



It pays to be well-connected: The moderating role of networking ability on the relationship between core self-evaluations and income



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ABSTRACT

The aim of the current study is to examine the combined effect of networking ability and CSE on income. While both networking ability and CSE are known to be associated with income, it is not known if networking ability moderates the CSE and income relationship. Results with 203 Australian workers reveal that core self-evaluations are positively associated with income and that income is highest for individuals high in both core self-evaluations and networking ability. Drawing on approach/avoidance motivation theory and social capital theory, the results suggest that individuals high in CSE and networking ability are likely to benefit from higher incomes because of their motivation to set challenging and complex work goals as well as their willingness to draw on social connections in the workplace to achieve these goals. Implications of the current findings are discussed and directions for future research are offered.

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1. Introduction

Many individuals, whether out of research or personal curiosity, are interested in understanding what influences their earning potential. Contextual factors such as industry, country affluence and government fiscal policy play a role (Greenville, Pobke, & Rogers, 2013; Hall, 2005), however, many of these factors are outside of an individual's control. Having said this, there is emerging evidence that there are a number of individual difference factors, such as core self-evaluations and networking ability, which may influence income (Judge, 2009; Todd, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2009). Core self-evaluations (CSE) represent a stable personality trait capturing the fundamental beliefs that individuals hold about themselves and their functioning in the world (Judge, Locke, Durham, & Kluger, 1998). There is a considerable body of research, especially within the fields of personality and psychology, highlighting the impact of CSE on several work related outcomes such as job performance, goal-setting, job satisfaction and income (Bono & Judge, 2003; Chang, Ferris, Johnson, Rosen, & Tan, 2012; Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge & Bono, 2001; Judge & Hurst, 2007a; Judge, Hurst, & Simon, 2009). In the current research, we aim to investigate the relationship between CSE and career outcomes further by testing whether networking ability, the skill to develop beneficial networks of people and utilize these networks for personal and organisational gain, moderates the CSE and income relationship.

1.1. Core self-evaluations

Individuals low in CSE tend to have a negative view of themselves where they focus on their failures and shortcomings, seeing themselves as more susceptible to their environment. In contrast, individuals high in CSE tend to have a positive self-view, be confident in their abilities, and believe that they can influence their environment (Bono & Judge, 2003; Jiang & Jiang, 2015; Judge & Hurst, 2007a; Judge et al., 1998). Indeed, there are many benefits to being high in CSE with CSE individuals found to be more motivated, satisfied and better performers than those low in CSE (Erez & Judge, 2001; Harris, Gilbreath, & Sunday, 1998; Judge & Bono, 2001; Judge et al., 2009; Srivastava, Locke, Judge, & Adams, 2010).

CSE is a broad latent trait that comprises of four more specific traits: self-esteem, generalised self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003). These four components are substantially correlated and have been found to load onto one common factor (Erez & Judge, 2001; Judge et al., 1998). In comparison to the four components of CSE, the singular CSE construct better predicts job and life satisfaction (Judge et al., 2003) and more consistently predicts overall of behaviour (Erez & Judge, 2001).

1.2. Core self-evaluations and career success

Career success is defined as the accumulated positive work and psychological outcomes resulting from an individual's work experiences and is generally operationalized subjectively with career satisfaction, and objectively with income and number of promotions (Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Seibert & Kraimer, 2001). Individuals high

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in CSE have been reported to not only have higher incomes than those low in CSE (Judge et al., 2009), but also faster pay increases (Judge & Hurst, 2008). The association between CSE and income appears to be rather robust with longitudinal data showing that CSE in youth significantly predicts income in later life (Judge & Hurst, 2007b).

Perhaps the most comprehensive and theoretically based explanation for how CSE influences outcomes can be found in Elliot and Thrash's (2002) approach/avoidance motivation framework. According to this framework, approach motivation involves the action of behaviour towards positive stimuli and avoidance involves the action of behaviour away from negative stimuli (see Elliot, 1999 for a review). There is a wealth of empirical evidence identifying approach and avoidance motivations as fundamental to personality and behaviour (e.g. Bjørnebekk & Diseth, 2010; Dalley, 2016; Gardiner, Jackson, & Loxton, 2015). Therefore it seems reasonable to expect that an individual's sensitivity to approaching reward or avoiding punishment would be similarly relevant to work behaviours, such as performance and subsequent income.

Ferris and colleagues (Chang et al., 2012; Ferris et al., 2013) were the first to align high CSE with approach motivation and low CSE with avoidance motivation. There is growing support for this conceptualisation. Using a large national dataset Williams and Gardiner (2015) found an association between CSE and income. However, in contrast to prior studies reporting a pay advantage for those high in CSE (e.g. Judge & Hurst, 2007b), the authors found that low CSE was associated with a pay disadvantage where low CSE individuals were found to earn less than those high in CSE overall. The pay gap between high and low CSE individuals was greatest in challenging and incentive-based work environments. In line with the approach/avoidance motivation framework, Williams and Gardiner's (2015) study suggests that individuals low in CSE (avoidance motivated), rather than high (approach motivated), are much less motivated by reward. Following this, we reason that individuals high in CSE will be more motivated by positive rewards and less deterred by complex work than those low in CSE. Therefore we expect to find a positive association between CSE and pay (Hypothesis 1).

1.3. Networking ability as a moderator

Another individual difference factor we think likely to impact career success is the political skill of networking ability. Political skill involves the tendency of an individual to understand others and to use this understanding to influence others (Ferris, Perrewé, Anthony, & Gilmore, 2000). Networking ability refers to the tendency of an individual to develop diverse contacts and to use these networks for personal and organisational gains (Ferris et al., 2005a). Individuals high in networking ability easily develop strong, beneficial alliances and are adept at utilising these networks to make the most of opportunities (Ferris et al., 2000). Networking ability is one of four specific political skills within Ferris et al.'s (2007) cognitive-affect-behaviour, multilevel, meta-theoretical framework. The other components in the model include social astuteness (being perceptive of others' wants and needs), apparent sincerity (conveying authenticity) and interpersonal influence (being subtly persuasive in influencing others) (Ferris et al., 2000).

Over three decades of research has established political skill as playing an important role in organizations (Ferris et al., 2007). For example, political skill has been found to predict team and contextual performance (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004; Jawahar, Meurs, Ferris, & Hochwarter, 2008), and buffer against strain resulting from role conflict (Perrewé et al., 2004). Networking has been shown to be particularly predictive of individual career success (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Ng et al., 2005; Thompson, 2005; Todd et al., 2009; Wolff & Moser, 2009) and is positively associated with not only current salary but also salary growth-rate and number of promotions (Ng et al., 2005; Wolff & Moser, 2009). Interestingly, Todd et al. (2009) found that only networking ability, rather than overall political

skill or other political skill types significantly predicted total pay. This evidence seems to confirm the old adage that it's not what you know but *who you know* that's important.

Social capital theory provides a compelling explanation for the positive association between networking ability and income. Social capital theory argues that the quality of an individual's network determines the extent to which they can gain access to information, exert influence and effect change within an organisation (Brass, 2001; Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1988). Expanding personal networks is one way to increase social capital (Baron & Markman, 2000). Individuals who have diverse networks can utilize the opportunities that arise through these networks for self-gain (Burt, 1992; Forret & Dougherty, 2004).

1.4. Networking ability as a moderator

Approach/avoidance motivation theory and social capital theory provide some theoretical explanation for the association between CSE and networking ability. However, it is not known how CSE and networking ability together influence income. Cheung, Herndon, and Dougherty (2016) examined the effect of developmental networks, which is a network of people that take an active interest and provide developmental support to advance an individual's career, on the relationship between CSE and salary. The authors found that developmental network size had a negative relationship with salary; and that the CSE-income relationship was moderated by the strength of network ties. Individuals high in CSE with strong network ties reported a higher salary than those with weaker network ties. This study suggests that it is relationship quality and not quantity that determines income.

In line with prior research we hypothesize that networking ability will moderate the CSE and income association. We hypothesize that income will be highest for those high in both CSE and networking ability (Hypothesis 2). Compared to those low in CSE, high CSE individuals are more motivated to pursue reward, more confident in their abilities and more likely to see themselves as active agents who can change their environment (Bono & Judge, 2003; Judge & Hurst, 2007a; Judge et al., 1998). Therefore, individuals high in CSE and networking ability are likely to secure high incomes because they are expected to possess both the motivation to perform well and the means to do so.

2. Method

2.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were 203 working volunteers (137 female and 66 male) from a large Australian university and the wider community completed an anonymous online survey. The mean age of participants was 26.85 years ($SD = 10.52$) with 40.4% of the sample's highest education being high school and 39.4% being university. All participants worked a minimum of 15 h/week (mean hours worked = 29.70, $SD = 12.42$). Average tenure was 3.57 years ($SD = 5.13$). The majority of the participants worked in retail (19.7%) closely followed by hospitality (18.7%), government and defence services (18.2%) and health and community services (17.2%).

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Political skill inventory (PSI)

The PSI is an 18-item scale that measures the four dimensions of political skill: networking ability, interpersonal influence, social astuteness and apparent sincerity (Ferris et al., 2005a). Items were answered on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), where higher scores indicate higher levels of political skill. Example items include: "At work, I know a lot of important people and am well connected" (networking ability); "It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people" (interpersonal influence); "I understand people very well" (social astuteness); "I try to show a genuine

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