

The positive side of organizational politics essay sample

[Politics](#)



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Politics is perhaps as pervasive in the workplaces as the desks and chairs. In her book, *It's All Politics: Winning In A World Where Hard Work And Talent Aren't Enough*, Reardon (2005) explains that it is therefore essential to participate in the positive side of organizational politics so as to achieve success. Employees must be aware of hidden agendas, and also seek to understand how their employers think. Moreover, the overly polite employees who are pushed around by the aggressive ones must learn that extreme sweetness is as awful as extreme aggression. Thus, organizational politics must be used to one's advantage; as hard work, talent, and niceness do not contribute to success in the absence of emotional intelligence.

Organizational politics is generally understood to be “social influence attempts directed at those who can provide rewards that will help promote or protect the self-interest of the actor (Cropanzano, Kacmar, & Bozeman, 1995: 7).” Although many theorists recognize that there is a positive side to organizational politics, it is typically believed that political behavior in the workplace entails attempts to enhance, protect, and/or benefit one's self-interest without due consideration for the welfare of others or the organization as a whole. Also in the negative sense, organizational politics is understood to be informal, usually offensive, unlawful, as well as obviously parochial (Harris, James, & Boonthanom, 2005: 29).

This is the reason why Reardon feels the need to describe the differences between destructive politics and constructive politics with a single word, that is, virtues. She discusses a mastery of ethics alongside a mastery of politics for the maintenance of high professional standards. As a matter of fact, the author explains that many organizations have begun to reward constructive

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politics by assisting their employees in finding their individual political scopes while improving the outcomes. Furthermore, her book is not meant to impart knowledge about the negative side of politics.

Rather, it is the positive side of politics that the book delves into with an understandable description of emotional intelligence in the workplace.

Reardon is correct to suggest that most people automatically turn their backs on politics, however virtuous, because they have already developed a perception of organizational politics that is entirely negative. As an example, Sciacca (2004) describes office politics as questionable and despicable behavior that is enacted by employees to advance in their careers at the expense of others. Reardon also describes politics as a way to get ahead. All the same, the difference between the two definitions of politics – the harmful and the positive – is a matter of morality.

Reardon insists that politics does not have to be devious or unethical by any means. Instead, constructive politics is about relating to others and listening to them. While the employee would like to get ahead, positive politics further entails the making of choices that advance the goals of all.

Additionally, it is about knowing what to communicate, when to communicate, and who to communicate with; just as persons with high emotional intelligence are expected to be some of the most effective communicators.

Also according to Reardon, the accomplished and the talented people must take a back seat in the organization if they do not know positive politics.

This is because politics involves managing the important organizational relationships that would help the intelligence and the creativity of employees to be noticed. In the absence of knowledge about positive politics, employees may even lose their jobs to those who understand politics better. Butcher & Clarke (1999) agree with this view of office politics.

According to the authors, employees that have an understanding of constructive politics are more likely to believe that they have the power to influence change. Hence, organizational politics is essential to the work of managers, who are often required to read into hidden agendas, involve themselves in informal as well formal decision-making processes, and decipher hidden meanings in organizational communication. This is the reason why Boeing is working on developing managers that can read into political situations and also possess the influencing skills to accomplish truly difficult tasks on their own (11-12).

Butcher & Clark further believe that it is “ only human to submit to self-interest at the expense of higher organizational interests. The trick is to manage this as a balancing act between the two kinds of motivation, in oneself and in others (11).” In this way, political skills would translate into career success without stealing the rights of other employees. Reardon elucidates this fact with the example of chimpanzees that never make moves that appear uncalculated.

Rather, our wild primate cousins are known to ensure that they keep track of each other, always considering the next step in the light of their social needs. According to the author, chimpanzees “ form coalitions and work

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together to assess their surroundings and deal with potential enemies (Reardon).” In the organizational context, the potential enemies are the potential threats that the organization faces at any given time, in addition to its competitors.

All in all, Reardon’s understanding of organizational politics is very similar to the concept of emotional intelligence. By describing how employees may become politically astute, the author is in essence describing steps for increasing emotional intelligence. As an example, she proffers advice on how to communicate effectively in a variety of organizational situations.

Shading language, altering timing, and shifting tone in myriad complex situations are some of the ways to adapt to the emotional contexts of the situations. Reardon also offers short scripts to describe patterns of communication that are dysfunctional. She does this to break down ineffective interactions and describe how to improve communication by adding words that could have strengthened the conversations. Emotionally intelligent people are already cognizant of these facts.

Reardon discusses the importance of advance planning, in addition to the development of ready responses to usual situations. This kind of advice is especially useful for people who have low to average emotional intelligence, and may therefore not be considered politically astute. The author teaches them to become more effective at getting heard in the workplace, and to manage results before they appear. She also writes about listening to one’s gut feelings, as instincts could act as early warning signals; and how to avoid pushing aside valuable information that is available on the inside. In her

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view, employees must not disregard the innumerable inputs they receive. Instead, they must make sense of them, while continuing to listen to their gut instincts when something just does not feel right.

The author's idea of gut instincts is further described as "political intuition," which is "not uncanny clairvoyance but rather uncanny attentiveness to what others say and how they act (Reardon)." When employees keep their political radars on high alert, they may also enjoy the advantage of seeing political disasters that are a mile away. Also according to Reardon, politically aware employees would be able to manage how they and their ideas are seen by others. They would be able to "stay in touch with what is going on around them and communicate with others in ways that align their goals with those in power or soon to be in power (Reardon)."

Being politically astute is about having an extraordinary sense of the organizational environment. The knowledgeable politician is easily able to see problems that lie ahead and use the information that he has gathered to solve them first. In point of fact, the politician who is skilled is generally aware of the most significant concerns of the organization, and also possesses a number of solutions to properly deal with the concerns.

This is because he or she takes in what others discard or overlook, and therefore finds it easier to climb the career ladder more swiftly. As an example, politicians that are effective are known to notice the minutest of changes in verbal and nonverbal behaviors of others. Such changes are known to them as emotional expressions. Most importantly, effective

politicians use information about secondary actions to determine the responses of others (Reardon).

As mentioned previously, the skilled politician in Reardon's view is a person with high emotional intelligence. He or she understands self-management better than the others, and is also capable of handling social relationships in a superior way. In particular, emotional intelligence concerns how people engage with others' emotions.

Empathy is essential, and mostly concerns stepping into other people's shoes so as to understand their viewpoints. Furthermore, highly emotionally intelligent people must be able to work collaboratively, and also communicate directly and honestly while knowing exactly what they stand for as individuals and as groups. They must remain open to fresh alternatives as well as feedback to improve their social performance. Besides, they must be adaptable to alterations in the organizational environment (" Must have EQ," 2007).

Undoubtedly, the above mentioned characteristics of people with high emotional intelligence do not match the description of ruthless politicians who completely disregard the goals of others in pursuing their own. Instead, people with high emotional intelligence are most likely to practice positive politics in the workplace. Such people would not steal the rights of others in the process of achieving career success. This is because they are easily able to understand the emotions of others and thereby develop empathy. Relationships are important to them. Moreover, they are acutely aware of

what they feel and why they feel it. By acknowledging their emotions, they know how to deal with them (“ Must have EQ”).

This is the reason for Reardon’s emphasis on acknowledging and managing the responses to one’s own emotions, e. g. acknowledging that extreme niceness may not benefit the person in the workplace, and managing one’s emotions with this realization. By so doing, persons with high emotional intelligence are also able to motivate themselves and feel better. Because they are skilled politicians, such persons are additionally known to express their feelings and manage relationships most effectively (“ Must have EQ”).

Reardon’s focus on the importance of intuition may also be described in terms of emotional intelligence. According to the co-author of *Executive EQ*, Mr. Robert Cooper:

Emotions have long been considered to be of such depth and power that in Latin, for example, they were described as *moutus anima*, meaning literally ‘ the spirit that moves us’.

Contrary to most conventional thinking, emotions are inherently neither positive nor negative; rather they serve as the single most powerful source of human energy, authenticity and drive that can offer us a wellspring of intuitive wisdom. In fact, feelings provide us with vital and potentially profitable information every minute of the day. This feedback from the heart, and not the head, is what ignites creative genius, keeps you honest with yourself, shapes trusting relationships, provides an inner compass for

your life and career, guides you to unexpected possibilities, and may even save you or your organization from disaster (“ Must have EQ”).

The effective politicians in Reardon’s book are similarly able to sense things in their environment that other people may fail to notice. They regard small changes in behavior as alterations in emotional expressions. In this way, they are able to predict responses. Trusting their intuitions or emotions, they are further able to foresee disasters and proffer solutions to their organizations before disasters strike. For the simple reason that they know more than the others at any given time, they are capable of climbing the career ladder with greater speed than the others. Thus, their knowledge translates into power, which happens to be the basis of politics.

Of a certainty, both emotional intelligence and political astuteness are known to improve performance (Reardon; Herrera & Bradberry: 15). Organizational teams with members that exhibit high emotional intelligence are similarly known to achieve high success (“ Must have EQ;” Herrera & Bradberry). In such organizational teams, all members may be politically aware.

Even so, there may be team leaders who have the highest sense of organizational politics and are therefore able to achieve greater success than the other team members. In the words of Singh, these are the “ star performers...who maximize upon their psychic energy stored in their emotional cortex (59).” Although Reardon does not define the concept of emotional intelligence as it is, her description of effective politicians who use their sixth sense in making decisions and achieving star performance is that of persons with high emotional intelligence.

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Also according to Singh, emotional intelligence is more important than cognitive intelligence for high performance in the workplace, which is the reason why hard work and talent may not be enough. Effective politicians in organizations must, moreover, display three types of abilities: “ appraisal and expression of emotions, regulation of emotions, and utilization of emotions in solving problems (59).” Thus, persons who are politically astute are able to understand the emotions of others, and form better relationships in the organization.

By understanding the emotions of others, they are further able to create good impressions on them. They are aware of the responses of people before those responses are elicited. Hence, they are able to climb the ladder of success by nurturing the relationships that matter most. As a matter of fact, the handling of relationships in an effective manner is one of the most important abilities of individuals with high emotional intelligence (Singh: 59). It also happens to be one of the essential characteristics of skilled politicians. After all, politics is based on power differences between the people. If skilled politicians were not able to form effective relationships, they would not be able to influence others as they do.

Reardon also believes that relationships may sometimes be more important than skills in the workplace. In addition, politics is mostly communication, that is, “ knowing how to position something so that people can be more receptive to it (“ Kathleen Kelly Reardon,” 2005).” Undoubtedly, the effective communicator, a person with high emotional intelligence, must also know the political climate of his organization better than the others. What is

more, he is not a manipulator to possess political intuition. Instead, he uses his knowledge to get promoted and noticed as he happens to be in a position to work more wonders for the organization than the others (“ Kathleen Kelly Reardon”).

Another way of understanding the effective politician, as described by Reardon, is through an awareness of charismatic leadership. Charismatic leaders are known to possess high emotional intelligence. In order to move the people the way they do, these leaders are required to look to the vast range of motivations that move their followers. They are breakthrough agents, and therefore have to possess high emotional understanding so as to inspire their followers to accept difficult goals as their own (Callan, 2003).

After scanning the environment faster than the others, these leaders promise better outcomes and opportunities to their followers, regardless of the difficulties of the political course the followers are required to pursue alongside their leaders. The vision of a charismatic leader is based on the premise that his or her organization is not achieving its potential and somehow needs to be different. In order to follow the vision, the leader naturally has to assess the environmental opportunities in addition to constraints. The assessment has to be realistic, of course, in order for the vision to be considered achievable by followers (Javidan & Waldman, 2003).

While Reardon’s writing does not focus on leadership, in particular, politics is essentially concerned with the need for power. Charismatic leaders are known to possess this need (“ Charismatic,” 1999). Similarly, effective politicians try to get ahead by keeping other people’s needs in view. Like

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the charismatic leaders, effective politicians may have a vision, which may be described as an intuitive sense of the most important concerns of the organization and how to tackle them. However, not all effective politicians may be interested in leading others. Perhaps, therefore, only politicians at their best may turn out to be charismatic leaders.

After all, these politicians share many of the characteristics of charismatic leaders. By understanding the emotions of others, for example, an effective politician or a charismatic leader has the ability to make a consequential emotional impact on his or her followers and/or colleagues. He has also the knowledge to elevate the self-confidence and the self-image of his or her followers/colleagues by arousing their emotional attachment to the values he or she champions apart from the collective interests. Thus, an effective politician may be able to create strong follower commitment to the organizational goals by emotionally and intellectually connecting them to his or her followers' personal goals (Javidan & Waldman).

Charismatic leaders are further known to foster social relationships with their followers. Effective politicians also form effective relationships within the organization. Such relationships can motivate followers of charismatic leaders to perform brilliantly with a positive attitude. Followers of charismatic leaders are known to feel more secure, despite the fact that charismatic leadership is marked by risk-taking on the part of the leader. Moreover, the followers of such leaders are known to have high self-esteem (Ehrhart & Klein, 2001).

So as to be effective as a charismatic leader, one must be sensitive to the abilities as well as concerns of his followers (Javidan & Waldman). This is easily achievable for the effective politician in Reardon's theory. Effective politicians must also rely on effective communication.

This is yet another necessity for charismatic leadership. In point of fact, charismatic leaders inspire others to follow their values by communicating and articulating why there is a need for a breakthrough and how it could be accomplished.

According to Javidan & Waldman, charismatic leaders must explain the need for change by magnifying the principle forces that are driving the change, and articulating how and why the environmental changes would not accept the status quo. They also convince their followers that the breakthrough would be the best way to position the group within its situational context. Furthermore, these leaders appear credible because they are able to convince their followers of their own enthusiasm, motivation, and commitment (Javidan & Walman).

Indeed, effective politicians are capable of doing everything that characterizes charismatic leadership. Charismatic leaders must be effective politicians, or they would not be sensitive to the needs and abilities of others. Their vision is based on intuitive knowledge that other people have failed to gather, just like the effective politician's reliance on the sixth sense that most people fail to access. Lastly, these leaders have strong ties with their people apart from high emotional intelligence. All of these similarities

between effective politicians in Reardon's book and the charismatic leaders describe the fact that the best of politicians must be a charismatic leader.

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