Thriving in Central Network Positions: The Role of Political Skill

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Theory suggests that thriving, the feeling of vitality and experience of learning, is in large part determined by the social environment of employees' workplace. One important aspect of this social environment is the position of an individual in the communication network. Individuals who are sources of communication for many colleagues often receive benefits because other employees depend heavily on these individuals for information; however, there may also be drawbacks to this dependence. In particular, employees who are central in the communication network may experience more role overload and role ambiguity and, in turn, lower levels of workplace thriving. Individual differences are also likely to explain why some individuals are more likely to thrive. Relying on research that views organizations as political arenas, we identify political skill as an individual difference that is likely to enhance workplace thriving. Using a moderated-mediation analysis, we find support for the indirect cost of communication centrality on workplace thriving through role overload and role ambiguity. Furthermore, we identify both direct and moderating effects of political skill. Specifically, political skill mitigates the extent to which employees experience role ambiguity, but not role overload, associated with their position in the communication network, and these effects carry through to affect thriving. Star employees are often central in communication networks; with this in mind, we discuss the implications of our findings for employees and organizations.

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Thriving, the combined feeling of vitality and belief that one is learning, is a construct gaining increasing attention because of its association with many positive outcomes (Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005). Employee thriving is related to higher performance, organizational citizenship behavior, job satisfaction and commitment, as well as better general health and lower levels of burnout and job strain (Porath, Spreitzer, Gibson, & Garnett, 2012; Spreitzer, Porath, & Gibson, 2012). Spreitzer et al. (2005) put forth a theory in which they suggest that thriving is in large part determined by the social environment in which employees work. They theorize that thriving is socially embedded because energy is generated and learning often occurs through social interactions with others at work.

In this study, we rely on the Spreitzer et al. (2005) socially embedded model of thriving as a theoretical backdrop to examine a key aspect of the social environment that likely affects thriving at work—an individual's position in the communication network. Some employees are central sources in the communication network, providing information to many colleagues, while other employees have fewer connections. Relationships with colleagues can create energy and enable learning (Spreitzer et al.); however, when employees maintain many connections with others, they may find these relationships taxing, stressful, and possibly overwhelming (Bavelas, 1950; Glanzer & Glaser, 1961; Leavitt, 1951; Oldroyd & Morris, 2012; Soltis, Agneessens, Sasovova, & Labianca, 2013). In particular, they may feel overburdened or confused by a large number of coworkers depending on them for information. These stressors (role overload and role ambiguity) may explain a negative relationship between communication centrality and thriving.

In their model, Spreitzer et al. (2005) propose that the work context, including how information is exchanged, influences the extent to which individuals engage in active, purposeful actions (i.e., agentic behaviors; Bandura, 2001). They describe agentic behaviors as the engine that promotes thriving because these actions create resources individuals need to thrive at work. For example, one agentic behavior Spreitzer et al. describe is heedful relating, or acting in ways that demonstrate an understanding of one's own job and how it fits with the job of others to accomplish organizational goals. They argue that heedful relating positively affects thriving because helping others increases affective and physiological energy and promotes vitality.

Agentic behaviors are also common in descriptions of organizations as political arenas. In organizations, employees face limited resources, manage competing interests and priorities, and engage in the use of power and influence (Mintzberg, 1985; Pfeffer, 1981). Drawing on this view of organizations as a highly politicized context, we identify political skill as an individual difference that will enable thriving. Political skill is "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ferris et al., 2005: 127). Politically skilled individuals understand the social and political work environment and consider others' needs when influencing and interacting with them. These capabilities help politically skilled individuals more successfully enact strategic, purposeful actions, which are needed to navigate the

Figure 1
Hypothesized Moderated-Mediation Model
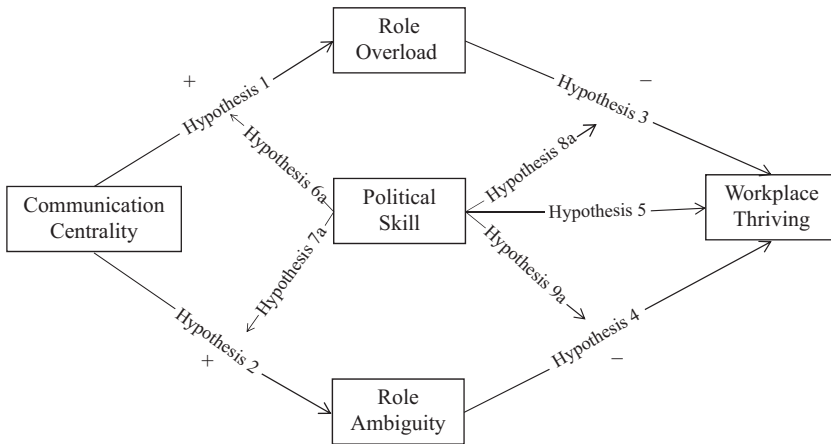
Hypothesis 6b: First-Stage Moderated Indirect Effect of Communication Centrality on Workplace Thriving Through Role Overload

Hypothesis 7b: First-Stage Moderated Indirect Effect of Communication Centrality on Workplace Thriving Through Role Ambiguity

Hypothesis 8b: Second-Stage Moderated Indirect Effect of Communication Centrality on Workplace Thriving Through Role Overload

Hypothesis 9b: Second-Stage Moderated Indirect Effect of Communication Centrality on Workplace Thriving Through Role Ambiguity

social and political workplace environment and relate effectively with colleagues. This individual difference will explain why some employees are more likely to thrive in general and experience less stress and strain when many colleagues rely on them as a primary source of communication.

In the present study, we seek to expand our understanding of thriving by considering negative aspects of the social and relational work environment that deplete energy and disrupt learning as well as an individual difference that may mitigate these relationships and enable thriving. We use a moderated-mediation model (see Figure 1) to explain why employees who are a primary source of information for others may experience lower levels of thriving. We propose role overload and role ambiguity as stressors that arise when a large number of colleagues depend on an employee for information. These stressors, created by the social context, are detrimental to thriving. Furthermore, we identify political skill as an individual difference that makes it easier for some employees to thrive, including allowing them to experience less role overload and role ambiguity related to their position in the workplace communication network and also equipping them to more effectively handle these stressors and, thus, not experience as large of a decrement in thriving related to the role overload and role ambiguity they do experience.

We examine this model in the human resource (HR) division of a global organization in technology development and manufacturing industry. This division closely mirrors the larger organization. It is geographically dispersed and has a very flat, matrix structure. Functional groups have different priorities and objectives. Employees are encouraged to reach out directly to others for information. As a norm, employees have a large amount of decision-making discretion, and the use of formal channels is minimized. One participant characterized the experience as follows: "There is a lot of grey. We are empowered to make decisions." Pfeffer (1981) and Mintzberg (1983, 1985) suggested political skill is especially important in this type of work environment. Testing the proposed model will provide a better understanding of how and why some individuals are able to thrive in central positions in the communication network. This information will help organizations better prepare and support central employees who are often the rising stars and top performers in organizations.

Theoretical Development

Thriving employees experience progress and momentum marked by the acquisition of knowledge and a sense of vigor. They feel alive and energized in their work and experience growth in terms of acquiring and applying new knowledge and skills (Spreitzer et al., 2005). They also demonstrate better and more innovative performance (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Porath et al., 2012), are more committed and satisfied, are healthier, and experience less burnout (Porath et al.; Spreitzer et al., 2012). Employee thriving is a critical component of building sustainable organizations and is important to the well-being of individual employees (Spreitzer et al., 2012). Understanding the factors that contribute to or inhibit employee thriving will help organizations create situations that foster productive experiences and behaviors and help employees manage their own development (Paterson, Luthans, & Jeung, 2014).

The central premise of the socially embedded model of thriving is that "when individuals are situated in particular work contexts they are more likely to thrive" (Spreitzer et al., 2005: 539). This model identifies social features of the workplace (e.g., widespread information sharing, trust and respect, and decision-making discretion) that enable agentic behaviors like heedful relating. These features are thought to facilitate thriving because development often occurs through interactions with others (Miller & Stiver, 1997). In particular, connections to others provide opportunities for learning through shared discussions, working together, and observing others (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Gherardi, Nicolini, & Odella, 1998; Wenger, 1998). Individuals also derive enthusiasm, energy, and excitement from these exchanges (Miller & Stiver, 1997). For this reason, Spreitzer et al. described vitality and learning as "deeply rooted in social systems" (539).

Indeed, connections to others have the potential to generate energy and create opportunities for learning (e.g., Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009), but there are potentially negative ways connections to others can affect thriving (e.g., uncivil interactions; Spreitzer et al., 2012). The impact of workplace relationships on thriving deserves greater attention. In particular, Spreitzer et al. (2005) suggest that information exchange is a contextual feature that will likely promote thriving. Thus, in this study, we examine the extent to which others depend on an employee for communication as a contextual factor that may influence an employee's thriving. In the next section, we describe why employees may experience role stressors

related to many colleagues depending on them as a communication source and how these stressors may ultimately result in lower levels of thriving. Later, we discuss how political skill may help employees thrive, including mitigating some of these relationships.

The Demands of Being a Central Source of Communication

Individuals who are central in communication networks are key sources of information, expertise, and resources for their coworkers (Emerson, 1962; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974). In these positions, individuals have the opportunity to share, modify, and withhold information, which allows them to influence others and the perceptions others hold (Rice & Aydin, 1991). Central positions in communication networks are often described as powerful because others depend on central individuals for information (Emerson), and this power is amplified by the extent to which individuals who seek information from central employees have fewer alternative sources of information (i.e., are more reliant on them). As such, central positions in communication networks are related to many positive outcomes, including greater influence (e.g., Friedkin, 1993; Ibarra, 1993), higher ratings of workplace popularity (Scott & Judge, 2009) and performance (e.g., Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001; Roberts & O'Reilly, 1979; Sparrowe, Liden, Wayne, & Kraimer, 2001), as well as increased likelihood of promotion (Brass, 1984, 1985).

Emerging research suggests that the outcomes associated with having many network connections may not all be positive (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Maintaining a large number of relationships can be detrimental to efficiency and effectiveness because information advantages are offset by the time and resources needed to maintain many connections (Elfring & Hulsink, 2007; Mariotti & Delbridge, 2012; Steier & Greenwood, 2000). Employees in central positions are often inundated with requests from others, receive redundant information, and experience information overload (e.g., Oldroyd & Morris, 2012; Uzzi, 1997). Being overly connected can stifle creativity (Baer, 2010; Zhou, Shin, Brass, Choi, & Zhang, 2009). Furthermore, we propose that being a source of communication for many colleagues is likely to affect the extent to which employees thrive because of the role stressors employees experience related to their position in the communication network. The identification of these stressors (i.e., role demands) will help to explain how the social context in which employees are embedded influences their thriving.

Role demands on central employees. The social environment within organizations has long been understood by the roles individuals fill. Roles are the behavioral expectations attached to positions in an organized set of social relationships (Merton, 1957; Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970; Stryker, 2007; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Roles are often designated by formal titles (e.g., manager, subordinate, and specialist) but also apply to positions without formal designations. Structural positions in workplace communication networks have their own expectations. For employees who are central to communication networks, these expectations include acting as a source of information for many colleagues. Each connection brings different expectations, and as a result of their connections to a large number of people who depend on them for information, individuals central to communication networks experience a variety of obligations and expectations (Goode, 1960). The extent to which colleagues depend on an individual as a communication partner because they do not have many other connections will further add to the demands placed on the central employee.

Employees who occupy central positions in the communication network may or may not be suited for the demands placed on them. When individuals have difficulty fulfilling their role demands, they experience role strain (Goode, 1960; Jackson & Schuler, 1985; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Thus, we utilize role theory and focus on role overload and role ambiguity as two key role demands (stressors) that help explain the psychological experience of being central in the communication network and the impact of this structural position on thriving. These two role stressors represent different demands placed on employees as a result of their position in the communication network.

First, central employees receive more requests for information (Oldroyd & Morris, 2012), which makes them especially susceptible to the experience of role overload. Role overload refers to a high volume of demands individuals experience as part of their role, which makes it difficult for employees to fulfill their obligations (Kahn et al., 1964). In a communication network, serving as a source of information for many other employees will result in greater communication demands (e.g., requests for information, advice, referrals), which may prevent employees from fulfilling not only these requests but other aspects of their jobs as well (Soltis et al., 2013). Oldroyd and Morris suggest that star employees are especially likely to attract the attention of colleagues because they are seen as a valuable resource. Being sought out for information is beneficial in some ways; it provides access to information and a platform to influence others (Burkhardt & Brass, 1990). Yet these requests also represent demands, and the volume of these demands is substantially higher for central employees as a result of the affiliatory nature of networks.

Hypothesis 1: Communication centrality is positively related to role overload.

Second, central employees may experience greater ambiguity with regard to their role. Although some connections may bring similar requests for information, relationships often involve different expectations (Goode, 1960). Thus, central employees may be left wondering: Which requests are the most important? How much time should I allocate toward responding to others as opposed to completing my own task responsibilities? This experience of confusion regarding one's role is a stressor called role ambiguity (Kahn et al., 1964; Rizzo et al., 1970). Confusion in terms of prioritizing information exchanges is likely higher for central employees, as they have a greater number and variety of requests from their colleagues.

Hypothesis 2: Communication centrality is positively related to role ambiguity.

Role demands and workplace thriving. As mentioned previously, the theoretical model proposed by Spreitzer et al. (2005) emphasizes the socially embedded nature of thriving. Relationships are a conduit of energy and learning; however, a large number of colleagues depending on a central employee as a communication partner creates communication demands that are likely to lead to the experience of role overload and role ambiguity. Spreitzer et al. contend that the mitigation of role stressors is not sufficient to ensure individuals thrive at work; however, this does not undermine the importance of understanding whether role stressors impede employees' thriving. Emerging research has found that positive as well as negative antecedents are important to consider when understanding the experience of thriving and other positive outcomes in the workplace (e.g., Bono, Glomb, Shen, Kim, & Koch, 2013; Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, & de Chermont, 2003).

Substantial evidence indicates that role stressors (e.g., role ambiguity and role overload) have a negative impact on employees. These stressors are associated with lower performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment and also greater emotional exhaustion and tension (see the meta-analysis by Örtqvist & Wincent, 2006). We extend research in this area by examining the relationship between role overload/role ambiguity and workplace thriving. While not yet examined in the literature, we expect role overload and role ambiguity to inhibit employees' experiences of thriving as these stressors disrupt the ability of employees to heedfully relate to colleagues. Central individuals are responsible for a disproportionate amount of information exchange and, thus, experience frequent interruptions and information overload that prevent them from performing their primary work tasks and sharing valuable information with others (Oldroyd & Morris, 2012). If individuals do not have the capacity to provide valuable information to others, or are overwhelmed by the demands of their role, their capacity to heedfully relate to others will be diminished and they will be less likely to thrive. Furthermore, in a review of the role theory literature, Sluss, van Dick, and Thompson (2011) emphasized the importance of role clarity for employees to act proactively with meaning, confidence, competence, and self-determination (Spreitzer, 1996). They identified role ambiguity as a job stressor (Schaubroeck, Ganster, Sime, & Ditman 1993) that prevents employees from understanding the expectations of their own role and how they should relate to others (Rizzo et al., 1970). For some employees, the abundant connections that place them at the center of the workplace communication network may lead to role overload and role ambiguity and indirectly negatively affect thriving.

Hypothesis 3: Role overload is negatively related to employees' experiences of thriving.
Hypothesis 4: Role ambiguity is negatively related to employees' experiences of thriving.

Engaging in Agentic Workplace Behavior, Avoiding Stressors, and Reducing Strain

Another major component of the Spreitzer et al. (2005) conceptual model is agentic workplace behaviors. These active, purposeful actions (Bandura, 2001) are described as the engine of thriving because when individuals engage in agentic behaviors, they generate resources that promote vitality and learning (e.g., new knowledge, affective and relational resources). Theorizing (Spreitzer et al., 2005) and subsequent research (e.g., Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Niessen, Sonnentag, & Sach, 2012; Paterson et al., 2014; Porath et al., 2012, Spreitzer et al., 2012) has yielded insights into aspects of the social environment that enable agentic behaviors and employee thriving but resulted in little knowledge about the characteristics of individuals that enable thriving (see recent studies by Paterson et al. and by Wallace, Butts, Johnson, Stevens, & Smith, in press, as exceptions). Having established the rationale for how individuals' position in the workplace communication network may influence their experience of thriving through two role stressors, we now identify an individual difference that will help certain employees thrive in the workplace.

Political skill and thriving.   Recognizing the importance of politics and influence in organizations, researchers introduced the term political skill to describe the ability some individuals have to understand social and political aspects of their workplace and use that understanding to effectively influence others (Mintzberg, 1983, 1985; Pfeffer, 1981). Because of this

ability, politically skilled individuals are more popular among their coworkers (Cullen, Fan, & Liu, 2014), have better reputations (Blickle, Schneider, Liu, & Ferris, 2011; Liu, Ferris, Zinko, Perrewé, Weitz, & Xu, 2007), are seen as more promotable (Gentry, Gilmore, Shuffler, & Leslie, 2012), and achieve higher individual performance ratings (e.g., Ferris et al., 2005; Semadar, Robins, & Ferris, 2006) and greater levels of performance from the teams they lead (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004). The positive effects of political skill have been confirmed meta-analytically for task and contextual performance (Bing, Davison, Minor, Novicevic, & Frink, 2011; Munyon, Summers, Thompson, & Ferris, in press) and also for self-efficacy, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, productivity, personal reputation, and career success (Munyon et al.).

Political skill has been described as "a comprehensive pattern of social competencies, with cognitive, affective, and behavioral manifestations, which have both direct effects on outcomes, as well as moderating effects on predictor-outcome relationships" (Ferris, Treadway, Perrewé, Brouer, Douglas, & Lux, 2007: 291). In this study, we propose that political skill enables thriving in the workplace through direct effects as well as moderating relationships. Political skill is a construct that captures the "how" (not the "what") of influence (Ferris et al., 2005; Ferris, Treadway, Brouer, & Munyon, 2012). Influence behaviors are active, purposeful actions in which one individual attempts to interact with another so that the person responds in a desired way. Politically skilled individuals are more effective in eliciting desired responses because they understand others' needs and adjust their behavior to meet them. This ability allows politically skilled individuals to have more control in their life, which Bandura proposed is the "essence of humanness" (2001: 1). In general, the self-directed, volitional nature of agentic behaviors, like influence, generates feelings of aliveness and experiences of learning (Spreitzer & Porath, 2013). These active purposeful pursuits allow individuals to exercise control and shape workplace outcomes through interactions with others. Substantial research has found that politically skilled individuals are more effective at a range of influence behaviors (e.g., Ferris et al. 2007; Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007; Kolodinsky, Treadway, & Ferris, 2007; Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007). Furthermore, research has found that agentic motives (e.g., getting along with others, getting ahead at work) are associated with better job performance ratings for politically skilled individuals (Blickle, Fröhlich, et al., 2011) and that proactive personality is negatively related to task performance, helping behaviors, and learning when individuals are low in political skill (e.g., Sun & van Emmerik, in press).

Together, this previous research suggests that political skill should help employees to successfully engage in a range of agentic behaviors. Their ability to understand others and act strategically on the basis of this understanding will help them thrive at work. For example, being sensitive to others' needs is an important aspect of not only achieving desirable outcomes for oneself (Pfeffer, 1992) but also heedfully relating to others (Spreitzer et al., 2005). Politically skilled employees' understanding of others and the social interactions in their workplace allow them to be attentive to other employees and to look for ways to help them and the larger workgroup function effectively by adjusting their own behavior to elicit desired responses (Munyon et al., in press). The focus of politically skilled employees is "outward toward others, not inward and self-centered" (Ferris et al., 2005: 128), which allows them to experience greater vitality and learning. Thus, we expect politically skilled employees to experience greater levels of workplace thriving.

Hypothesis 5: Political skill is positively related to thriving.

Given the proposed negative effects of communication centrality on employees' experience of thriving as a result of role overload and ambiguity, a natural question is: How might individual characteristics help employees thrive in demanding positions in the communication network? In addition to the positive direct relationship we expect to find between political skill and thriving, we expect political skill to moderate the indirect effects of being central in the communication network on thriving through role overload and role ambiguity. Munyon et al. (in press) identified two roles political skill can play in moderating work environment–stressor–strain relationships. Political skill allows employees "to avoid aspects of work that represent potential stressors" and also to perceive "stressors as less threatening" (Munyon et al.: 8). Applying this logic, we identify two possible ways that political skill may moderate the indirect relationships of interest in the current study. The first is by moderating the paths between communication centrality and the role stressors (i.e., role overload and role ambiguity). The second is by moderating the paths between the role stressors and workplace thriving. In sum, political skill is likely to not only directly affect thriving but also indirectly affect thriving by helping employees to experience lower levels of stressors related to their position in the communication network and to experience less strain in the form of decreased thriving related to the stressors they do experience. In the remainder of this section, we present rationale supporting each of these moderated relationships.

Political skill and navigating communication requests. Integral aspects of political skill are the intuitive ability to understand social situations and to use information gleaned from the social context to influence others in strategic ways (Ferris, Perrewé, Anthony, & Gilmore, 2000). Politically skilled individuals excel in environments characterized by social demands (Bing et al., 2011; Kaplan, 2008; Perrewé, Ferris, Frink, & Anthony, 2000). The success of politically skilled employees in these situations is attributable to their ability to act strategically and influence others over whom they have no authority (Ferris et al., 2007). Thus, political skill is a particularly relevant individual difference to examine when attempting to discern why some employees may not experience the same level of role demands (stressors) as a result of their central network position.

Political skill may aid individuals in navigating the demands they experience related to their network position. Specifically, political skill may help individuals to negotiate the expectations of each workplace relationship such that they would experience less role overload related to their communication centrality. For instance, the astute nature of politically skilled individuals may allow them to tactically set limits on the expectations others have for using them as a source of information such that although they are central to communication networks, they would not experience unreasonably high demands and the associated role overload. Goode (1960) referred to this process of role bargaining as a means for individuals to minimize their experience of role strain. The ability of politically skilled employees to influence the terms of their relationships with others may allow them to experience less role overload and as a result, a smaller indirect negative impact on thriving than employees low in political skill. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 6: Political skill attenuates the positive relationship between communication centrality and role overload (6a); thus, the negative indirect effect of communication centrality on thriving via role overload is weaker for politically skilled employees (6b).

Another way political skill may aid individuals in navigating the demands of a central network position and thereby experiencing less stress is through a deeper understanding of the social and political environment in which they operate. For example, politically skilled employees are more likely to approach the large number of requests they receive strategically and respond in ways that advance their own and the organization's objectives. As a result, the potential for ambiguity created by a large number of requests for information and expertise would likely be less for politically skilled employees. Central positions are less likely to result in role ambiguity for politically skilled employees because of their ability to prioritize the requests they receive in a way that aligns with the objectives they seek to achieve. In essence, politically skilled individuals are able to effectively utilize the strategy of compart-mentalization, which Goode (1960) identified as one way individuals can manage role demands by determining which requests are most important to address in a specific context and time and delaying or ignoring demands that are not urgent. Furthermore, as an extension of their mitigated experience of role ambiguity, politically skilled employees may not experience the same decrement in thriving as employees who are low in political skill. In sum, for individuals who are low in political skill, communication centrality leads to greater role ambiguity and indirectly lower levels of thriving. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

> *Hypothesis 7:* Political skill attenuates the positive relationship between communication centrality and role ambiguity (7a); thus, the negative indirect effect of communication centrality on thriving via role ambiguity is weaker for politically skilled employees (7b).

Political skill and coping with stressors. Political skill has also been identified as an individual difference that helps individuals reduce the strain they experience as a result of work-place stressors (Perrewé et al., 2000). Political skill is thought to have a neutralizing effect on workplace stressors because politically skilled individuals feel better equipped to handle these stressors (Ferris et al., 2007; Ferris et al., 2012; Perrewé et al., 2000). Politically skilled individuals perceive stressors as less threatening because they have greater self-confidence and a sense of personal security and control derived from their ability to understand and influence others (Ferris et al., 2007; Perrewé et al., 2000). These internal self-evaluations as well as the tangible resources politically skilled individuals are able to secure (Perrewé, Zel-lars, Ferris, Rossi, Kacmar, & Ralston, 2004) serve a protective function (Hobfoll, 1989) that results in politically skilled individuals' experiencing less strain related to workplace stressors, while individuals with low levels of political skill tend to experience more strain related to workplace stressors (Ferris et al., 2007; Zellars, Perrewé, Rossi, Tepper, & Ferris, 2008). For example, political skill has been shown to diminish the effects of role overload on behavioral, cognitive, and somatic anxiety; job dissatisfaction; and job tension (Perrewé et al., 2005) as well as the effects of role conflict on psychological anxiety, somatic complaints, and psychological strain (Perrewé et al., 2004). Numerous other studies have found support for the "antidotelike" effects of political skill (e.g., Brouer, Ferris, Hochwarter, Laird, & Gilmore, 2006; Brouer, Harris, & Kacmar, 2011; Harvey, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2007; Hochwarter, Ferris, Gavin, Perrewé, Hall, & Frink, 2007; Hochwarter, Summers, Thompson, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2010; Meurs, Gallagher, & Perrewé, 2010). Similarly, political skill may help employees avoid experiencing decreased thriving due to greater role overload and ambiguity and thereby mitigate the negative indirect effect of communication centrality on thriving as well. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 8: Political skill attenuates the negative relationship between role overload and thriving (8a); thus, the negative indirect effect of communication centrality on thriving via role overload is weaker for politically skilled employees (8b).

Hypothesis 9: Political skill attenuates the negative relationship between role ambiguity and thriving (9a); thus, the negative indirect effect of communication centrality on thriving via role ambiguity is weaker for politically skilled employees (9b).

Method

Participants and Procedure

The global HR division (156 participants) of a large multinational corporation completed a social network analysis survey. This division has a mix of regional and global functional groups where work requires information sharing and decision making by a variety of individuals. Formal structure is muted in comparison to hierarchical, command and control organizations because of its flat, matrix structure. The potential for role ambiguity and role overload also exists as groups often have conflicting objectives and priorities. The HR division is representative of the larger organization and other organizations with more equivocal forms of organizing (Grant, Fried, Parker, & Frese, 2010).

The entire roster of employees in the global HR division was presented to participants as possible network connections. We used the roster method of data collection because it has been shown to result in accurate and reliable data (Marsden, 1990). The response rate of 87% is comparable to other network studies (e.g., Sasovova, Mehra, Borgatti, & Schippers, 2010; Sparrowe et al., 2001). In the final sample (N = 135), employees had an average tenure of 10.87 years of service (SD = 9.57). The majority of participants were female (81%), were individual contributors (91%; i.e., did not have supervisor responsibilities), and were in a shared service unit within the HR department (64.5%). Nonrespondents did not significantly differ from respondents with respect to gender, location, hierarchy, or tenure.

Measures

Communication centrality. From the list of names provided, participants were asked to "identify those people you personally know (i.e., you have actually interacted with or met)." Then, for the people whom they knew, participants were asked, "How frequently do you communicate with each of the following employees?" The response scale was (1) seldom, less than once a month; (2) less than once a week; (3) once a week; (4) a few times a week; (5) one or more times each day.

There are several ways to measure centrality within a social network (Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2013; Wasserman & Faust, 1994), and each one measures slightly different aspects of centrality. A common measure is indegree centrality (e.g., Brass & Burkhardt, 1993; Ibarra, 1993, 1995), which takes into account the number of times a participant (i.e., an actor) has been nominated as a contact by others in their network, but this measure does not take into account the connections among the other individuals in the network (Freeman, 1977). Conceptually, we are interested in not only how many people an actor is a source of communication for but also how much others depend on the actor for communication. To this end, we used a measure of centrality that takes into account not just an actor's own connections (as

indegree centrality would) but also the connections of an actor's connections, mapping on to Emerson's (1962) conceptualization of power and dependence in networks. This measure is called negative Bonacich indegree centrality (Bonacich, 1987). The formula for calculating the Bonacich indegree centrality is $C(\alpha,\beta) = \alpha(I - \beta R)^{-1} R1$, where α is a scaling vector, which is set to normalize the score; where β reflects the extent to which you *weight* the centrality of people the actor is tied to (a positive β makes an individual more central if the individuals the actor is connected to are more connected to others, whereas a negative β identifies actors whose network connections are less well connected); where R is the adjacency matrix (which in this case is valued); where I is the identity matrix (1s down the diagonal); and where 1 is a matrix of all 1s. In effect, it is a weighted measure that takes into account the number and value of the actor's ties as well as the values and number of ties of the individuals to which the actor is connected.

In the communication network, this measure takes into account the number of connections, the frequency of communication, and the extent to which an actor's connections have other sources of information. We estimated the negative Bonacich indegree centrality, which simply means the beta takes on a negative value, for each participant in the network. When a negative beta value is included in the formula, a higher score indicates that an actor's network connections have fewer alternative connections, meaning those connections are more dependent on the actor. In other words, a higher score indicates that other employees rely on the actor as a primary source of communication (and furthermore, because we used valued data, rely on them on a very regular basis). This measure is an indicator of the communication demands employees experience because of their position in the communication network.

Political skill. A 6-item measure developed by Ferris et al. (1999) was used to assess political skill. This initial measure was expanded by Ferris et al. (2005) into the 18-item Political Skill Inventory. Both measures are considered to reflect the same core construct (Munyon et al., in press), and similar to the current study, this short unidimensional scale has been used in previous research where the focus was on examining the effects of the global political skill construct (e.g., Ahearn et al., 2004; Brouer et al., 2011; Perrewé et al., 2004). Responses were completed on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). An example item is "I understand people very well." Higher scores indicate greater levels of political skill (α = .82).

Role overload. A 5-item measure was used to assess role overload (Peterson, Smith, Akande, & Ayestaran, 1995). Responses were completed on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). An example item is "My workload is too heavy." Higher scores on this scale indicate greater levels of role overload (α = .85).

Role ambiguity. A 5-item measure was used to assess role ambiguity (Peterson et al., 1995). Responses were completed on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). An example item is "I have clearly planned goals and objectives for my job." The scale was reverse-scored. Higher scores indicate greater levels of role ambiguity (α = .93).

Workplace thriving. Thriving is defined as the combined experience of learning and vitality. We utilize the Porath et al. (2012) measure of workplace thriving which consists of 10

Table 1
Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	*M*	*SD*
1. Tenure	—								10.87	9.57
2. Gender	.10	—							0.81	0.39
3. Hierarchy	.16	−.22**	—						0.09	0.29
4. Communication Centrality	.32**	−.10	.31**	—					106.16	53.13
5. Political Skill	.11	.01	.13	.25**	—				4.06	0.51
6. Role Ambiguity	−.04	.06	−.14	.00	−.21*	—			2.44	0.96
7. Role Overload	.05	−.12	.15	.22**	−.16	.00	—		2.67	0.93
8. Workplace Thriving	.08	.05	.23**	.10	.35**	−.31**	−.29**	—	4.30	0.50

Note: $N = 135$. Gender is coded 1 for female and 0 for male. Hierarchy is coded 1 for supervisor and 0 for individual contributor. Tenure is measured in years.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.

items measuring learning and vitality. Participants were asked to respond to each item in reference to their job on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Example items are "I find myself learning often" and "I feel alive and vital." Higher scores indicate greater levels of workplace thriving ($\alpha = .81$).

Control variables. We used three demographic variables (tenure, gender, and hierarchy) in order to control for individual characteristics of the employees in this study.

Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations. We controlled for demographic differences in gender, tenure, and managerial responsibilities in these analyses. We examined a first- and second-stage moderated-mediation model (Edwards & Lambert, 2007) where the moderating variable (political skill) is hypothesized to operate on the first stage of the indirect relationship (i.e., between communication centrality and role ambiguity and between communication centrality and role overload) and the second stage of the indirect relationship (i.e., between role ambiguity and thriving and role overload and thriving). We did not find any significant second-stage moderation (please contact the authors for these results); thus, Hypotheses 8 and 9 were not supported, and in the remainder of the Results section, we present the more parsimonious model that includes only the first-stage moderated mediation.

As recommended by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007), we derived the direct and indirect effects of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediators at various levels of the moderator on the basis of a family of equations that compose the moderated-mediation model. To estimate these effects, we used the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013) and tested the effects for statistical significance using 95% bias corrected and accelerated bootstrapped confidence intervals (CI) based on 1,000 samples to avoid concerns regarding inflated Type I error rate (cf. Shrout & Bolger, 2002).

Table 2
Regression Results for Model Predicting Thriving

	Role Overload		Role Ambiguity		Workplace Thriving	
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2
Tenure	−0.00	−0.00	−0.01	−0.01	0.01	0.01
Gender	−0.17	−0.16	0.10	0.08	0.10	0.10
Hierarchy	0.21	0.12	−0.48	−0.24	0.38*	0.38*
Communication Centrality (CC)	0.01**	0.01*	0.01*	0.01*	−0.00*	0.00
Political Skill	−0.42**	−0.42*	−0.41*	−0.40*	0.22*	0.22**
CC × Political Skill		0.00		−0.01*		
Role Ambiguity						−0.12*
Role Overload						−0.15*
Intercept	4.01	2.78	3.86	2.56	3.95	4.89
Total R^2	.07	.12	.07	.11	.25	.29
ΔR^2		.05		.04		.04

Note: Gender is coded 1 for female and 0 for male. Hierarchy is coded 1 for supervisor and 0 for individual contributor. Tenure is measured in years.
*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.

Regression results are presented in Table 2. In Steps 1 and 2 of the model predicting role overload, communication centrality has a positive and significant effect ($b = 0.01$, $p < .05$), suggesting that those who are more central in the network are more likely to experience role overload. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Political skill also has a negative and significant effect on role overload ($b = −0.42$, $p < .05$), which suggests that those with more political skill are less likely to experience role overload. In Step 2 of the model predicting role ambiguity, communication centrality has a positive and significant effect on role ambiguity ($b = 0.01$, $p < .05$), suggesting that those who are more central in the network are more likely to experience role ambiguity. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported. Political skill also has a negative and significant effect on role ambiguity ($b = −0.40$, $p < .05$), suggesting that those with more political skill are less likely to experience role ambiguity.

As can be seen in Step 2 of the model predicting thriving, the direct effect of communication centrality fails to reach significance (see the last column in Table 2). However, role overload has a negative and significant effect on thriving ($b = −0.15$, $p < .05$), indicating that those individuals who experience role overload are less likely to thrive at work. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported. In addition, role ambiguity has a negative and significant effect on thriving ($b = −0.12$, $p < .05$), which suggests that those individuals who experience role ambiguity are less likely to thrive at work. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported. Finally, political skill has a positive and significant effect on thriving ($b = 0.22$, $p < .01$), supporting Hypothesis 5.

After examining the main effects, we examined the interaction between communication centrality and political skill predicting role overload and role ambiguity. The interaction between communication centrality and political skill predicting role overload is not significant (see Table 2 and Figure 2). Thus, Hypothesis 6a was not supported. Political skill does

Figure 2
Interaction of Political Skill and Communication Centrality Predicting Role Overload and Role Ambiguity
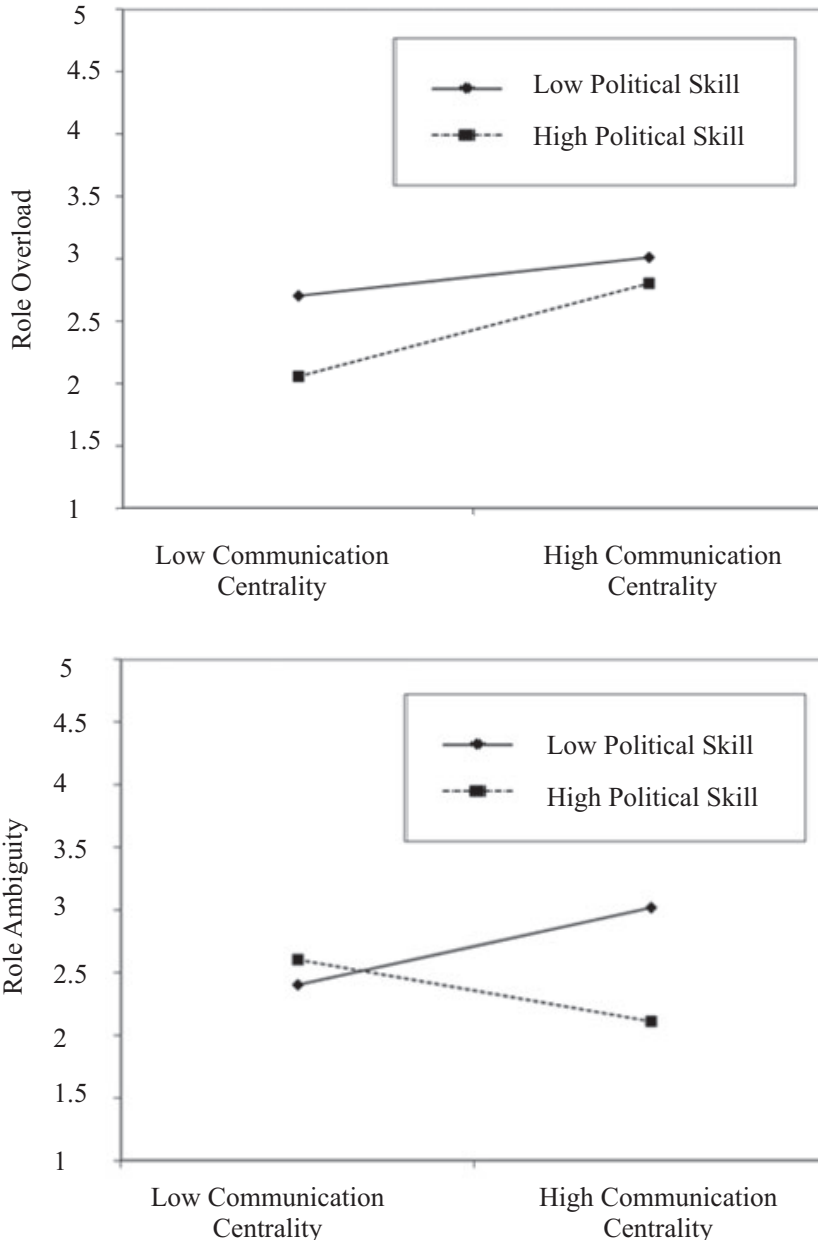
not moderate the role overload–workplace thriving relationship. However, the interaction between these variables predicting role ambiguity is negative and significant ($b = -0.01$, $p < .05$). As demonstrated by the graph of the interaction effect (see Table 2 and Figure 2) supporting Hypothesis 7a, the significant positive relationship between communication centrality and role ambiguity that exists for individuals low in political skill is actually negative (but not significant) for individuals with high political skill. Thus, we found that individuals who are central in the communication network and who are low in political skill are more likely to experience role ambiguity. In all, these variables accounted for 12% of the variance in role overload, 11% of the variance in role ambiguity, and 29% of the variance in thriving.

We next examined the significance of the indirect effect of communication centrality on thriving through role ambiguity and role overload. The significance of the indirect effect is indicated by the exclusion of 0 from the 95% unstandardized CI. The interaction effect between communication centrality and political skill did not significantly predict role overload ($b = 0.00$, n.s.); thus, the indirect effect of communication centrality through role overload on workplace thriving did not vary on the basis of an individual's level of political skill. Hypothesis 6b, therefore, was not supported. As can be seen in Figure 3, the regression coefficient between communication centrality and role overload was not significantly different at high and low levels of political skill. The PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) does not provide an overall estimate of the indirect effect (i.e., it provides only conditional estimates of the indirect effects at specified levels of the moderator); thus, we conducted a follow-up analysis where we estimated the same mediation model without including political skill as a moderator. The indirect effect of communication centrality on workplace thriving via role overload was significant (unstandardized indirect effect = -0.001, 95% CI = [-0.0016, -0.0001]).

The negative indirect effect of communication centrality on thriving via role ambiguity is significant for individuals with low levels of political skill (i.e., standardized effect = -0.0880, unstandardized effect = -0.0008, 95% CI = [-0.0020, -0.0002]) but not for individuals with high levels of political skill (standardized effect = 0.0287, unstandardized effect = 0.0002, 95% CI = [-0.0004, -0.0012]). Thus, individuals with low levels of political skill appear to experience reduced levels of thriving, while individuals with high political skill do not experience the same levels of ambiguity in central positions or, in turn, reduced levels of thriving (see also Figure 3). Thus, Hypothesis 7b was supported; political skill mitigates the negative indirect effect of communication centrality on thriving through role ambiguity.

Following the recommendations of Edwards and Lambert (2007) and Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, and Pagon (2006), we tested alternative models (i.e., direct effect moderation and curvilinear relationships) to determine whether they might provide alternative explanations for our findings. Political skill did not moderate the direct effect of communication centrality on thriving. Furthermore, the relationship between communication centrality and thriving might be better modeled as a curvilinear relationship, but the square term was not a significant predictor. Thus, these models do not represent the data better.

Discussion

Workplace relationships are generally assumed to provide individuals with valuable social capital (Burt, 2000) and to be a source of energy and learning (Spreitzer et al., 2005). The current study adds to the developing literature suggesting there are also costs associated with central positions in communication networks (e.g., Adler & Kwon, 2002; Baer, 2010; Elfring

Figure 3
Standardized Path Coefficients for the Mediation Model at High and Low Levels of Political Skill
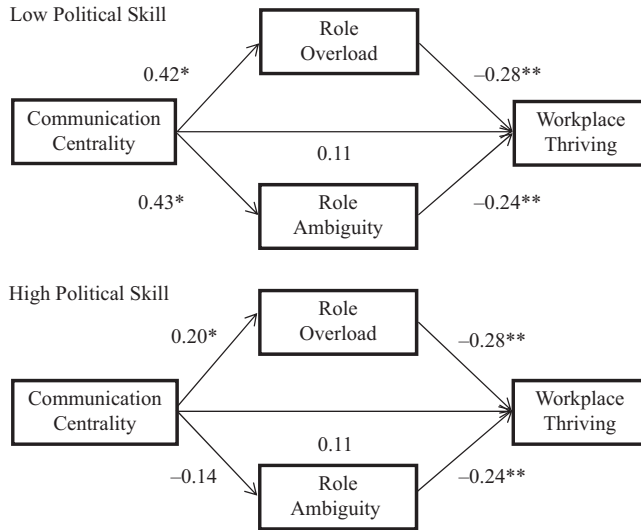
*p < .05.
**p < .01.

& Hulsink, 2007; Mariotti & Delbridge, 2012; Oldroyd & Morris, 2012; Steier & Greenwood, 2000; Uzzi, 1997; Zhou et al., 2009). Specifically, we found support for a mediating process in which role ambiguity and role overload act as mechanisms by which communication centrality negatively affects workplace thriving.

The results also provide insight into why certain employees are more likely to thrive. Political skill has a direct relationship with thriving and also mitigates the relationship between communication centrality and role ambiguity and, thus, reduces the indirect effect of communication centrality on thriving for individuals who are high in political skill. These findings suggest that politically skilled individuals are able to prioritize and strategically respond to information requests, reducing their experience of role ambiguity. Alternatively, employees who lack political skill may become confused about their role when they are a source of communication for many colleagues. As one employee described,

> You definitely have to prioritize. I'm happy to pass requests on to the right person. I don't feel like I have to answer a particular email or call. I don't feel like I have to solve their problem. Sometimes it feels like you're drinking out of a fire hose. I give the requests a quick scan and think is there something business critical or is this all stuff that can wait.

Our results show that political skill did not mitigate the relationship between communication centrality and role overload and, thus, did not lessen the indirect effect of centrality on thriving through role overload. Thus, political skill does not appear to allow employees to avoid that feeling of "drinking out of a fire hose" (i.e., the magnitude of the

demands employees experience as a result of their position in the communication network). Recent research by Soltis et al. (2013) establishes that there are prescribed communication demands related to one's job that cannot be avoided. This may be an important factor to consider in future research examining the role of political skill in helping employees navigate the demands of communication centrality. Furthermore, although previous research indicates that political skill has the potential to mitigate the strain felt as an experience of role overload (Perrewé et al., 2005), we did not find support for political skill as a moderator of the relationship between these stressors (role overload and role ambiguity) and thriving. In sum, it appears that political skill does not influence the magnitude of the demands experienced as a result of a central position in the communication network but allows an individual to prioritize those demands and reduce the ambiguity felt in central positions.

Theoretical Implications

The current study identifies an important, unstudied aspect of the workplace social context (communication centrality) as an antecedent of thriving and contributes to theoretical development by ascertaining "how" and "why" the relationship between communication and thriving emerges and "for whom" this relationship is amplified or attenuated (Whetten, 1989). This research also addresses calls to better understand the intervening mechanisms linking such positions to employees' psychological experience and other outcomes (Anderson, 2008; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Specifically, we identify role ambiguity and role overload as stressors through which communication centrality can hinder some employees' capacity to thrive at work. Furthermore, we identify political skill as an individual difference explaining why some individuals are able to avoid the costs of many workplace relationships and are more likely to realize the benefits (Ibarra, 1992, 1995; Stevenson & Greenberg, 2000). The moderation results advance the political skill literature by demonstrating that politically skilled individuals experience less role ambiguity, a stressor that has to do with prioritizing demands. However, results show that political skill does not mitigate the experience of all role stressors, including role overload. Together, these findings provide support for the proposed but lesser studied role of political skill in stress management, specifically, political skill allowing individuals to avoid experiencing certain aspects of work as stressors (Munyon et al., in press).

We also extend the literature by identifying a significant positive relationship between political skill and thriving. A participant asked to describe a thriving colleague said,

> She seeks first to understand others' needs and has the ability to flex quickly to fit information to different groups. She presents information in a way that it is useful in the local context. This is important in our HR community as we integrate across the globe.

Another participant stated,

> People appreciate that he is very measured in his communication. He is very strategic. He thinks about who he is sharing information with and what the implications are for that individual. He doesn't necessarily filter the information into what is pertinent and what is not, but he tries to communicate the information in a way that helps other people find connections.

These examples describe politically skilled employees engaged in heedful relating (an agentic behavior) with their colleagues. Politically skilled employees draw on their astute understanding of the social and political work environment and consider others when influencing them to obtain their own and organizational objectives, which enables them to experience greater levels of thriving. Future research may empirically examine the mechanisms by which political skill influences thriving directly; however, the current study provides further insight into the nature of the political skill construct and how this capability helps individuals thrive at work.

Practical Implications

Research suggests that helping employees thrive at work is an essential component of creating sustainable organizations (Spreitzer et al., 2012). Central employees are often the top performers in their organizations; thus, their experience of thriving may be considered of even greater importance to their organization. If these individuals fail to thrive, they may decide to leave and take considerable expertise and knowledge with them. Retaining employees is a key challenge for organizations in the current, transient, knowledge-based labor market. Developing political skill may provide a means to bolster workplace thriving as it is positively linked to thriving directly and also indirectly by providing individuals with the social astuteness to experience less role ambiguity related to the communication requests they receive. Previous research has shown that political skill may be enhanced through instruction, experiential exercises, mentoring, coaching, feedback, case studies, and role-playing (Ferris et al., 2000; Ferris et al., 2007). Thus, organizations may consider political skill training to enhance employee thriving. Although political skill is malleable, Perrewé et al. (2000) suggest that it is best gained through experience and therefore takes time to develop. Organizations may also consider selecting politically skilled employees for positions with high communication demands (Blickle & Schnitzler, 2010).

Recently, Kilduff and Brass (2010) applied a social network perspective to job design, concluding that the network of connections in which individuals are embedded will greatly influence the experience of their work role. Though it seems practical to suggest that employees who are overburdened should reduce the size of their network, this task is very challenging. Increasing awareness about how network connections both constrain and enable individuals to perform their job effectively may positively affect employees' capacity to manage their network. Beyond awareness, organizations can alter jobs to minimize or remove certain communication interactions as a way to help employees manage network demands. Organizations may consider developing processes aimed at directly reducing role stressors. For example, procedures that screen questions and demands directed at star (likely central) employees may reduce role overload (Oldroyd & Morris, 2012) by limiting the number of requests brought to star employees. Additionally, screening requests for importance (i.e., determining which requests employees should prioritize) may help reduce role ambiguity. Furthermore, organizational leaders may help clarify information sharing expectations to reduce the role ambiguity associated with numerous, diverse information requests.

There are a number of tactics individuals might use to limit their experience of negative effects due to role stressors. Goode (1960) suggests delegation, which includes strategically redirecting communication requests that could be addressed by others. Other suggested approaches include eliminating role relationships (i.e., choosing not to respond to requests

and demands from certain individuals) or expanding one's role so it becomes so expansive that many requests are deprioritized. These strategies may be useful for all employees; however, they are especially useful for those in more central network positions. Reducing the amount of role stress employees experience will provide greater opportunities for them to thrive and, in turn, lead to higher performance, commitment, and satisfaction and to lower levels of burnout (Carmeli & Spreitzer, 2009; Porath et al., 2012; Spreitzer et al., 2012).

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations of this study. We alleviated some concerns regarding common-source bias by using other-report measures to assess communication centrality and self-report measures of role stressors, political skill, and thriving. However, the cross-sectional nature of the research design prevents any claims of causality. An important future direction for researchers to pursue is the use of longitudinal studies. This approach not only will improve information regarding the causal ordering of these relationships, but also may provide insights as to how some individuals are better equipped to navigate network position demands.

In the current study, we used a short unidimensional measure of political skill (Ferris et al., 1999), which prevented us from examining relationships between thriving, role stressors, and political skill dimensions (social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity). Examining the dimensions would provide a more nuanced understanding of how politically skilled individuals are able to avoid stressors related to communication centrality. Recent reviews (e.g., Ferris et al., 2012; Munyon et al., in press) have called for increased research on the dimensions of political skill, especially outcomes related to the different dimensions. It is likely that certain dimensions will be stronger predictors of employee thriving and also more important moderators of the work context–stressor and stressor-strain relationships.

The focus of this study was on how individuals' experience is influenced by their network position; however, individuals may also take actions to build and change their network. Ferris et al. (2012) identified examining the networks politically skilled employees build and leverage as an important direction for research. Wei, Chiang, and Wu (2012) found that politically skilled individuals reported getting more resources from their network and had stronger relationships between network resources and job performance/potential for career growth. Together, these results suggest that politically skilled individuals are better at gaining and leveraging network resources. Future research should also examine the structure of the network politically skilled employees develop. Examining how the dimensions relate to network position and dynamics is an important area for future research. Networking ability refers to being adept at building relationships (friendships, alliances, and coalitions) and creating vast networks of connections that can be used to achieve one's goals (Ferris et al., 2005; Treadway, Breland, Adams, Duke, & Williams, 2010), but it is yet to be seen whether politically skilled individuals build networks that are structurally associated with increased influence and performance (Burt, 2004, 2005). A longitudinal approach would allow researchers to examine how individuals manage their network and examine the network building and management tendencies of individuals who differ on important capabilities, such as political skill.

This study examined the interplay between social structure and individual differences in political skill, thereby taking an integrative perspective, which provides greater insights than a study examining structural or psychological constructs alone. Furthermore, we expanded the

model proposed by Spreitzer et al. (2005) by integrating role theory, network position, and political skill to provide a more comprehensive understanding of employee thriving. In doing so, we establish a previously unidentified mechanism linking position in the communication network to thriving (i.e., role overload and role ambiguity). Future research should examine other positive and negative aspects of being a source of information for many colleagues as possible mediators, for example, other role stressors (e.g., role conflict) as well as the support, resources, energy, and access to new ideas that connections with others can bring an employee.

Another promising avenue for future research is the consideration of additional moderators. For example, Oldroyd and Morris (2012) suggest that differences in working memory capacity (i.e., the amount of information individuals are able to process) are in part responsible for the strain employees experience as a result of communication requests. Furthermore, personality constructs may be a fruitful topic. Individuals high on extraversion who are in central positions may be more likely to thrive as they derive energy from social interactions. However, it may be important for introverts in central positions to develop political skill because they do not naturally derive energy from many social exchanges.

In their discussion of the socially embedded nature of thriving, Spreitzer et al. (2005) suggest that interactions with others in the workplace are a source of learning as information is shared through communication exchanges and creates energy. Central positions provide employees with opportunities to extend beyond the boundaries of their focused work responsibilities and connect with others. The ability to connect one's own work within the objectives of the organization provides meaning and purpose, helping employees feel vital, and also provides a foundation for learning from interactions with others (Spreitzer et al.). Conceptually, it makes sense that being a source of information to others would contribute to learning and provide meaning to one's work. However, at some point, too many communication demands negatively affect thriving. We did not find evidence supporting a curvilinear relationship between communication centrality and thriving, but we encourage researchers to continue to examine potential nonlinear relationships and perhaps shed light on the "tipping point" whereby connections shift from having a positive to a negative impact on thriving.

Finally, as this study is the first to examine the proposed model, future research may consider replicating our findings in other samples. As we described, the global HR division we examined is similar to many organizations that have moved toward flatter, matrix structures and operate globally. We expect our results to generalize to employees in other professions because of the nature of the work in this division but encourage others to replicate this research in a variety of organizations to expand confidence in the generalizability of our findings.

Conclusion

Our study contributes to a growing literature attempting to understand the outcomes individuals experience as a result of their network position. While employees in central positions may experience greater power and influence, they may experience increased role ambiguity and role overload, which negatively influences their ability to thrive at work. Our findings point to developing political skill as a possible strategy for mitigating the indirect negative impact of communication centrality on workplace thriving by limiting the experience of role ambiguity. Employees advancing into more central positions in their organization's communication network should thus consider developing greater political skill as a way to enhance their ability to thrive in these challenging yet influential positions.

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