespersons' performance. The results largely support our hypotheses showing that when both salespersons' political skill and intrinsic motivation are high, the positive effects of adaptive selling behavior on task proficiency and tasks proactivity are higher than when both political skill and intrinsic motivation are low or when either political skill or intrinsic motivation is high and the other is low.

However, regarding task adaptivity, we found that political skill strengthens the positive effects of adaptive selling behavior, regardless of the level of intrinsic motivation. One possible explanation for this unexpected finding is that task adaptivity does not always lead to the completion of the core task or to proactive initiation of change and improvement. Therefore, it is possible that politically-skilled but intrinsically-unmotivated salespeople may be able to adapt to change out of necessity (task adaptivity), but do not complete their core task (task proficiency) because they do not persist in their effort. For example, salespeople low in intrinsic motivation may not tend to make much effort to network and collect information from their networking. Moreover, although salespeople high in political skill but low in intrinsic motivation may adapt to change reactively, they may not be likely to proactively initiate change (task proactivity). Therefore, a high level of political skill is not sufficient for effective functioning of adaptive selling behavior, regarding task proficiency and task proactivity.

### ***5.1. Research Implication***

Although prior studies have revealed situational moderators on the relationship between adaptive selling behavior and sales performance (Giacobbe et al., 2006; Porter et al., 2013), few studies have examined the moderating effect of individuals' skill. Because it is an essential skill for salespeople, recent studies have focused on political skill and showed that it helps salespeople to achieve a high level of sales performance (Blickle et al., 2012; Li et al., 2017). However, existing studies did not reveal and explain why political skill enhances sales performance. Integrating the study of adaptive selling behavior and that of political skill, this study filled this research gap. Specifically, this study showed that political skill can enhance sales performance through enhancing the effectiveness of adaptive selling behavior. Politically-skilled salespeople can read a situation and effectively interact with customers. Moreover, they can develop interpersonal networks and use them to acquire social support or collect useful information for adaptive selling.

In addition, this study also revealed the moderating effects of intrinsic motivation. Previous studies on political skill showed that politically-skilled employees do not necessarily use their political skill to achieve high performance and contribute to organizational goals; rather they can behave politically for their own personal benefit, regardless of the organizational goals (Wu et al., 2013). Our findings of three-way interaction suggest that for politically-skilled salesperson to achieve high sales performance through adaptive selling, they should be intrinsically motivated to their current work. In short, consistent with some recent studies on the relationship between skill and intrinsic motivation (Hill et al., 2016; Logan et al., 2011), this study revealed that intrinsic motivation is a fundamental

condition that directs employees to concentrate their general skills, like political skill, to contribute to organizational goal (Becker, 1962; Ferris et al., 2005, 2007).

### ***5.2. Practical Implications***

The present study offers several practical implications. The findings suggest that salespeople can enhance the effectiveness of adaptive selling behavior by improving their political skill. However, although recent studies recognize the importance of political skill as a leadership skill (Kapoutsis et al., 2016; Kimura, 2015), few researchers and practitioners seem to regard political skill as a useful skill in selling situations. Therefore, it should be recommended that managers include political skill in training programs for salespersons.

As noted in the previous sections, individuals can use their political skill for self-serving purposes rather than organization-serving purposes. When an employee is only extrinsically motivated but not intrinsically motivated, he/she may use political skill for impression management behavior and make his/her abilities and performance appear better than they really are. Therefore, in addition to training politically-skilled employees, managers need to direct efforts to intrinsically motivate these employees. For example, managers can provide positive feedback or create an autonomy-supported workplace climate (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

### ***5.3. Strengths and Limitations***

This study contains some strengths, worthy of highlighting. First, this study collected data from multiple sources (i.e., supervisors and salespeople), which helped to minimize concerns related to common source variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Second, we integrated two streams of research (i.e., adaptive selling behavior and political skill) that can be related but have been separated in prior studies. Third, based on the three dimensions of performance developed by Griffin et al. (2007), we conceptualized and measured performance in an integrative way, which enables us to consider proactive and change-oriented aspects of salesperson's performance. Fourth, this study uses a sample of salespeople working in Spain, where relatively few studies on political skill have been conducted in the field of management.

However, we should also mention some limitations of this study. First, since this study used only a Spanish sample, we cannot determine whether our results can be generalized to other contexts. Second, since our data of adaptive selling behavior and political skill were self-reported, we cannot deny the possibility that the respondents overestimated the levels of their behavior and skill. Finally, although we recognize that prior research assumed the four-dimension structure of political skill and some empirical studies conducted dimensional analysis (e.g., Ferris et al., 2005; Shi et al., 2011), we do not implement dimensional analysis of the effect of political skill. The reason for this is that our data of political skill did not show the four-dimension structure suggested in the previous studies. Therefore, to avoid confusion, this study examines political skill as a unified construct.

## 6. Conclusions

By using a sample of Spanish salespeople and their supervisors, this study revealed that political skill and intrinsic motivation interact to enhance the positive effect of adaptive selling behavior on salespersons' performance. This finding suggests that to implement adaptive selling behavior successfully, salespeople need to develop their political skill and have high levels of intrinsic motivation. It also shows that political skill contributes to not only internal political tactics but also effective selling behavior. Future research can investigate the effect of each dimension of political skill to further explore the mechanism of how political skill enhances the effectiveness of adaptive selling.

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