

**Political Skill, Self Monitoring and Emotional Intelligence as Antecedents to
Organisational Retaliatory Behaviours**

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Abstract

In recent years, researchers have focused on aggression in the workplace. Organisational retaliatory behaviour has been identified as a specific typology of workplace aggression that has been gaining increasing attention. Given the negative outcomes associated with organisational retaliatory behaviour, we believe it is important to extend this research to consider possible antecedents. If we can understand the antecedents to organisational retaliatory behaviours then we may be able to minimize this phenomenon. This article will conceptualise a model arguing that low political skill, low self monitoring and low emotional intelligence are individual difference variables that may be antecedents to organisational retaliatory behaviours. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

Keywords: organisational retaliatory behaviours, political skills, self monitoring, emotional intelligence

‘Adelaide man attacks employer with tomahawk after argument with employer, having his hours reduced and eventually being dismissed’ (Fewster 2006)

‘Three employees steal from employer after employer cuts funding for Christmas party’ (Wilson 2009)

‘Employee dismissed after taking ‘sickie’ to attend induction day for new job after being made redundant by current employer’ (Lovett v Pacific National (NSW) Pty Limited 2008)

Organisational retaliatory behaviours are a fact of organisational life. The above are real life examples of organisational retaliatory behaviours taken from recent newspaper articles. Skarlicki and Folger (2004:384) define organisational retaliatory behaviour as ‘reactions by disapproving individuals to organisational misdeeds’. Organisational retaliatory behaviours can result in outcomes ranging from minor inconveniences to serious damage to the organisation and its property, as well as injury to individuals and, includes behaviours such as absenteeism, time wasting, gossiping, theft and sabotage (Skarlicki & Folger 1997). These types of behaviours have significant monetary and emotional cost to the organisation and its employees (Fehr & Gächter 2000). Indeed, we argue that this type of behaviour has impacts on employees who do not engage in these practices as it effects the ambience of the organisation. Therefore, we consider that it is important to examine organisational retaliatory behaviour and its antecedents.

Initially we need to determine the antecedents to organisational retaliatory behaviours as this may allow us to predict and minimize such behaviour. In the workplace, this knowledge enables managers to encourage behaviours that enhance both the individual's and the company's performance and discourage those behaviours that reduce performance. A recent focus of much of this research has been in the area of emotions (Ashforth & Humphrey 1995). Following up on this initial work, Humphrey (2006) identifies a number of interesting areas for further research of the effect of emotions including testing the effects of negative mood on work performance, examining contextual factors that predict moods and emotions in organisations and the effect of emotions during times of change and conflict. In this article, we contribute to this body of work by examining the antecedents of organisational retaliatory behaviour with political skill, self monitoring and emotional intelligence being the particular antecedents of focus.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for our model is based on Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action and Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour. In our model (Figure 1), we posit that individuals with low political skills or low self monitoring skill are more likely to engage in organisational retaliatory behaviours, particularly when they perceive unfairness or mistreatment in the organisation. In terms of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1991), we argue that emotional intelligence can act as a behavioural control reducing the incidence of organisational retaliatory behaviours. In the following sections, we outline our model in greater detail commencing with an overview of organisational retaliatory behaviours and following with our propositions as to how the antecedents of political skill, self-monitoring and emotional intelligence will interact with organisational retaliatory behaviours. Finally, we will discuss implications for theory and practice and conclude with recommendations for future directions.

Insert Figure 1 here

Organisational Retaliatory Behaviour

Organisational retaliatory behaviour was first conceptualised by Skarlicki and Folger (1997) as a counterpart to organisational citizenship behaviour (Skarlicki & Folger 2004). Retaliatory behaviours were initially described as overt or covert, physical or verbal behaviours enacted by 'disgruntled employees to perceived unfair treatment' (Skarlicki & Folger 1997:100). Although described as overt or covert, the authors state that the majority of retaliatory behaviours would be subtle such as taking extended breaks or working on personal matters, as opposed to acts like assault which, according to Baron and Neuman's (1996) typology of workplace aggression, is an overt act.

Skarlicki and Folger (1997) readily admit that the behaviours they describe as retaliatory overlap with other typologies such as counterproductive workplace behaviours, anti-social behaviour and, specifically, deviant behaviour (Spector & Fox 2002; Griffin & Lopez 2005; Robinson & Bennett 1995) and have similarities with Baron and Neuman's (1996) dimensions of workplace aggression. However, they believe that the term retaliatory suggests the behavioural response has (at least in part) been precipitated by the organisation (either in context or situation) whereas terms such as anti-social or deviant may emerge as individual behaviour with no organisational trigger. Skarlicki and Folger (1997) also believe that the term deviant has a negative connotation whereas retaliatory does not necessarily label the behaviour as negative or wrongful and, in fact, the behaviour could be argued to be beneficial in some instances. As an example, 'disobeying a supervisor's order' is deemed as retaliatory behaviour but, if the order is to do something unethical, the refusal could be seen as ultimately positive or functional (Folger & Skarlicki 2005). We concede Skarlicki and Folger's (1997) assertions as to the potential benefits of retaliatory behaviour; however, for the purposes of this article, we will focus on the negative aspects of organisational retaliatory behaviour.

As stated in the introductory paragraph, in 2004, Skarlicki and Folger redefined organisational retaliatory behaviour to 'reactions by disapproving individuals to organisational misdeeds' (p 324). This new definition relates to the authors' argument that employees may not only retaliate in order to seek justice for a perceived wrong committed against them personally but, may also seek redress for perceived unfair treatment against third parties. Ultimately, whether the retaliation is enacted for the benefit of a direct target or a third party, Skarlicki and Folger (2004) suggest that people retaliate for a

range of reasons including: to restore perceived balance and social order, to educate alleged wrongdoers, to address threats, to protect values, and to punish.

In summary, organisational retaliatory behaviours can be targeted toward the individual or the organisation; aimed at the direct source of the transgression (e.g. talked back to supervisor) or can be indirect (e.g. gossiped about supervisor); active (e.g. took supplies) or passive (e.g. took an extended break); illegitimate-unlawful (e.g. theft of resources) or legitimate-lawful (e.g. grievance procedure/litigation); verbal (e.g. spread rumours) or physical (e.g. damaged equipment); attempted or completed; and, can range from minor (withdrawal behaviours) to extreme (violence) (Skarlicki & Folger 2004:387-388). Research in this area is important because of the high costs to organisations and individuals (Fehr & Gächter 2000) and so our discussion will now turn to our model which outlines some individual difference variables that we propose are antecedents of organisational retaliatory behaviours.

Political Skill

According to Ferris, Treadway, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, Kacmar, Douglas and Frink (2005), Pfeffer (1981) and Mintzberg (1985) were two of the first researchers to consider politics in organisations. Pfeffer (1981) argued that political skill was necessary to be successful in organisations. Mintzberg (1985:138) conceptualised organisational politics as the use of influence through persuasion, manipulation and negotiation to counter questionable or illegal behaviour or cause organisational change. Further research by Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas and Ammeter (2004: 311) resulted in political skill being 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 organisational objectives'.

Perrewé, Zellars, Ferris, Rossi, Kacmar and Ralston (2004) and Perrewé, Zellars, Rossi, Ferris, Kacmar and Liu (2005) argue that political skill can help neutralise strain or stress reactions to workplace stressors. Ferris, Treadway, Perrewé, Brouer, Douglas and Lux (2007) suggest that individuals with high political skills exhibit a calm self-confidence as a result of a sense of control and their own personal security which enables them to maintain balance and perspective. Further, Ferris et al. (2005) state that those with higher political skill will find environmental stressors less threatening.

Therefore, we believe that individuals higher in political skill will be less likely to exhibit organisational retaliatory behaviours when they perceive unfairness or mistreatment (a form of stressor) in the workplace.

Moreover, we believe that those lower in political skill would be more likely to use organisational retaliatory behaviours such as ‘talking back or gossiping’ given their lesser skills in using alternative influence tactics such as ingratiation. Harrell-Cook Ferris and Dulebohn (1999) found that those higher in political skill use techniques such as ingratiation to facilitate their goals which, in this case, would be reducing the unfair treatment. Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams and Thatcher (2007) also found that supervisors who observed employees with high political skill using ingratiation tactics saw it as a genuine effort whereas those with low political skill were viewed as using ingratiation tactics as an intentional effort to manipulate for self-interest or personal gain and, therefore, are less likely to achieve their goals. We argue that this lack of ability to achieve their goals as a result of their lower political skill could then lead to organisational retaliatory behaviours.

Finally, Ferris et al. (2005) found that the overall political skill score significantly and positively related to conscientiousness ($r = .31, p < .001$). This indicates that those higher in political skill are more accountable to themselves and others. Given this, we consider that those higher in political skill would be less likely to engage in organisational retaliatory behaviours as they may deem these behaviours to reduce or impact negatively on their accountability. We therefore predict that:

Proposition 1 Lower levels of political skills will be associated with higher levels of organisational retaliatory behaviour

Self-Monitoring

Although political skill is moderately correlated with self monitoring, Ferris et al. (2005) deem it to be a distinct construct. Ferris, Perrewé, Anthony and Gilmore (2000) argue that political skill is used to *effect change* in an acceptable fashion whereas self monitoring is used to *adapt behaviour* to an acceptable fashion in a given situation. Snyder (1974:528) defined a high self-monitor as someone who is particularly sensitive to expressions and self-presentation of others in social situations and uses these prompts to monitor their own expressions and self-presentation. Lennox and Wolfe (1984) revised Snyder’s (1974) self-monitoring scale and, in doing so, redefined the concept somewhat.

Lennox and Wolfe (1984) state that self monitors are adept at understanding environmental contexts, others' emotions and behaviours and are able to transform their own self-presentation in relation to these cues either to fit in (protective monitoring) or to promote themselves (acquisitive monitoring). High self monitors can control their expressions and self-presentation across different situations and in relation to others' behaviour whereas low self-monitors are not able to and would simply react according to their own emotions, temperament and mindset (Gangsted & Snyder 2000:531).

Baron (1989) found that high self-monitors are more likely to use less provocation and more conciliation when resolving conflict. Neuman and Baron (1997) discovered a significant relationship between low self-monitors and obstructionism. Obstructionism is defined by Neuman and Baron (1998) as a manifestation of organisational retaliatory behaviour and takes the form of passive aggression such as arriving late for meetings or failing to transmit needed information. These examples of passive aggressive behaviour can also be seen as forms of retaliation. This may emerge from the fact that low self monitors have a reduced ability to manage their reactions across different situations, a propensity to be more provocative and less conciliatory and are more likely to engage in obstructionism. Based on these findings, we propose that:

Proposition 2. Lower levels of self monitoring skills will be associated with higher levels of organisational retaliatory behaviour

Behavioural Control – Emotional Intelligence

Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined the emotional intelligence construct as involving the ability of an individual to monitor one's own and others' emotions; to discriminate between the positive and negative effects of emotion; and to use emotional information to guide one's thinking and actions. In later work, Mayer and Salovey (1997) argue that emotional intelligence is differentiated from other forms of intelligence (e.g. Gardner's 1983 constructs of interpersonal or intrapersonal intelligence), because it deals specifically with the management of emotions and emotional content. Mayer and Salovey's most recent definition of emotional intelligence encapsulates four branches, namely: perception of emotion, use of emotion to facilitate thought, understanding emotion, and, managing emotion. This framework emphasises that emotional intelligence is a multi-dimensional construct and that these four steps are iterative in that each factor contributes to the development of other factors.

Perception refers to an ability to be self-aware of emotions and to express emotions and emotional needs accurately to others. A part of this self-awareness is the ability to distinguish between accurate and inaccurate expressions of emotions, and honest and dishonest expressions of emotions. Use of emotion refers to an individual's ability to use emotions to prioritise thinking by focusing on important information that explains why feelings are being experienced. This factor also includes the ability to adopt multiple perspectives to assess a problem from all sides, including pessimistic and optimistic perspectives. Understanding, the third component of emotional intelligence refers to an individual's ability to understand complex emotions such as simultaneous feelings of loyalty and anger. This factor also refers to an ability to recognise the likely transitions between emotions, for example, moving from feelings of betrayal to feelings of anger and grief. Finally, emotional management revolves around the regulation of emotions. That is, an individual's ability to connect or disconnect from an emotion depending on its usefulness in any given situation. For example, when faced with what is perceived as a personal injustice, an individual's feelings of anger may motivate or distract them from resolving the conflict and may engage in retaliatory behaviour. The individual with high emotional intelligence would be able to connect to their anger and regulate it to motivate their behaviour constructively.

Emotional Intelligence and Political Skill

Ferris et al. (2000) suggest that emotional intelligence is a specific dimension of various social skills such as social intelligence and self monitoring that will influence political skill. They assert that emotional intelligence enables understanding and regulation of emotions whereas political skill uses understanding and knowledge of others' emotions to build networks and influence others in order to achieve personal or organisational goals. Ferris et al. (2005) also state that emotional intelligence and political skill are related, but not so high that construct redundancy is present. Their view is that political skills differ from emotional intelligence as it goes beyond emotions to include other knowledge and skills. Therefore, we propose that:

Proposition 3 Higher levels of emotional intelligence will be associated with higher levels of political skills.

Emotional Intelligence and Self monitoring

Douglas, Frink and Ferris (2004) assert that we have limited knowledge about how emotional intelligence interacts with self monitoring. They suggest that they both contribute to social skills that assist in social exchanges. Schutte et al. (2001) found that those who scored higher for emotional intelligence scored significantly higher for self-monitoring, suggesting a positive relationship. In their research on individual emotional intelligence in work teams, Jordan, Ashkanasy, Härtel and Hooper (2002) proffer that emotional intelligence is related to managing emotions whereas self monitoring relates to an ability to change personal behaviours to fit particular circumstances. They found that emotional intelligence (measured with the WEIP-3) correlated positively with 'ability to deal with others' emotions' as measured with Lennox and Wolfe's (1984) revised self-monitoring scale.

Consequently, we propose that:

Proposition 4 Higher levels of emotional intelligence will be associated with higher levels of self monitoring

Emotional Intelligence and Organisational Retaliatory Behaviours

We previously proposed that emotional intelligence was an individual difference variable that has the potential to reduce organisational retaliatory behaviours. During a literature review we were unable to find any previous research that has examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and organisational retaliatory behaviour. Notably, Barclay, Skarlicki and Pugh (2005) examined the relationship between outward focused emotions (anger and hostility) and organisational retaliatory behaviour. Their findings suggest that individuals who experience anger and hostility in response to perceived unfairness increase their need to respond with organisational retaliatory behaviours. Research by Ashkanasy, Ashton-James and Jordan (2004) suggests that those with higher emotional intelligence have an increased ability to cope with stress. Thus, we feel that those with lower emotional intelligence will be less able to manage emotions such as anger and hostility when faced with stressful situations such as perceived mistreatment and may react with organisational retaliatory behaviours. A practical example of how emotional intelligence may act as a behavioural control to reduce organisational retaliatory behaviour will illustrate this proposition.

For example, a supervisor may order an employee to work overtime despite previously agreeing to the employee leaving early to attend a family function. Based on Mayer and Salovey's (1997) definition of emotional intelligence, we believe that when a person with higher emotional intelligence is faced with this perceived unfair treatment, they will become aware of the emotions they are feeling as a result of the actions of their supervisor. The employee with higher emotional intelligence may also assess the supervisor's verbal and non verbal signs of stress that may be associated with the request to remain at work. Secondly, an individual with higher emotional intelligence would draw on their past emotional experiences in similar situations prior to reacting. For instance, had a similar unfair act occurred in the past and they felt anger at the time, they would revisit the experience. Thirdly, an individual with higher emotional intelligence will analyse the likely outcome based on their own emotional reaction. For example, they would consider the probable outcomes associated with responding to the overtime request with an angry outburst versus calmly and quietly approaching their supervisor to discuss alternative solutions. Finally, an individual higher in emotional intelligence would regulate their emotional reaction to ensure their own goals are met. For instance, the employee with higher emotional intelligence may feel anger but will control the anger in an effort to ensure other objectives (i.e. future requests for leave) will not be impacted negatively by their current emotional response.

Conversely, using the same scenario, we believe that a person with lower emotional intelligence would not be able to regulate or manage their emotions in response to the perceived unfair request to work overtime and would simply respond with organisational retaliatory behaviours such as refusing to work overtime or disobeying a supervisor's request (Skarlicki & Folger 1997). Thus, we propose that:

Proposition 5 Lower levels of emotional intelligence will be associated with higher levels of organisational retaliatory behaviours.

Emotional Intelligence, Political Skills, Self Monitoring and Organisational Retaliatory Behaviours

Our final set of propositions is based on the assumption that emotional intelligence will have both direct effects and mediated effects on organisational retaliatory behaviours. As noted, we have

developed arguments that emotional intelligence can enhance both political skills and self monitoring skills and those individuals with political skills and self monitoring skills will engage in less organisational retaliatory behaviour. We noted that Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) Theory of Planned Behaviour states that behaviour emerges from norms and behavioural intentions. We argue that emotional intelligence provides the basis for determining acceptable norms and that the level of political skill and self monitoring determines the behavioural intention. On this basis we propose that:

Proposition 6 The relationship between emotional intelligence and organisational retaliatory behaviours will be mediated by the political skills of the individual.

Proposition 7 The relationship between emotional intelligence and organisational retaliatory behaviours will be mediated by the self monitoring skills of the individual.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

To our knowledge, no research has examined the relationships between political skill, self monitoring, emotional intelligence and organisational retaliatory behaviour. Therefore, we believe that our proposed research will provide original contribution to the literature. By linking low political skills and low self monitoring to organisational retaliatory behaviours we have provided an operationalisation of Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) Theory of Planned Behaviour. We have also contributed to our theoretical understanding of this phenomenon by arguing that emotional intelligence is a possible behavioural control that may ameliorate this behaviour.

In terms of practical outcomes from our research we contend that it is important for managers to be aware of the antecedents of these costly organisational retaliatory behaviours. That is, employees who have poor political skills and low levels of self monitoring may have the potential to engage in organisational retaliatory behaviours as the only method of achieving redress for problems that may arise for them in an organisation. Our model also points to a practical focus for emotional intelligence training. Certainly, most employees consider undertaking organisational retaliatory behaviours when faced with stressful situations or perceived unfair treatment. In these circumstances employees may consider calling in sick or leaving early or just browsing the internet instead of working. While these may be natural options to be considered, emotional intelligence may be the

individual difference variable that allows employees to put aside these thoughts and refocus on the task at hand.

Thus, if we are correct that political skill, self-monitoring and emotional intelligence are antecedents to organisational retaliatory behaviour, our ability to positively intervene could be enhanced. In particular, should we find that higher levels of political skill, self-monitoring and emotional intelligence decrease organisational retaliatory behaviours, managers and organisations could provide training to increase these skills. Notably, Ferris et al. (2007) state that political skill can be gained through training, practise and experience.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We acknowledge that our model is limited in that it examines individual skills and individual difference variables to the exclusion of other important variables. For example, Martinko Gundlach and Douglas (2002) contend that individual differences and situational variables such as culture, leadership style and economic factors may influence counterproductive behaviours such as retaliatory behaviours. Similarly, Skarlicki and Folger (1997) state the form of organisational retaliatory behaviours can change depending on the opportunities available in terms of the context of the organisation or other situational factors. We also believe that organisational and individual values and norms would play a part in organisational retaliatory behaviours. For example, self monitoring is associated with the ability to analyse other's behaviour and situational cues to determine how to respond in given circumstances. Thus, should high self monitors interpret retaliatory behaviours as being an appropriate response or an 'accepted value or norm', they may react with these behaviours. Thus, we concur with Skarlicki and Folger (2004) who argue that situational, contextual and individual variables are antecedents of organisational retaliatory behaviour and, therefore, future research should consider all three variables. Accordingly, we need to test our model in specific organisational settings.

We also agree with Skarlicki and Folger's (1997) argument that organisational retaliatory behaviours can be functional as well as dysfunctional. In this article, we have primarily focused on the negative aspects of organisational retaliatory behaviour. To extend our model in the future, we will examine the functional aspects of organisational retaliatory behaviour to determine if high

political skills, high self monitoring and high emotional intelligence can produce these functional behaviours.

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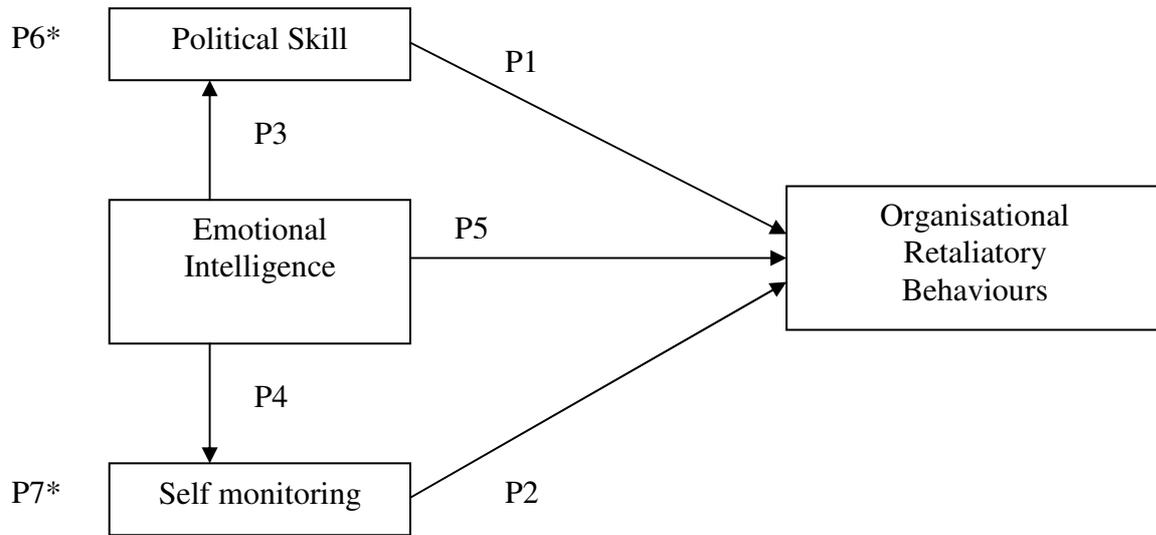
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Figure 1: Model of the Antecedents of Organisational Retaliatory Behaviours

P6* and P7* are mediated propositions.

