The relationship between networking behavior and promotability: The moderating effect of political skill

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Abstract

Networking behaviors toward career and community domains assist individuals in doing their jobs better and advancing their careers. However, few studies investigate and identify how these different types of networking behaviors lead to supervisory promotability evaluations. The current study argues that career- and community-based networking behaviors interact with political skill on promotability. This study surveyed and collected data from 160 financial employees and 103 supervisors working at branches of a large bank in Taiwan. Career-based networking behaviors, particularly maintaining contacts and engaging in professional activities, were found to be positively related to promotability, and political skill strengthened the relationship between community-based networking behaviors and promotability. The implications of these findings are discussed in terms of networking behaviors, political skill, and promotability.

Keywords: career-based networking behavior, community-based networking behavior, promotability, political skill

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I n the context of boundaryless careers, professionals, and managers need to be proactive about networking to build and maintain relationships in career and community domains for personal value and visibility (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998; Sturges, Conway, Guest, & Liefooghe, 2005). By engaging in networking behaviors, professionals, and managers can better craft their social networks and attain social capital embedded in social relationships in order to achieve positive career outcomes, and can focus on how to access and mobilize social resources embedded in relationships (e.g., de Janasz, Sullivan, & Whiting, 2003; Wolff, Moser, & Grau, 2008). Scholarly research has demonstrated that networking behavior has positive effects on self-rated career and work outcomes, such as promotion, total compensation, career satisfaction, and subjective and objective sales performance (Michael & Yukl, 1993; Orpen, 1996; Langford, 2000; Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Macintosh & Krush, 2017). At the same time, networking is a behavioral demonstration that promotes personal visibility and affects others' perceptions and evaluations. Networking behavior is typically seen by observers as effectively or ineffectively enacted (Mohd Radsi, Garavan, & Ismail, 2013). Only Thompson (2005) and Sturges et al. (2005) reported positive correlations between networking and supervisory ratings of job performance. Few studies have examined the effects of networking behavior on supervisors, particularly when supervisors' prediction of upward advancement determines their final decision on promotion and compensation.

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Networking is considered both a behavior-related 'influence tactic' supportive of upward appeal (Levy, Collins, & Nail, 1998; Taber & Blankemeyer, 2015) and a social cue by supervisors seeking to determine an actor's promotability. Different from self-rated retrospective career outcomes (e.g., promotion, compensation, and perceived career success), promotability reflects supervisors' support for an employee's advancement (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990), revealing whether or not the support is sufficient for a promotion (Wayne, Liden, Kraimer, & Graf, 1999; Van Scotter, Motowidlo, & Cross, 2000). Thus, it is vital for professionals to engage in career- or community-based networking behaviors in order to influence supervisors' immediate inferences regarding the professionals' capacity and willingness to perform effectively at higher job levels (De Pater, Van Vianen, Bechtoldt, & Klehe, 2009). As no research has directly examined the different relationships between multidimensional networking behaviors and promotability evaluation, the present study investigates whether or not – and if so, to what extent – career- and community-based networking behaviors are related to supervisory ratings of employees' promotability.

Because networking is an effort to gain or achieve career success, the individual who is networking should be concerned about other people's perceptions of the networking, which are a function of how effectively the individual presents the networking. More specifically, observers' perception of actors' networking behaviors can shape the observers' related evaluations of the actors and, thus, can influence the effectiveness of the actors' networking (Floyd, 2014). Empirical studies have shown that gender differences moderate the relationships between networking and individual outcomes (e.g., Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Gremmen, Akkerman, & Benschop, 2013; Macintosh & Krush, 2017). However, few studies have investigated other individual differences as moderators. An exception is recent research showing that political skill is less observable than the demographic variable of gender, but that explicit behavior can influence supervisors' perceptions and evaluation (Breland, Seitz, Treadway, Lovelace, & Gazdag, 2017). The present study examines the issue by paying particular attention to the moderating effects of political skill on networking behaviors' effectiveness in maximizing promotability. Individuals possessing political skills can engage in politically astute career- and community-based networking behaviors that shape supervisors' perceptions in ways conducive to desired outcomes (Treadway, Breland, Adams, Duke, & Williams, 2010). The present study considers the joint effect that networking behaviors and political skill can have on supervisors' evaluations of subordinate employees' potential for promotion. Moreover, involvement in career- and community-based networking may give rise to various types of evaluations.

The present study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, this study extends the effects of networking behavior from self-rated career success (as recalled after a period of time) to supervisors' concurrent evaluation of promotability. The investigated relationship could yield findings capable of answering an important question: in the workplace, *what* should employees do to influence supervisors' perceptions of the employees when the supervisors are trying to predict how well the employees would perform in higher-level positions? Second, rather than treat networking as a unitary construct, the current study suggests that career- and community-based networking behaviors lead to promotability (Treadway et al., 2010). By rigorously exploring the various types of relationships between career or community networking and promotability, the current study can deepen the networking literature and explain the comparative effectiveness of various networking behaviors. Third, rather than detect the gender differences associated with networking effectiveness, this study examines the moderating effect of political skill on the relationship between networking behaviors and promotability, and addresses how subordinate employees perform *politically* to attract positive attention from supervisors. This knowledge should be valuable to individuals who want to proactively shape their careers as well as to professionals who assist employees in their career management.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

People's engagement in networking behaviors not only can foster a strong social-capital network for the achievement of desirable career outcomes (Forret & Dougherty, 2004), but also can serve as an informational cue by which supervisors can judge who within a pool of employees most deserves promotion (Spence, 1973). The former perspective views networking behavior as a means by which individuals can access and mobilize social resources embedded in interpersonal relationships (Forret & Dougherty, 2001; De Vos, Clippeleer, & Dewilde, 2009); the latter perspective focuses on how observers perceive networking behavior and, from the perceptions, draw inferences about advancement recommendations (Noe, 1996; Mohd Radsi, Garavan, & Ismail, 2013). Most empirical results show that, through increases in social capital, networking behavior is positively associated with self-rated retrospective measures of compensation, promotion, and perceived career success (e.g., Michael & Yukl, 1993; Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Wolff & Moser, 2009, 2010). Nevertheless, little empirical research has addressed how networking affects supervisors' contemporary evaluations of promotability, which can determine employees' real promotion in the future (De Pater et al., 2009). The retrospective data of promotion and compensation is collected and recalled during a period of time, and is conceived of as distal career outcomes. The effect of networking behavior on supervisors' promotability ratings is more proximal than compensation and promotion, and can enhance real promotion (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998). Thus, the current study examines the relationship between networking behavior and supervisor-rated promotability, detecting the effectiveness of networking on supervisors' perceptions and evaluations.

According to Treadway et al. (2010), networking behaviors can be directed to career or community domains, and individuals engaging in networking behaviors within these two domains have unique outcomes. Career-based networking behaviors include maintaining external contacts, socializing, engaging in professional activities, and increasing internal visibility whereas community-based networking behaviors refer chiefly to participation in community events. Attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Fiske & Taylor, 1991) posits that people draw upon certain informational cues in an attempt to determine whether internal (personal) or external (situational) factors can help explain the causes of a behavior. Under the context of employee evaluations, supervisors observe subordinates' career- or community-based networking behaviors and are likely to commit a fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977) by attributing the extent of certain networking behaviors to personal factors. Thus, the extent of a specific type of networking behavior may lead supervisors to make inferences about employees' capabilities and talents, in turn deeply influencing judgments about whether an employee is suitable for a higher-level position (Williams & Walker, 1985).

In this study, career-based networking behavior is more visible and favorable than community-based networking behaviors at directly inducing supervisors' positive inferences about employees (Noe, 1996). New and higher-level jobs will require employees to possess and develop relevant knowledge, skills, and expertise (De Pater et al., 2009). The greater the number of career-based networking behaviors an employee engages in, the more easily he or she will reap complementary benefits from social capital. Employees with more social capital are more likely than other employees to enhance their own value by facilitating exchanges of information within the employing organization and, consequently, to achieve superior outcomes (Friedman & Krackhardt, 1997; Hitt, Bierman, Shimizu, & Kochhar, 2001; Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001). Social capital built from career- and community-based networking behaviors can assist employees not only in exchanging information, but also in accumulating job-related knowledge (Forret & Dougherty, 2004), providing clues as to future performance in higher positions. Moreover, employees' development of interpersonal relationships through career-based networking behaviors reflects the employees' competence in dealing with various types of people both inside and outside organizations (Higgins & Kram, 2001), and this competence

increases the possibility that employees can acquire resources from influential persons to enhance their prospects for getting promoted (Kram, 1988). Thus, employees' engagement in career-based networking behavior – as opposed to community networking – can signal a supervisor about their job-related knowledge and interpersonal relationships, so that the supervisor can feel better able to predict which employees will perform well in higher positions. Noe (1996) found that networking resulted in objective career success because it increased an individual's visibility, development opportunities, and capacity to negotiate promotions. However, it did not investigate the more direct relationship between networking behavior and development potential. The present study examines this issue, comparing the relationships that exist (1) between career-based networking behavior and promotability and (2) between community-based networking behavior and promotability. Therefore, I propose the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 1: Career-related networking behavior will be more positively related to promotability evaluations than will community-based networking behavior.

Political skill as the moderator

Because promotability evaluations are a function of supervisors' subjective perceptions of upward mobility, ample room exists for individuals to engage in networking behaviors that can shape supervisors' perceptions of these individuals concerning their true effectiveness and developmental potential (Liu, Liu, & Wu, 2010). Relevant to this matter is the idea of political skill, defined as '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). Thus, central to the effectiveness of networking is the given employee's ability to adapt his or her networking behavior to diverse situations in a manner that conveys genuineness and sincerity (Ferris et al., 2005), and to effectively convince supervisors that he or she is suitably competent for higher positions.

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM), which is a well-known theory of persuasion accounting for the persuasiveness of information content (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), can provide a theoretical foundation for discussing how political skill may enhance the relationship between networking and promotability. The ELM suggests that people retrieve and process information by way of either central or peripheral paths. Individuals who carefully examine an observable relevant message (i.e., who engage in central processing) will judge the message on the basis of the content of the message itself. By contrast, individuals who process a message without carefully examining the merits of the presented information (i.e., who engage in peripheral processing) will judge the message on the basis of such environmental cues as the information source's characteristics. Actually, career- and community-based networking behaviors are important informational cues for supervisors when they are evaluating employees' developmental opportunities (Noe, 1996). Indeed, the career-based networking behaviors are central-processing cues because these behaviors are directly observable in the organization. In contrast, community-based networking behaviors are peripheral-processing cues because employees participate in community activities outside the organization, thus increasing the difficulty with which supervisors observe employees' participation in community activities. Owing to physical proximity, supervisors observe more employee-initiated career networking with such job-relevant targets as peers and clients than employee-initiated community networking with such relatively job-irrelevant targets as churches and social groups (Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Michael & Yukl, 1993). Empirical results suggest, in general, that community-based networking behavior might be less frequent than career-based networking behavior, further suggesting that community networking might have low observability for supervisors (Forret & Dougherty, 2001, 2004; Treadway et al., 2010; Mohd Radsi, Garavan, & Ismail, 2013). Thus, when evaluating employees' upward potential, supervisors appear likely (1) to observe

with care the *direct substantial cues* of career-based networking behaviors and (2) to observe, perhaps with less care, the *indirect symbolic cues* of community-based networking behaviors. More specifically, supervisors apparently pay more attention to the extent of expressivity characterizing employees' community participation than to actual enactment; but most of all, supervisors seem to concentrate on the actual and substantial enactment of career-based networking behavior.

Politically skilled employees are effective in the development, maintenance, and recognition of social networks (Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, Blass, Kolodinsky, & Treadway, 2002), and improve others' perceptions and evaluations of them (Treadway, Hochwarter, Kacmar, & Ferris, 2005). Employees who execute community-based networking behavior with political skill can strengthen the significance of networking, which might also increase supervisors' positive affect toward them (Judge & Bretz, 1994; Noe, 1996). Networking that increases positive affect can bolster career success, whereas networking that comes across as self-promotion can undermine career success (Mohd Radsi, Garavan, & Ismail, 2013). The extent to which employees' community-based networking behaviors are astute and sincere can determine the extent to which supervisors like the employees. The more frequently a politically skilled employee participates in community activities, the more likely he or she is to gain the admiration of supervisors and to gather positive promotability evaluations. Thus, I propose that, in general, employees who are high in political skill are more likely than those who are low in political skill to exhibit impressive community-based networking behavior, which can increase promotability:

> Hypothesis 2: Political skill will strengthen the positive relationship between community-based networking behaviors and promotability evaluations. That is, the higher an individual's political skill, the more positive his or her involvement in community-based networking behaviors will be for promotability evaluations.

However, employees' political skillfulness in career networking might trigger supervisors' negative perceptions of the employees. According to the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), supervisors who centrally process essential career-networking details are more likely to observe *the substantial contents of* politically skillful employees' career-based networking behavior than the supervisors are to observe *the expressivity* of employees' same behavior. Although employees are just doing what they should do at work, the salience of career networking displayed by politically skillful employees may lead supervisors to infer that the employees are purposely engaging in excessive networking. The supervisors are quite likely to categorize the employees as *manipulative* politically skilled persons, to perceive them as a threat, and to give them unfavorable evaluations. Floyd (2014) found that actors' networking with high-status friends is attributable to self-serving goals and is negatively related to supervisory performance ratings. Thus, I propose the following hypothesis:

> Hypothesis 3: Political skill will weaken the positive relationship between career-based networking behavior and promotability evaluations. That is, the higher an individual's political skill is, the more negative his or her involvement in career-based networking behaviors will be for promotability evaluations.

METHOD

Sample and study design

To test the hypotheses, the present study surveyed and collected data from financial-services sales agents and their supervisors working at branches of a large bank in Taiwan. I contacted the supervisors, asking each one (1) to provide me with one or two names of sales agents and (2) to send the surveys directly to the named agents. Every survey included a cover letter explaining the study's objective and was coded (on the return envelopes). I distributed a total of 215 surveys directly to sales agents, and

1 week later, sent the agents' supervisors another survey about the corresponding subordinates' performance and promotability evaluations (which were also coded to allow a matching of the corresponding surveys after their return). This study emphasized confidentiality by having individual participants return the survey directly to the author. Usable surveys with no missing data for any items in the analysis were received from a set of 103 supervisors corresponding to exactly 160 of the 181 responding employees, yielding a dyadic response rate of ~74%.

The 160 employee–supervisor dyads comprised 160 employees and 103 supervisors. The respondent group of 160 employees was 63% female, with an overall average age of 30.91 years (SD = 8.43) and an average organizational tenure of 3.16 years (SD = 3.82). The respondent group of 103 supervisors was 51% male, with an overall average age of 35.55 years (SD = 9.42) and an average organizational tenure of 7.96 years (SD = 6.80).

Measurement

All variables were self-reported by employees, except for promotability and task performance, which were assessed by supervisors. The original version of the questionnaire was translated into Chinese by me, the author, and then translated back from Chinese into English by two bilingual foreign-language experts. Finally, the translation was reviewed for appropriateness by five organizational-behavior experts to ensure the content validity and face validity of the measurements (Brislin, 1980).

Networking behavior

Networking behavior was measured with Forret and Dougherty's (2001) 28-item networking-behavior scale. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 6-point scale how often they had typically engaged in networking behaviors within the last year. This scale measures five types of networking behavior: maintaining external contacts, socializing, engaging in professional activities, increasing internal visibility, and participating in community activities. Cronbach's α sequentially were 0.82, 0.84, 0.72, 0.82, and 0.82.

For this study, I conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to detect the dimensions of networking behaviors. The five-factor model achieved a good model fit ($\chi^2 = 1054.22$, $df = 340$, $\chi^2/df = 3.10$, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.93, normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.91, incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.93) and was better than a one-factor model ($\chi^2 = 2,114.50$, $df = 350$, $\chi^2/df = 6.04$, RMSEA = 0.16, CFI = 0.75, NNFI = 0.73, IFI = 0.75) and a two-factor model ($\chi^2 = 1355.92$, $df = 349$, $\chi^2/df = 3.89$, RMSEA = 0.10, CFI = 0.82, NNFI = 0.80, IFI = 0.82). χ^2 difference tests also indicate that the five-factor model was better than the one-factor model and the two-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 301.70$ and $1,060.28$, $\Delta df = 9$ and 10, respectively, $p < .01$). These results suggest that the present study's constructs were distinct from one another. Consistent with Forret and Dougherty's (2001, 2004) methodology, the current study's statistical analysis rests on five types of networking behaviors, rather than on a combination of career- and community-based networking behaviors.

Political skill

Political skill was measured with Perrewe, Zellars, Ferris, Rossi, Kacmar, and Ralston (2004) 6-item scale. Respondents reported the extent to which they agreed with each statement, such as 'I understand people well.' Responses rested on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 5 = 'strongly agree'). The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.84.

Promotability

Promotability was measured with Lin and Huang's (2005) 3-item scale of developmental potential. Supervisors were asked to indicate on a 6-point scale the extent to which they agreed with

each statement, such as the statement 'If possible, I will promote the employee in the future.' The Cronbach's α for this measure was 0.91.

Control variables

Several additional variables were included in the study to control for factors that might confound the relationship between networking behavior and career-related outcomes (Becker, 2005). Following the suggestion of Wolff and Moser (2009), the current study used three human-capital variables – education, organizational tenure, and work experience. Herein, education is related to network size (Carroll & Teo, 1996) and to compensation. Ng, Eby, Sorensen, and Feldman (2005) have shown that experience and tenure are related to compensation and may also influence networking behavior (e.g., Kram & Isabella, 1985). Respondents in the present study indicated their highest education degree (1 = 'high school', 2 = 'bachelor's degree', 3 = 'master's degree', and 4 = 'doctorate degree'), organizational tenure, and work experience. Organizational tenure and work experience were measured as years and months and then converted to years.

Prior research has often focused on employees' current task performance (e.g., Beehr, Taber, & Walsh, 1980; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990) and demographic variables (e.g., Williams & Walker, 1985; Hartman, Griffeth, Crino, & Harris, 1991) as key factors in predicting promotability. Thus, in addition to demographic variables, I also included the second supervisor-rated variable of task performance as the control variable in this study. The task performance measure here was made up of four items adopted from Wayne and Liden (1995) and MacAllister (1995). Supervisors were asked to indicate on a 6-point scale the extent to which they agreed with each statement as applied to a given employee. Sample items include 'In my estimation, this employee has completed his or her work very effectively.' The Cronbach's α for this measure was 0.91. This study controlled for two demographic variables that, according to research (Ng et al., 2005), correlate with career-related outcomes: gender (0 = 'male', 1 = 'female') and relationship status (0 = 'single', 1 = 'in a steady relationship').

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations of all variables included in this study. The correlations among the five networking-behavior variables ranged from 0.26 to 0.67. Maintaining external contacts was positively related to task performance and promotability ($r = 0.22$ and 0.27, $p < .05$), and engaging in professional activities was positively related to promotability ($r = 0.24$, $p < .05$), but not to task performance. The correlation between task performance and promotability was the highest ($r = 0.76$, $p < .01$), but these two variables were associated with different networking behaviors. Thus, controlling for task performance has helped clarify the relationships between networking behaviors and promotability. I also ran multicollinearity statistics to detect the extent to which correlations among variables were high. Results show that none of the tolerances were at or below 0.10, providing confidence that multicollinearity was not a problem in this study. These results allowed me to proceed with the following hierarchical regression analyses.

Hypothesis testing

This study investigated the relationship between networking behaviors and promotability by conducting hierarchical regression analyses. Table 2 presents the results of the hierarchical regression analyses. Of the control variables, only task performance was significantly positively related to promotability ($\beta = 0.75$, $p < .01$). The unique incremental to R^2 was calculated for the set of networking-behavior variables after the control variables were entered into the regression, and the results show that networking-behavior variables could explain significant variances of promotability ($\Delta R^2 = 0.09$, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 1, declaring that

TABLE 1. CORRELATIONS, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF VARIABLES

	Means	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Gender[a]	0.63	0.48	–												
2. Relationship status[b]	0.33	0.47	0.15	–											
3. Education	2.68	0.57	−0.16*	−0.44**	–										
4. Work experience	8.11	7.21	0.17*	0.66**	−0.43**	–									
5. Organizational tenure	3.16	3.82	0.12	0.53**	−0.41**	0.61**	–								
6. Task performance	4.76	0.82	0.06	0.08	0.09	−0.04	0.08	(0.91)							
7. Political skill	3.62	0.55	−0.21*	−0.05	0.20*	−0.06	−0.03	0.16*	(0.84)						
8. Maintaining external contacts	3.96	.96	−0.08	0.06	0.11	−0.10	0.08	0.20*	0.26*	(0.82)					
9. Socializing	3.51	0.89	−0.21*	−0.32**	0.26**	−0.31**	−0.23*	0.06	0.29**	0.67**	(0.84)				
10. Engaging in professional activities	1.91	0.85	−0.09	−0.03	0.28**	0.01	0.07	0.13	0.48**	0.39**	0.31**	(0.72)			
11. Increasing internal visibility	1.63	1.06	−0.13	0.03	0.07	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.20*	0.26*	0.30**	0.65**	(0.83)		
12. Participating in community activities	1.99	1.15	−0.10	0.05	0.05	0.16*	0.07	0.03	0.23*	0.27*	0.23*	0.56**	0.49**	(0.83)	
13. Promotability	4.68	0.99	0.01	0.00	0.10	−0.04	0.05	0.74**	0.28**	0.27*	0.10	0.24*	0.11	0.11	(0.91)

Note. $n = 160$; reliabilities are shown in the diagonal.
[a]0 = 'male', 1 = 'female'.
[b]0 = 'single', 1 = 'in a steady relationship'.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

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TABLE 2. REGRESSION RESULTS: NETWORKING BEHAVIORS AS PREDICTORS OF PROMOTABILITY

	Promotability		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Control variables			
Gender	−0.04	−0.03	−0.03
Relationship status	−0.09	−0.12*	−0.11*
Education	0.01	0.04	−0.03
Organizational tenure	−0.02	−0.05	−0.02
Work experience	0.08	.08	0.05
Task performance	0.75**	0.73**	0.70**
Networking behaviors			
Maintaining external contacts		0.20*	0.15
Socializing		−0.17*	−0.13
Engaging in professional activities		0.25*	0.26*
Increasing internal visibility		−0.01	−0.08
Participating in community activities		0.02	−0.11
Moderator			
Political skill (PS)			0.15
Interaction terms			
Maintaining external contacts × PS			−0.21*
Socializing × PS			−0.18
Engaging in professional activities × PS			0.11
Increasing internal visibility × PS			0.01
Participating in community activities × PS			0.20*
R^2	0.64**	0.73**	0.77**
Adjusted R^2	0.59	0.71	0.74
ΔR^2		0.09*	0.03*
F	61.81	65.58	70.08

Note. * $p < .05$; **$p < .01$. All the regression coefficients shown are standardized.

involvement in career-based networking behavior would be more positively related to promotability than community-based networking behavior, received partial support. Compared to career networking, participating in community activity was not associated with promotability ($\beta = 0.02$, $p > .10$). Of the career-based networking behaviors, only maintaining external contacts and participating in professional activities were significantly related to promotability ($\beta = 0.20$ and 0.25, $p < .05$). However, the relationship between socialization and promotability was found to be negative ($\beta = -0.17$, $p < .05$).

Hypothesis 2 proposed that political skill moderates the relationship between community-based networking behaviors and promotability. According to Baron and Kenny (1986), each of the five interaction terms for networking behaviors in combination with political skill were entered into the regression after the control variables, networking behaviors, and political skill. To counter the problem of multicollinearity in tests of interaction terms, I centered all networking behaviors combined with political skill before creating the interaction terms (see Aiken and West, 1991). As seen in Table 2, only the interaction terms of participating in community activities and maintaining external contacts in combination with political skill were significantly related to promotability ($\beta = 0.20$ and -0.18, $p < .05$). To clarify the form of the relationship, I followed Aiken and West's (1991) procedures and plotted a graph, with which I investigated the relationship between community-based networking behavior (participating in community activities) and promotability under different levels of political skill (i.e., high and low). Figure 1 illustrates that when political skill was relatively high, participating in community activities was positively related to promotability; this pattern conforms to the expected
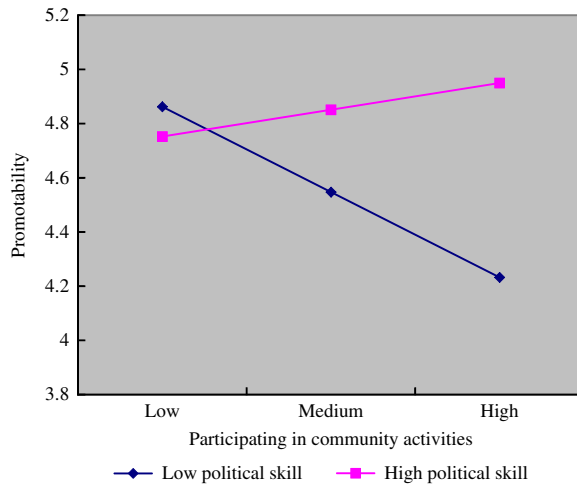
FIGURE 1. THE MODERATING EFFECT OF POLITICAL SKILL ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARTICIPATING IN COMMUNITY
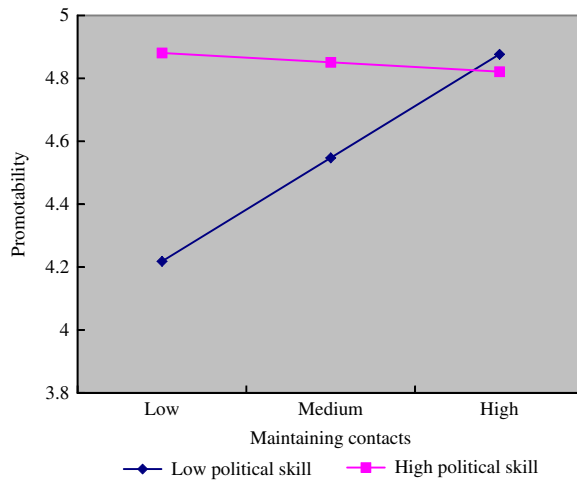ACTIVITIES AND PROMOTABILITY

FIGURE 2. THE MODERATING EFFECT OF POLITICAL SKILL ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MAINTAINING EXTERNAL CONTACTS
AND PROMOTABILITY

shape of the hypothesized interaction. Thus, the result supports Hypothesis 2. Also, I examined the joint effect that maintaining external contacts and political skill would have on promotability and plotted their relationship in Figure 2. The figure illustrates that when political skill was relatively low, maintaining external contacts was associated with lowered promotability evaluation. Thus, the results partially support Hypothesis 3.

DISCUSSION

Although networking has drawn much attention from career researchers, there remains the important question regarding what type of networking behaviors will influence supervisory evaluations for

career advancement. The present study extends prior research (e.g., Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Treadway et al., 2010; Mohd Radsi, Garavan, & Ismail, 2013) by distinguishing career- and community-based networking behaviors from one another and by identifying their specific effects on promotability. Results of the current study support the argument that employees who are involved in career-based networking behaviors and integrate considerable political skill into their community-based networking activities have a good chance of enhancing their supervisor's impression of them as competent for higher positions in the future (Wolff & Moser, 2009).

The current study built upon calls to better understand the effects of networking on promotability evaluations by supervisors (Bozionelos, 2008). Although networking behaviors are an important predictor of career advancement, research focusing on real networking behaviors is relatively scant (Huang, 2016). The current study contributes to the literature by linking the attribution theory and ELM to networking in order to clarify the relationships among networking behaviors, promotability, and political skill. The findings consolidate evidence pertaining to the incremental validity of networking behaviors' effects on promotability (with task performance and demographic variables controlled for). Moreover, the findings help further uncover the distinctive nature of networking behaviors insofar as career- and community-based networking behaviors differ from each other regarding their association with promotability. According to attribution theory (Fiske & Taylor, 1991), subordinates' networking behaviors can shape supervisors' perception of subordinates and supervisors' career-progression predictions for subordinates. Career networking has 'pure' competence characteristics, which lead supervisors to use high-promotion-potential explanations. In contrast, community networking – when exhibited by politically skillful employees – has 'mixed' warmth and competence characteristics, which lead supervisors to make similar inferences about employees' traits and motives because supervisors tend to attribute salient behavior to disposition rather than to situation (Lassiter, Geers, Munhall, Ploutz-Snyder, & Breitenbecher, 2002). The results show the value of networking based on the ELM (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986): supervisors used career and community networking as central and peripheral informational cues to make upward-advancement evaluations.

Consistent with findings presented by Forret and Dougherty (2004), the current study's findings show that career-based networking behavior, particularly in professional activities outside organizations, was positively related to promotability. This finding reinforces an important idea: supervisors may infer, from employees' engagement in professional activities, that the employees have opportunities for competency development in addition to personal growth (Mohd Radsi, Garavan, & Ismail, 2013). Moreover, the finding suggests that, in order to develop their career prospects, employees should signal both their ambition and their capabilities by engaging in professional activities.

Contrary to the findings of previous studies (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Wolff & Moser, 2010; Mohd Radsi, Garavan, & Ismail, 2013), the current study's findings show that maintaining external contacts was positively related to promotability and that socializing was negatively related to promotability. In general, employees who frequently maintain external contacts may rapidly access new extra-organizational information beneficial to the employees' prospects for career advancement (Wolff & Moser, 2010). Supervisors place a high value on maintaining relationships and may view employees who frequently contact outsiders as ambitious and proactive in maintaining instrumental relationships. In contrast, supervisors may consider socialization a waste of employee time and effort. An employee taking part in these informal socializing activities is essentially networking with peers who tend to have little influence on either the performance evaluations or the upward-promotion decisions affecting the employee (Forret & Dougherty, 2004), and frequent peer interaction might give supervisors the impression that the employee is politicking or has weak career commitment, which could lead to negative promotability evaluations.

According to a high-performance culture like Taiwan's (Dissanayake et al., 2015; Hofstede, n.d.), employees should value tradition, work hard, and de-emphasize leisure in order to improve performance persistently. Socializing at work is seen as ineffective and inefficient, and supervisors generally do not

encourage employees who engage in such behavior. Moreover, because familial collectivism has deep roots in Taiwan, the development and maintenance of relationships there are associated with emotional and instrumental trust embedded in social networks (Chua, Morris, & Ingram, 2009). People's involvement in socializing can help configure friendships, but typically lacks instrumental benefits. Similarly, involvement in community networking tends to create links that are more emotional than instrumental.

However, the findings of this study do not show that increases in internal visibility are effective at enhancing promotability evaluations, even when employees are politically skillful. One plausible explanation for these particular findings concerns the variable of job attribute. All respondents of this study worked in banks and were involved in selling financial services to potential customers. The respondents' job focus was on individual sales, which gave the respondents few opportunities to accept highly visible or challenging work assignments or to participate in task forces or committees. Thus, most of these respondents seldom had an opportunity to prove their broader capabilities (McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow, 1994). Another plausible explanation is that the frequency or the extent of internal visibility presented in this study was lower than in past studies, which might lead to an underestimation of internal visibility's effects. Table 1 shows that the frequency of internal visibility ($M = 1.63$) was, in fact, less pronounced here than in past research (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; $M = 3.19$), suggesting that respondents in the current study demonstrated a limited range of internal visibility. In this type of case, such a restriction of range (Schmidt, Hunter, & Urry, 1976) relative to internal visibility may make it difficult for promotability-evaluating supervisors to differentiate among employees on the basis of networking behavior.

The current study represents an initial attempt to empirically evaluate and demonstrate the moderating effects of political skill on the relationship between community-based networking behaviors and promotability. This study is a response to the arguments of Ferris et al. (2005) that politically skilled individuals who engage in networking activities are more likely to experience success than politically unskilled ones. However, a finding in the current study indicates that political skill is not always effective in every situation. In this regard, the current research indicates that employees' maintenance with external contacts is, for the most part, negatively related to promotability when the employees' political skill is high. One explanation for this finding is that employees' maintenance of contacts takes place more frequently than the employees' participation in community activities, resulting in a situation where political manipulation expands in the maintenance of contacts, inducing perceptions of insincerity. Although political skill is regarded as an important social competency (Ferris et al., 2002), the current study's results highlight that it is not always effective and, in fact, can sometimes harm personal career development. Thus, politically skilled individuals should be careful to adapt their networking behaviors to diverse situations in a manner that conveys genuineness and sincerity toward the target (Treadway et al., 2010). Engaging in more community activities and maintaining fewer external contacts are two strategies that could help politically skilled employees impress a given supervisor of their worthiness for promotion.

The findings here also provide professionals with useful suggestions and guidance on networking and career self-management. Before enacting any networking behaviors geared toward gaining a promotion, professionals should self-assess personal political skill in advance. The effectiveness of networking depends on the mastery of political skill. When seeking to prove themselves qualified for higher positions, professionals low in political skill should exhibit more career-based networking behaviors that signal confidence and social competency. In contrast, politically skilled professionals should be involved in community-based networking behavior to persuade a given supervisor that they are better than their colleagues for future advancement in the organization.

Limitations of the current study and directions for future research

The current study has several limitations that point to areas of inquiry for future research. First, as with any correlational study, inferences of causality cannot be made with certainty in this investigation.

For example, it could be that promotability affects networking behaviors. Although alternative orderings of paths cannot be ruled out, prior theory and empirical findings suggest that the causal ordering of the variables in this study is justified (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Thompson, 2005). Longitudinal research on networking-behavior processes is critical to the further substantiation of this study's conclusions. Moreover, research conducted in a natural setting, preferably observational research, seems important for this field as well.

Second, differences among supervisors' approaches to conducting evaluations might have confounded the relationships between employees' networking behaviors and supervisors' promotability evaluations.[1] Supervisors' political skill may affect relationships. The more politically skillful the supervisors are, the better they can detect the authenticity and hidden motives of employees' networking behaviors. Future research should consider supervisors' political skill as a control variable or moderator.

Finally, the sample consists only of financial-service sales agents in one bank. When the respondents in the current study is compared with the respondents with various jobs in previous research (e.g., Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Wolff & Moser, 2010), the results of this current study may resist any direct generalization to less interactive jobs like R&D engineering positions or public-sector management positions (Mohd Radsi, Garavan, & Ismail, 2013). Accordingly, the current study suggests that future research should investigate and compare the differences among diverse job types. On a related note, my decision to conduct the current study within a single organization affected the study's external validity (i.e., generalizability). However, the single-organization context created an opportunity to hold constant a host of contextual factors, such as compensation policies, HRM policies, and organizational culture, and also enhanced the study's internal validity (i.e., reduced plausible alternative explanations).

To expand the current findings, future research should integrate all the types of networking behaviors and investigate interactive models that explain how employees' networking behaviors ultimately lead to promotability evaluations. For example, supervisors may regard those employees who engage in more professional activities and less socialization as more concentrated on self-development – a perception that, in turn, may strengthen supervisors' favorable evaluation of the employees in the context of promotion decisions.

Future research would also do well to explore the mechanisms that mediate supervisors' perceptions of and inferences about subordinates regarding the relationship between networking and promotion. Weer and Greenhaus (2017) showed that supervisors perceived employees displaying significant extra-role behaviors as highly committed to the organization and, in turn, evaluated them as having significant structural growth opportunities. For instance, the more a professional is involved in career networking, the more likely the supervisor will be to perceive the professional as a skillful self-monitor, as an extravert, or simply as a likable person; and then, there is a better chance that the supervisor will evaluate the professional as promotable. Another mediating mechanism of network structures might also explain why networking behaviors lead to career outcomes. Gremmen, Akkerman, and Benschop (2013) found that networking behaviors have explanatory power in network structures. It is possible that the more diverse or frequent the networking behaviors of an employee are, the more effective the network ties will be; thus, because of social capital embedded in network structures, the employee will be more likely to receive upward promotion.

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[1] To lower concern about non-independence, I conducted an ANOVA regarding the supervisor-rated variables (e.g., task performance and promotability) and found that the F values were insignificant ($F = 1.18$ and 1.05, $p > .05$). Furthermore, I conducted a WABA test, the results of which show that supervisors in this study were able to distinguish differences among employees (Dansereau, Alutto, & Yammarino, 1984). Future studies should use hierarchical linear modeling with a large one-to-one dyad sample.

In sum, my goal in this study has been to forge a better understanding of the relationships among networking behaviors, promotability, and political skills. Results of this study suggest that career-based networking behaviors affect promotability beyond task performance. In addition, the results suggest that employees with elevated political skills might do well to engage in community-based networking behaviors, which can positively influence supervisors' evaluation of promotability in this context.

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