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Politics and Politicians at Work

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The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Politics and Politicians at Work

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The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Politics and Politicians at Work

“Under every stone lurks a politician”

Aristophanes (c.450-c.385 BC *Thesmophoriazusa* I, 530)

Ask most people to describe politicians and they will probably use terms like manipulative, untrustworthy, self-interested, power-hungry, and devious. In fact a US poll found that out of 26 occupations members of the public ranked Senators, Congressmen and state office holders 21st, 22nd and 23rd respectively in terms of their perceived trustworthiness (Gallop, 1999). Only insurance sales agents, advertisers and used car salespeople ranked lower, which, according to Gardner and Seeley (2001), suggests a disappointingly low level of trust in American government. Politics at work garners similar reactions. In all likelihood few employees would disagree with Mintzberg (1983) that organizations are political arenas, but if asked to recall a political episode most would probably cite examples of managers or colleagues acting covertly, decisions made to serve Machiavellian self-interest, or individuals left feeling manipulated, betrayed and misled (Gandz & Murray, 1980). Much less likely would be descriptions of political actions being used for the good of others or to achieve some work-related goal. Politics is associated with the ‘dark side’ of workplace behaviour and researchers have described political behaviour as inherently divisive, stressful, and a cause of dissent and reduced performance (e.g., Bolino, 1999; Fandt & Ferris, 1990; Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwater & Ammeter, 2002; Kacmar & Baron, 1999; Witt, 1998). For the most part political activity is seen as something that needs to be minimized or removed to maximize organizational functioning.

Yet, politics and politicians are also at the heart of democracy: their performance affects the economic and social wellbeing of nations. Although professional politicians and their actions are often unpopular, acting politically is generally accepted as a legitimate and important part of their role. For politicians politics is work: not an unacceptable or deviant activity. Somewhat surprisingly, Industrial/Organizational (I/O) psychologists have paid little attention to political work (Bar-Tal, 2002), despite growing interest in

what might be described as a more positive side of politics in the workplace, political skill. Identified as an important component of leadership effectiveness (Ammeter, Douglas, Gardner, Hochwarter. & Ferris, 2002; Perrewé, Zellars, Rossi, Ferris, Kacmar, Liu, Zinko & Hochwarter, 2005; Pettigrew & McNulty, 1998), researchers have begun to explore how political skill can be nurtured and developed in order to enhance individual and organizational performance. Such contradictory views of organizational politics pose a challenge to researchers and practitioners, namely to reconcile the differing conceptions of political activity in the workplace as good, bad and just plain ugly.

This chapter considers why I/O psychologists do not look to political arenas to test or apply their theories and research, and why there have been so few attempts to explore organizational politics in the broader political context of government organizations. It considers whether this is a missed opportunity or whether valid differences make it difficult to draw comparisons between politics in the workplace and the politics of government. In order to do this, the chapter critically reviews research on workplace politics by I/O psychologists and reflects on findings in relation to the broader arena of politicians and political work. The primary focus is on individuals acting politically rather than groups or political systems. It asks whether a better understanding of political activity at work might be gained by studying politicians and political environments. The chapter considers how I/O psychology research and practice might be useful in helping to improve politician performance, and finally, it considers what I/O psychologists can actually learn from politicians. Beginning with a brief review of the broad theoretical perspectives on organizational politics, subsequent sections critically discuss I/O psychology research investigating perceptions of politics and political skill in the workplace. Next the chapter compares and contrasts professional political roles with traditional work roles, and considers the ways in which work on personnel selection, development and performance evaluation might be adapted for use in the context of political work. The latter part of the chapter explores how human resource (HR) systems are influenced by, and influencing of, power and politics within the organization. It argues that I/O psychologists need to pay more attention to the integral role of power in

Politics and Politicians at Work

their own work, and for the development of new innovative methods to accommodate pluralistic perspectives typical of political environments.

Organizations as Political Arenas

'Man is by nature a political animal' (Aristotle 384-322BC: Politics)

The 1970s and 1980s saw burgeoning interest in the topic of organizational politics. Effort was devoted to explaining why politics occurred, when it was likely to occur, the form it might take, as well as its likely consequences. Research focused on politics as an organizational phenomenon, with political activity resulting from individuals or groups with different needs competing for limited organizational resources. Organizations were described as political battlegrounds where coalitions form and deform in the process of building and exercising power, and daily campaigns are waged in an effort to control scarce resources (Bies & Tripp, 1995; Ferris, Perrewé, Anthony & Gilmore, 2000). Two broad perspectives emerged from this work. In the first of these researchers typically view politics as an illegitimate aspect of organizational life: a phenomenon that causes conflict and division between organizational members, impeding the achievement of organizational goals. Central to this perspective is the idea that politics involves placing self-interest above the interests of organization and other organizational members (see definitions of political behaviour in Table 1). Pettigrew (1973), for example, describes company politics as the by-play that occurs when a person or group wishes to advance themselves or their ideas regardless of whether or not those ideas would help the organization. Another important feature of this perspective is the argument that organizational politics involves activities not sanctioned by the organization that lead to dissent (Treadway, Adams & Goodman, 2005). A good illustration of this is Mintzberg's (1985, p.134) description of political behaviour as "neither formally authorized, widely accepted, nor officially certified" and which, as a consequence, "is typically divisive and conflictive, often pitting individuals and groups against formal authority, accepted ideology and/or certified expertise or else against each other". According to researchers in this group, political activity is harmful to the organization because it involves

individuals putting their own needs above those of the organization and other work colleagues. As Mayes and Allen (1977, p.675) describe it, organizational politics is “the management of influence to obtain ends not sanctioned by the organization or to obtain sanctioned ends through non-sanctioned influence means”.

INSERT TABLE ONE HERE.

In contrast, researchers in the second category treat politics as a natural and endemic feature of organizational life; something that is “neither inherently good nor bad but rather a fact of life and a feature woven into the very fabric of organizations” (Ammeter et al. 2002, p.752.). According to these researchers organizational politics is best treated as neutral, because it can have positive or negative consequences depending on the views, needs and objectives of different individuals and groups. Central to this group of researchers are the concepts of power and conflict. For example, Pfeffer (1981) defines power as a property of a system at rest and politics as the study of power in action, however, as Dawson (1986) points out power is meaningless without conflict. Political activity therefore implies multiple perspectives, conflicting needs or views, and a discrepancy in the power of different individuals or groups. Importantly, organizational politics can be defined as functional or dysfunctional depending on whose interests are being considered (Ammeter et al. 2002). This group of researchers also suggest that political activity can be triggered by uncertainty about how to act (Parker, Dipboye & Jackson, 1995; Pfeffer, 1981, 1992). Where there is a lack of clarity about rules or procedures, political activity can create consensus and shape shared beliefs between different groups (Kirk & Broussine, 2000). As such, it can serve an important sense-making function in organizational environments that are changing or where norms of behaviour are unclear (Gioia, 1989; Weick, 1995).

One of the most important ways in which these two perspectives on organizational politics differ relates to the idea that behaviour can be sanctioned. According to the first perspective political behaviour is defined from the perspective of the organization as unsanctioned and therefore illegitimate. In contrast, the second perspective acknowledges

the existence of multiple legitimate perspectives, and focuses on political activity as a constant process of negotiating shared organizational realities. These different perspectives have influenced the way in which subsequent researchers have investigated organizational politics. Arguably the two largest bodies of research in I/O psychology research (perceptions of politics, and political skill) have been influenced most by the first group of researchers. The next sections consider these areas and the evidence garnered by researchers that organizational politics constitutes a detrimental or positive influence for individuals and organizations.

Perceptions of Politics

Organizational politics is a difficult topic to study empirically, because it involves observers' judgements about the intent behind an actor's behaviour. Take the example of a manager's decision to reward a member of staff. To an observer, this decision may be perceived as 'political' if they attribute a particular motive to the manager, such as a desire to reward someone they liked. Their judgement may or may not be accurate, but it can still influence the way the observer feels and reacts towards the political actor. Not surprisingly, most I/O psychology research has studied organizational politics as a perceptual and subjective phenomenon. Early studies sought to identify the types of workplace behaviour most likely to be described as political and where in organizations these behaviours generally occur (Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick & Mayes, 1979; Gandz & Murray, 1980; Madison, Allen, Porter, Renwick & Mayes, 1980). For example, Gandz and Murray asked 428 managers from different organizations to complete a series of questionnaires, and write descriptions of events they had observed or experienced that in their view were political. For the most part managers' narratives focused on descriptions of colleagues' or managers' self-serving and self-advancing behaviour. These narratives yielded 192 political incidents, of which 32 percent related to promotions, transfers, demotions and dismissals; mostly describing what were perceived to be inequities in decisions made by superiors. A further 31 percent described individuals avoiding blame, supervisors making decisions based on some hidden or uncontrollable criteria, or supervisors focused on protecting their own position. Twenty

percent of incidents referred to competition between work units for control over projects or resources, and a further 17 percent concerned struggles for control over projects between head offices and fieldworkers. Finally, 14 percent concerned situations where responsibility, and therefore power, was allocated to individuals. From the questionnaire data, Gandz and Murray found that political activity was perceived to be more prevalent at higher organizational levels, more common in discretionary than non-discretionary organizational processes, and generally associated with behaviour that deviated from a techno-economic rationality. Based on these findings, they suggest that the concept of organizational politics should be “restricted to denote a subjective state in which organizational members perceive themselves or others as intentionally seeking selfish ends in an organizational context when such ends are opposed to those of others” (Gandz & Murray, 1980, p.248). This conceptualization of political behaviour as the pursuit of egocentric goals irrespective of broader organizational needs remains central to research in this area (e.g., Byrne, Kacmar, Stoner & Hochwarter, 2005; Cropanzano, Kacmar & Bozeman, 1995; Ferris et al. 2002).

This early work provided an important base for Ferris, Russ and Fandt’s (1989) influential framework identifying likely antecedents and consequences of perceived political activity (for a detailed review see Ferris et al. 2002). Ferris et al. (1989) identified three types of antecedents of perceptions of politics: organizational factors (including centralization, hierarchical level, formalization, span of control), job factors (autonomy, job control, feedback, promotion opportunities, skill variety) and individual factors (age, sex, Machiavellianism, self-monitoring). Consequences of perceived politics were predicted to include reduced job involvement and satisfaction, increased anxiety, and a greater likelihood of organizational withdrawal, with employee control over their work environment a potential moderator.

Subsequent studies have found evidence for hypothesized relationships. For example, in the case of organizational antecedents, findings suggest that employees perceive politics to be more prevalent at higher organizational levels (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992), although Drory (1993) found that employees at lower (non-managerial) levels were more likely

than those at higher levels to describe their organizational environment as political. There is also support for hypothesized links between perceptions of politics and consequences for employees. Studies have found that higher levels of perceived politics are associated with reduced job satisfaction (Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey & Toth, 1997; Drory, 1993; Ferris, Frink, Galang, Zhou, Kacmar & Howard, 1996; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Nye & Witt, 1993; Parker et al. 1995; Vigoda, 2000), lower employee morale (Voyer, 1994), reduced organizational commitment (Cropanzano et al. 1997; Ferris & Kacmar, 1992; Nye & Witt, 1993; Randall, Cropanzana, Bormann & Birjulin 1999; Vigoda, 2000), and increased intentions to leave (Cropanzano et al. 1997; Maslyn & Fedor, 1998; Vigoda, 2000). Voyer (1994) also found that employees with higher levels of employee somatic tension, burnout and general fatigue were more likely to perceive their work environment to be political. Researchers have argued that these findings provide support for the view that perceptions of political activity are stressful and detrimental, with the potential to impact negatively on a wide variety of individual and work outcomes (Ferris et al. 2002; Harris & Kacmar, 2006). Ferris et al. (1996) suggest that this is because political behaviour does not follow formally sanctioned norms. More specifically, it blurs the rules of conduct, making it more difficult for individuals to predict how others will respond or determine what their own response should be. It is this uncertainty that leads to increased levels of strain. However, studies have also found that the quality of the employee-supervisor relationship can moderate the negative consequences of perceptions of politics (Davis & Gardner, 2004; Harris & Kacmar, 2005, 2006). The degree of goal congruence between supervisor and subordinate has also been shown to moderate the relationship between perceived politics and performance ratings (Witt, 1998), as has perceived organizational support and procedural justice (Byrne, 2005; Byrne et al. 2005).

In an effort to understand these relationships further, studies have looked at whether some individuals are more sensitive than others to workplace politics. Treadway et al. (2005) found that higher levels of perceived politics were associated with poorer job performance for older but not younger employees. They suggest this may be due to older employees being more sensitive to politics because of repeated exposure to political stress, but it is also possible that repeated exposure might lead some individuals to

develop more effective coping strategies. Other studies have found support for the prediction that negative consequences of perceived politics may be moderated by individual differences, such as: perceived control over the work environment (Ferris, et al. 1996), need for achievement (Byrne et al. 2005), and self-promoting behaviour (Harrell-Cook, Ferris & Duhlebohn, 1999). However, Bozeman, Perrewé, Hochwarter and Brymer (2001) found that high job self-efficacy exacerbated the relationship between politics and dysfunctional attitudes, and Andrews, Witt and Kacmar (2003) found that strong beliefs in reciprocity exacerbated the negative effects of political environments. Hochwarter, Witt and Kacmar (2000) also found that conscientiousness was related to job performance when organizational politics were perceived to be average or high, but was unrelated when perceptions were low. These findings suggest that an individual's ability or skill at working in a political environment can alleviate some of the negative consequences of perceptions of politics, but the relationship is not simple. Personal values such as beliefs in equity or fairness may mediate the impact of political environments and political working indicating the need for further research in this area.

Another question relating to perceptions of politics is whether the organizational level at which political activity is perceived to occur can influence how individuals respond. Evidence that employees distinguish between political activities at different levels has led to the suggestion that multiple political environments can exist within an organization (Hochwarter et al. 2003; Treadway, Adams & Goodman 2005). For example, by comparing the impact of perceived political activity at a work group and an organizational level, Maslyn and Fedor (1998) found that politics perceived at an organizational level predicted increased intentions to leave among subordinates after controlling for the effects of supervisor-subordinate relationship. Politics at a work group level, however, had a contrary effect such that increased political activity was associated with higher levels of organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB). Maslyn and Fedor explain this by suggesting that employees engage in OCB as a strategy for keeping the peace within the group, thereby mitigating the effects of unconstructive personal conflict. Another possibility is that OCB itself constitutes a form of political behaviour that can be used to enhance personal efficacy and control in a political environment. Certainly there

Politics and Politicians at Work

is evidence that, political behaviour can be a response to highly political environments, where self-promotion and ingratiation may be necessary for effective working (Harrell-Cook et al. 1999). This suggests the importance of taking account of the culture of an organization and the prevalence of political activity within it.

Perceptions of Politics: A Critical Evaluation

Although studies of perceived workplace politics have contributed much to our understanding of politics and political behaviour, important challenges still remain. For example, researchers have raised issues about research design and methodology (Ferris et al. 2002). Randall et al. (1999) criticizes research in this area for the paucity of non-self-report measurement, the attendant risk of common method variance, and the lack of longitudinal studies. Researchers have asked employees to provide simultaneous ratings of political activity within their workplace and self-ratings of affective response. As a consequence it is difficult to determine whether politics leads to employee dissatisfaction or vice versa. Are dissatisfied employees more likely to judge their manager's actions political? Recent studies have begun to address these criticisms by using non-self-report ratings, but there is still a need for more longitudinal research to explore causal relationships (Witt, 1998). Ferris (2007, personal communication) also points out that the effects of politics perceptions on work outcomes might not be just positive or negative linear in nature, but could be curvilinear. Again, further research is needed to explore these relationships in more detail.

Another problematic area for researchers is the reliance on subjective judgements of others' motivations. Almost without exception researchers have defined political behaviour in relation to the political actor's self-interest. For example Treadway et al. (2005) state that perceptions of politics involves "individuals' observation of others' *self-interested* behaviour, such as the selective manipulation of organizational policies" (p.872). This means that observers must not only judge whether a particular behaviour or outcome is intended by a political actor, but also the motive behind that behaviour (Ferris, Bhawuk, Fedor & Judge, 1995). Unlike assessors who observe and rate

behavioural evidence during selection procedures, observers must observe what a person does and infer why they have done it in order for behaviour to be considered political. This judgement of motive adds a further level of complexity when considering the validity or accuracy of perceptions of politics: an issue that becomes most apparent when groups differ in the way they perceive political activity. If individuals at lower organizational levels perceive the work environment to be more political than individuals at higher levels whose perceptions are accurate? Mainstream I/O psychology research (particularly that concerned with personnel selection) has been dominated by a positivist approach based on “the notion of an objective truth existing ‘out there’” (Cassell & Symon, 2006, p.345). Yet organizational politics challenges assumptions about the existence of ‘objective truths’ by focusing attention on the existence of multiple legitimate perspectives and perceived realities (cf. Weick, 1995). For example, definitions of what constitutes good work performance may be very different when generated by employees or trades union representatives compared with those of managers. The extent to which an observer’s judgement of political behaviour is accurate may therefore be less meaningful than considering whether the same perceptions of political activity are shared by different individuals and groups.

Comparatively few researchers have critically evaluated the assumption that politics is inherently divisive and harmful. Almost without exception, questionnaires used by researchers to investigate perceptions of politics have focused on more negative aspects of politicking. Example items include ‘there is a lot of self-serving behaviour going on’ and ‘in this organization people spend too much time sucking up to those who can help them’ (Hochwarter et al. 2003; Kacmar & Ferris, 1991). These items implicitly assume that the behaviour is not in the interests of the respondent, making an association with workplace stress more likely. In fairness, research has generally found that employees are more likely to recall negative rather than positive political behaviour, but socio-cognitive research suggests that individuals pay more attention to unexpected negative and potentially threatening events (Wong & Weiner, 1981). Consequently, political behaviour that is personally threatening and uncontrollable may simply be more noticeable than political behaviour that serves one’s own interests. This raises questions regarding what

individuals pay attention to as well as what they infer to be political behaviour in the workplace. More research is therefore needed to illuminate how individuals make political judgements, to examine the extent to which such judgments are shared by others and to determine whether individuals can accurately predict others' political intentions (see Valle & Perrewé, 2000). One area of research that has largely escaped the attention of I/O psychologists, but which could prove relevant, is that concerned with how voters make judgments about political actors (e.g., Lodge & Steenbergen, 1995).

Finally, somewhat surprisingly, the literature on perceptions of organizational politics makes little reference to issues of power and influence. Political activity might also be stressful if individuals believe themselves to have little power or ability to influence political outcomes (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska & Shaw, 2007). Most research has tended to focus on employees' perceptions of political behaviour by more powerful individuals. It has also concentrated on political observers rather than political actors. As such, research investigating perceptions of politics confounds three sets of factors: (1) political observers can also be political actors, (2) individuals will vary in their ability (power and skill) to engage in political activity, and (3) it is more likely that managers' interests will overlap with organizational objectives, than the interests of employees at lower organizational levels. Hence future work needs to examine how perceptions of the threat political activity poses to individuals' self interests determine how such activities are evaluated, and how the power and skill of the individual mediate or moderate this relationship.

Political Skill

"...there is a dark side [of politics], characterized by destructive opportunism and dysfunctional game playing. However politics can be positive as well for organizations and individuals..... Individuals who become proficient at playing politics may realize greater job and career related rewards" (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992, p.113)

In stark contrast to the perceptions of politics literature, most researchers have treated political skill as an important and valuable commodity: an antidote to, rather than cause of, workplace stress (Perrewé, Ferris, Frink & Anthony, 2000; Perrewé et al. 2005) and a factor central to leader effectiveness (Richardson, 1995). Competition and organizational ambiguity are seen as opportunities for individuals to use political skill to achieve personal or organizational objectives. In fact Mintzberg (1983) first coined the term 'political skill' to describe the networking abilities and social skills that employees need in order to navigate complex organizational environments successfully. More recent definitions focus on political skill as an interpersonal style construct. For example, Perrewé et al. (2005, p.311) describe it 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". Other definitions incorporate a more Machiavellian flavour and refer to the selective use, or presentation, of information to gain commitment and trust from others. Ferris et al. (2000, p.30) propose that political skill "combines social astuteness with the ability to relate well and otherwise demonstrate situationally appropriate behaviour in a disarmingly charming and engaging manner that inspires confidence, trust, sincerity and genuineness". Similarly, Ammeter et al. (2002, p.765) argue that politically skilled individuals not only "know precisely what to do in different social situations" they also know "exactly how to do it with a sincere, engaging manner that disguises any ulterior motives and inspires believability, trust and confidence". Both of these imply the use of impression management to persuade others to change their views and adopt those of the political actor. While they do not refer explicitly to deception, there is certainly the suggestion of 'spin': that is, political actors presenting information in a way that shapes perceptions and creates a version of reality based on their views and needs. Researchers have drawn on research into social influence constructs, such as self-monitoring and social skill (Ferris, Perrewé & Douglas, 2002), and influence tactics, such as negotiation, persuasion, ingratiation and exchange (Kipnis, Schmidt & Wilkinson, 1980; Vigoda & Cohen, 2002; Yukl & Falbe, 1990) to inform theory development. Surprisingly, however, most definitions of political skill do not mention power and conflict; a notable exception being Perrewé, Zellars, Ferris, Rossi, Kacmar and Ralston (2004) description of political skill as the effective use of power to

achieve enhanced control and influence over others at work. Although not stated, the political skill research implicitly assumes that individuals must have some form of power in order to behave politically, and that political skill involves the use of overt or covert methods to change others' views when they conflict with those of the political actor. Unlike the perceptions of politics literature reviewed above which has considered employees and managers, political skill research has generally focused on managers.

The growing interest in political skill has been attributed to a number of factors. These include widespread changes to company structures resulting in more complex and challenging work environments for managers. With greater spans of control the manager role is increasingly concerned with the need to influence groups and social situations rather than monitoring the performance of individual subordinates (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas & Ammeter, 2004; Douglas & Ammeter, 2004; Ferris, Witt & Hochwarter, 2001). Similarly, a growing emphasis on coaching, facilitating, and coordination of teams has meant that political skills have become more important to managers' ability to achieve their own individual objectives. Globalization and worker mobility has forced attention towards the need for individuals to build social networks and social capital (Novicevic & Harvey, 2004). Similarly, recognition that social capacity (interpersonal contacts and resources an individual can draw upon) is just as important as social capability (the ability to work effectively with people), has led to interest in how organizations can support future international leaders develop necessary skills (Ammeter et al. 2002). Finally, a trend towards more inter-organizational partnerships and a greater use of external associates has meant that managers often have less legitimate role-related power, and must rely instead on their individual power to influence others (Silvester, 2006). All of these work related changes have resulted in the move away from command and control structures, with high levels of power attributed to individuals by virtue of their position, to organizational environments that depend on the ability of individuals to influence and persuade colleagues and co-workers. It has been claimed that politically skilled individuals, who possess higher levels of social perceptiveness and the ability to adjust their behaviour to different and changing situational needs, are much better suited to these new organizational environments (Perrewé et al. 2005). As such, political skill is

likely to become an increasingly important commodity for organizations seeking to identify future talent and develop current leaders (Ferris et al. 2000; Ferris, Davidson & Perrewé, 2005). The challenge for current research is therefore to provide the evidence base to support valid means of identifying and developing political skill.

Although research investigating political skill is comparatively new, studies have begun to explore how it may buffer individuals against potentially negative organizational situations. For example, Perrewé et al. (2005) suggest that politically skilled individuals are more likely to see themselves as having control over interpersonal interactions in the workplace. Indeed, Perrewé et al. (2004) found that individuals who described themselves as more politically skilled experienced less psychological anxiety, somatic complaints, and physiological strain, than individuals who were less politically skilled. Perrewé et al. (2005) also found that politically skilled individuals experienced less role strain associated with job tension or job dissatisfaction. However, the relationship may be complex. Kolodinsky, Hochwarter and Ferris (2004) found that only moderate (not high or low) levels of political skill were associated with higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of job tension. A meta-analysis conducted by Higgins, Judge and Ferris (2003) to establish relationships between influence tactics (e.g., ingratiation, rationality, assertiveness, exchange, upward appeal) and work related outcomes, found that ingratiation and rationality have positive effects on work outcomes. They argue that political skill affects the type of influence tactics people use and how effective they are. In a comparatively rare study using objective measures of team performance, Ahearn et al. (2004) investigated the impact of leader political skill on how successful child welfare casework teams were at placing children into legally final living arrangements. They found that subordinate perceptions of their leader's political skill predicted leader effectiveness ratings after controlling for leader demographic and social skill variables. Bartol and Martin (1990) also found that a subordinate's political skill led them to receive higher pay, but only when managers depended on their expertise and when the subordinate made a dependency threat. In their recent article, Ferris, Treadway, Perrewé, Brouer, Douglas and Lux (2007) begin to develop a model of political skill based on

cognition-affect-behaviour which should provide a useful framework for future research in this area.

Political skill: A critical evaluation

There is little doubt that political skill holds much promise as an area that could help explain and predict how individuals achieve influence in the workplace. Like the perceptions of politics literature, however, there are still important issues that need to be addressed. One of the main challenges for researchers relates to the question of whether political skill is distinct from other social influence constructs. More specifically, is there anything unique about political skill, or does it simply reflect a repertoire of behaviours required for effective working in political environments? Another issue concerns the lack of 'dark side' political behaviour. Why is political skill discussed in terms of potential benefits for organizations and individuals, whereas political behaviour is viewed as detrimental? One reason for this discrepancy may rest with the types of questionnaires that have been used to empirically test hypothesized relationships, and the definitions that have driven their development. Ferris et al. (2000, p.32) argue that political skill is not a single trait or skill, but a reflection of "an integrated composite of internally consistent and mutually reinforcing and compatible skills and abilities that create a synergistic social dynamic that defies precise description". Despite difficulties of definition, there is growing interest in how to measure political skill. Ferris et al. (2001) developed an 18-item Political Skill Inventory [PSI] that measures four constructs: interpersonal influence, network building, social-astuteness, and genuineness and sincerity. Example items include: 'I understand people well', 'I find it easy to imagine myself in the position of others', 'I am able to make most people feel comfortable and at ease around me', 'I am good at getting others to respond positively to me', 'I usually try to find some common ground with others' and 'It is easy for me to develop good rapport with most people'. Ferris, Treadway, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, Kacmar, Douglas and Frink (2005) investigated the construct and criterion-related validity of the PSI using seven samples and found that political skill was positively related to self-monitoring, political savvy, and emotional intelligence, and negatively related to trait anxiety. They found no

association with general mental ability, but criterion-related validity, explored by examining the relationship between PSI ratings and performance ratings for managers, proved to be significant. However, a more recent study of subordinate ratings of supervisor political skill by Douglas and Ammeter (2004) found that the results best fitted a two-factor model of 'network building/social capital' and 'interpersonal influence/control'. Whereas 'network building/social capital' was positively associated with leader and work unit performance, 'interpersonal influence/control' was negatively associated with leader performance. Douglas and Ammeter explain these findings by suggesting that subordinates perceive leaders who use influence and control strategies as manipulative rather than persuasive and, as such, may be less likely to do what these leaders ask of them.

Importantly, few items in political skill questionnaires describe behaviour or characteristics that respondents would consider undesirable, despite the fact that much political behaviour falls into this category. Yet efforts to capture self-assessments of these darker aspects of political skill are fraught with difficulty: asking respondents to describe themselves as manipulative or as likely to deceive others is likely to trigger social desirability distortions. As Gandz and Murray (1980, p. 239) point out if "managers feel negatively about politics it follows that they would not be likely to admit that they personally would consciously and willingly engage in such behaviour". Ironically, the most politically skilled respondents may also be the most sensitive to potential consequences of admitting to darker aspects of political behaviour and therefore least likely to do so (Harris et al. 2007). The impact of political skill on impression management. Interestingly, Hochwarter's (2003) scale of political behaviour includes items that could be construed negatively (e.g., I spend time at work politicking) and items that could be construed positively (e.g., I work behind the scenes to make sure that my group is taken care of). Hochwarter, Ferris, Zinko, Arnell and James (2007) used this instrument to investigate personal reputation as a moderator of the relationship between political behaviour and work outcomes. They found that if individuals had a favourable reputation political behaviour was associated with increased job performance ratings and reduced emotional exhaustion, but political behaviour resulted in poorer work outcomes

if the individual's reputation was unfavourable. There is clearly scope for further work exploring the darker aspects of political skill as well as potential moderators and mediators.

However, another important challenge for political skill researchers relates to the comparative lack of discussion in many research studies about who or what political skill is being used for. Perceiving political behaviour as positive or negative depends on the perspective and interests of the observer. Yet most research has adopted a managerial perspective that assumes political skill is good or beneficial because managers are using it to achieve organizational objectives. Yet as Beu and Buckley (2004) point out, charismatic and politically astute leaders can also create work environments that encourage subordinates to commit 'crimes of obedience'. Here leaders use their power, status, and political skill to convince employees that unethical behaviour is morally justified. Cases like Enron and research into politics in the boardroom (e.g., Pettigrew & McNulty, 1998; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974; Pye & Pettigrew, 2005; Westphal & Stern, 2006) suggest a need to consider the wider impact of political skill on different stakeholder groups, as well as the role played by ethics and values. There is also a question of whether political skill is used for personal gain, as a means to achieve gains for others including the organization, or both. As we have seen, many definitions of politics include some mention of individuals acting selfishly at others' expense (Table 1). Bargh and Alvarez (2001) suggest that subversion of official organizational power for individual gain can have substantial costs in terms of achieving organizational goals, as well as for colleagues and subordinates whose ability to secure their own goals may be thwarted. Yet, Bargh and Alvarez also note that political behaviour may be considered pro-social when a political actor's personal goals overlap with those of the organization. Consequently, political behaviour motivated by self-interest is not problematic from the organization's perspective provided self-interest overlaps with the organizational interests (Kacmar & Baron, 1999). Thus a new CEO acting politically to protect her own interests and power through the systematic removal of rivals from the senior management team, may be viewed positively by shareholders if it also leads to the introduction of 'new blood' to the organization.

As individuals progress to higher organizational levels their power and resources to act politically increase and their motivations and goals become more closely aligned with those of the organization (Cavanaugh, Moberg & Velasquez, 1981). Political behaviour in managers may therefore be informally sanctioned by organizations when leaders turn a 'blind eye' to the use of non-sanctioned methods provided they help to achieve organizational goals (Mayes & Allen, 1977). However, political behaviour by managers may have more negative consequences for employees at lower organizational levels. As political behaviour does not follow sanctioned procedures, and can contravene shared beliefs about appropriate behaviour at work, it can convey the perception that managers operate by different rules: a situation likely to have negative consequences for perceptions of justice and psychological contracts. Moreover, while managers' political behaviour may be unofficially sanctioned that of lower level employees may be strongly discouraged in order to avoid any challenge to the power of the ruling elite.

In summary, research investigating organizational politics has centred on two major topics: (1) employees' perceptions of political activity at work, and (2) managers' political skill. Most of this work has concentrated on the impact of political activity (perceived or actual) on employee wellbeing and effectiveness. While some research has found that politics can be a stressful phenomenon detrimental to work performance, other studies have shown that the extent to which politics has a negative influence depends on factors such as employee beliefs about fairness and reciprocity at work, and the nature of supervisor-employee relationships. In contrast, political skill has been associated with improved job performance and reduced job-related stress and recent research suggests that political skill may in fact neutralize the negative consequences of engaging in political activity (Treadway, et al. 2005). In terms of the central issues raised at the outset of this chapter, these findings indicate that politics may have good, bad and/or ugly consequences. However, this will depend on the extent to which the political activity serves an individual's interests, and whether the individual concerned has the power, motivation and skill to act politically for their own interests or those of other organizational stakeholders. Clearly many interesting questions remain to be explored, as

do the considerable practical implications of political skill for issues such as fair and accurate performance assessment (Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams & Thatcher, 2007).

So far this chapter has concentrated on politics in the workplace, and how political activity can impact on worker effectiveness. Another equally important and relevant area is the political work undertaken by individuals elected to political roles. To what extent does research concerned with perceptions of politics and political skill in the workplace hold up to scrutiny when applied to the work of politicians? In order to make these comparisons, the second part of this chapter takes a rather different approach by considering the work of politicians and exploring the relevance and applicability of I/O psychology. It discusses how knowledge and expertise from I/O psychology might be used to enhance the performance of politicians, raising in turn questions concerning what political skill means to politicians and how it might be best developed and evaluated.

Political Leadership

Given the potentially useful parallels that might be drawn between the performance of individuals who occupy formal political and more traditional job roles, it is remarkable that I/O psychologists have paid so little attention to the work of professional politicians and their attendant skills. With most academic work in this area undertaken by sociologists and political theorists, research has generally focused at a group or political organizational level. There is also a substantial body of opinion amongst these researchers that political roles are very different from more traditional work roles, and as such should not be treated in the same way. Phillips (1998, p.231) for example, argues that there is a “*strong feeling that being a politician is not just another kind of job. ‘Career politician’ is still – and rightly – a term of abuse; however accurately it may describe people’s activities in politics, it does not capture our political ideals.*”

Undoubtedly there are historical and political reasons for such claims. Until the late 1800s in the UK only men who owned land could become a Member of Parliament (MP): as such they distinguished themselves from working ‘professionals’ by being wealthy enough not to need employment. Although circumstances are very different today, the

idea that politics is not a profession persists, possibly because the term 'profession' suggests membership of an elite group and contradicts the democratic ideal that all individuals should have the right to stand for election. Yet very little consideration has been paid to possibility that there are sufficient similarities between political and other types of work roles to permit comparison and systematic investigation.

Morrell and Hartley (2006) define political leaders as democratically elected representatives who are vulnerable to de-selection and who both operate within and influence a constitutional and legal framework. A key difference is therefore that politicians are elected not selected. Although as Maidment and Tappin (1994) point out, election is not unique to politicians: in the US alone over one million offices, from the local school board to the presidency are filled by election. Yet, the fact that politicians are elected provides them with a legitimate democratic mandate to represent the needs of their constituents in government and take decisions on their behalf. This elected status, which is fundamental to the democratic process, is arguably the most important difference between political roles and other work roles. It is based on the premise that ordinary members of a society agree to give certain powers to government (and therefore politicians), and to obey the laws and rules, if in turn the government uses these powers for the benefit of all the citizens. However, by ensuring that politicians serve relatively short periods of office, the power of the electorate to remove politicians from power through the electoral process is preserved. This means that politicians must at least pay attention to the needs of their constituents and seek to balance different view points (Lovenduski, 2005), even if at times this places them at odds with the needs of their political party or government. Perhaps more importantly from the perspective of this chapter, however, is the legitimacy and centrality of political behaviour in political roles. This legitimacy challenges many of the assumptions made by I/O psychology researchers about the divisive non-sanctioned status of political behaviour in the workplace. For politicians, political behaviour is fully sanctioned, and although they may be disliked or treated with suspicion, the right of politicians to make unpopular decisions and act politically is rarely disputed.

Another difference between political and other traditional work roles relates to the organizational contexts in which role incumbents operate. Morrell and Hartley (2006) argue that political leadership is distinct because it is socially constituted in a wide-ranging network of stakeholders that include the political party, constituents, local party members, and government agencies. This distinction is less easy to defend when we consider senior level organizational roles where incumbents are expected to work with and influence a wide network of internal and external stakeholders (e.g., partner organizations, suppliers, different organizational functions). However, there is evidence that political organizations (i.e. political parties) have less formal and centralized systems of control and decision-making than other types of work organization. March and Olsen (1999) contrast the existence of rules and regulations about how to behave within political organizations with the fact that political actors have considerable independence to pursue their own particular goals. For the most part politicians in democracies do not operate in strict hierarchies, neither are they officially managed by more senior personnel, as such systems of performance management are comparatively rare. In reality, political parties vary in the extent to which processes are centralized: this is most notable in the way different political parties control selection of political candidates. For example, Norris (2004), contrasts the most open systems, where selection decisions are determined mostly by voters (e.g., the Canadian Conservatives or U.S. Democrats), with more closed systems where decisions are determined mostly by party leaders (recent examples being the Mexican PRI or Berlusconi's Forza Italia). Although most politicians have considerable independence once elected, the absence of prescribed roles and formal organizational structures means that compared to most managers they are usually more dependent on their own political skill, namely their ability to influence, persuade and mobilize others. As such politicians must constantly monitor their political environment to detect competing interests, build alliances and avoid political challenge. As yet very little is known about how politicians develop their political skill, although one area that has received much attention and which may prove relevant concerns the impact of individual differences on attraction to, and success in, political roles.

Individual differences and political roles

Jost and Sidanius (2004) describe the relationship between personality and politics as one of the oldest and most central topics in political psychology. It is also a topic of considerable popular interest both in the media and among members of the public. Comments about the personal characteristics of politicians and their assumed relationship with political success are rife; as illustrated by Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.'s (Justice of the US Supreme Court) description of Franklin Roosevelt as having "*a second class intellect, but a first class temperament*" (1933). Academic research has focused on whether certain characteristics make individuals more likely to engage in political behaviour and more successful once in political roles. Early studies drew heavily on Freudian psychoanalytic theory to explore unconscious motives that might drive individuals to seek power and influence through politics. For example, Adorno and his colleagues (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson & Sanford, 1950) explored psychological bases of facism, anti-Semitism and racial prejudice, identifying a broad personality syndrome they labelled 'authoritarian personality'. Work by Christie and Geis (1970) led to the definition of Machiavellianism as a personality construct important to the motivation to seek and retain power. However, politicians are a notoriously difficult group to access directly (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004), and most recent studies fall into one of three categories. These include studies using psychological case histories (or psycho-biographies) of individual political actors; typological studies focusing on the classification of political actors and; analyses of the collective effects of individuals on the functioning of political institutions. Researchers have also used a range of qualitative methods to analyze secondary source materials including publicly available biographical sources, transcripts of political speeches, Q-sort methodology, and video material (Kowert, 1996; Simonton, 1986, 1988). Winter has conducted a series of studies of presidential personality, including rating the inaugural addresses of newly elected presidents for manifestations of power, achievement and affiliation motivation (Winter, 1987), and conducting motivational analyses of presidential campaigns (e.g., Winter, 1998). Another popular area of research has focused on observers' perceptions of the personalities of political leaders (e.g., US Presidents and presidential candidates). For

example, whether members of the public perceive politicians as more motivated, resilient and self-confident compared to other groups, (Deluga, 1998; Lyons, 1997; Valenty & Feldman, 2002; Winter, 2002). Rubenzer, Faschingbauer and Ones (2000, 2002) explored presidential personalities using the Revised NEO Personality Inventory to assess personality from the standpoint of an observer. They found that US presidents were perceived as more extroverted, achievement striving, assertive and open to feelings than typical American people, but less agreeable, modest, and straightforward.

For the most part researchers have studied observers' descriptions of politicians already in post and as a consequence we cannot be sure whether these personality characteristics determine political success, or whether public stereotypes influence findings. Two notable exceptions to this are studies where politicians have completed standardized self-assessment measures of personality. First, asked a large sample of politicians to complete the Adjective Check List (Gough, 1960) during the California campaign years (1960-1976). Secondly, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Consiglio, Picconi and Zimbardo (2003) Costantini and Craik (1980) persuaded Members of the Italian Parliament and Italian Members of the European Parliament to complete a questionnaire based on the FFM of personality. Caprara et al. found that politicians scored higher than members of the public on Energy and Friendliness. However, both studies found differences in personality between members of different political parties. Costantini and Craik found that Republicans scored higher than Democrats on personal adjustment, order, self-control and discipline, but lower on change and compassion. , Caprara et al. also found that Centre-right politicians scored higher on Energy and Conscientiousness. These findings plus those from other studies of personality attributions for political leaders and individual voter decisions (e.g., George & George, 1998; Greenstein, 2000; Jones & Hudson, 1996; Pancer, Brown & Widdis Barr, 1999; Stewart & Clarke, 1992) provide indirect evidence for a link between politician personality and political performance. However, there is a need for further longitudinal research in order to distinguish between attraction to political roles (in different political parties), and effective performance once elected. A distinction drawn by Mintzberg (1983) between political will (an individual's

motivation to engage in politics) and political skill (the knowledge and skills they need in order to do this effectively).

Studies investigating individual differences and political performance in the workplace may prove relevant here. There is evidence that an individual's willingness to engage in political behaviour at work is associated with self-esteem, Machiavellianism, Need for Power, and Locus of Control (Biberman, 1985; Ferris, Russ & Fandt, 1989). More recent research has identified emotional, practical and social intelligence, ego-resiliency, social self-efficacy, self-monitoring, and tacit knowledge as factors that may sensitize an individual to political environments (Ammeter et al. 2002; McClelland, 1985). Although Ferris, Perrewé, Anthony and Gilmore (2000) argue that engaging successfully in political behaviour may also depend on an interaction between these characteristics and general mental ability. Lawrence, Mauws, Dyck and Kleyson (2005) suggest that power mental models [PMM], political scripts, domain-relevant expertise, culturally appropriate social skills and social capital are important for developing political skill. Treadway, Hochwarter, Kacmar and Ferris (2005) also found that Need for Achievement and intrinsic motivation were both positively associated with political behaviour: less politically skilled individuals experienced a higher degree of emotional labour if they used political behaviour at work than did politically skilled individuals.

Clearly there is scope to extrapolate from such findings in order to investigate attraction to and effectiveness in political roles. However, Greenstein (1992) proposes five arguments why the complexity of political environments makes it more difficult to study personality and political performance than personality and work performance. First, he argues that, unlike employees, political actors are randomly distributed in roles and therefore their personalities are more likely to 'cancel out'. Secondly, compared with the workplace political action may be determined more by the actors' political environments than by their own characteristics. Thirdly, aspects of the psyche may have no political impact. Fourthly, in political environments the social characteristics of political actors are more important than their psychological characteristics. Finally, groups rather than individuals, impact on political outcomes. In fact, some researchers have claimed that

Politics and Politicians at Work

individual differences are likely to have little impact on political outcomes (e.g., elections) given the multitude of other factors that can influence political actors (Hargrove, 1993; Moe, 1993). Yet, one longitudinal study of individual differences and electoral performance of political candidates did find evidence of impact. Using a standardized assessment centre, Silvester and Dykes (2007) compared ratings of individuals before they were selected as Parliamentary Candidates with their subsequent performance in the UK General Election. They found a significant association between individual differences (critical thinking skills and communication skills) and two indicators of political performance: the proportion of votes secured by a candidate and the percentage swing in votes to their political party achieved by the candidate in that constituency. This suggests that, contrary to Greenstein's more pessimistic outlook, evidence of a link between individual differences and political outcomes may well be found using longitudinal research and more objective measures.

Politics and Human Resource Management

Although mainstream I/O psychology can be criticized for its neglect of political work, it is equally true that politicians have had very little to do with I/O psychology or human resource management (HRM). Reasons for this are worth exploring because they may help us to understand the opportunities and potential challenges involved in applying I/O psychology to political contexts. Although most political parties have no formal HRM function, they do perform several of the activities normally undertaken by HRM in other organizations. For example, political parties are responsible for recruiting candidates for political office. They also provide training in campaigning skills such as media communication and public speaking (Norris, 2002). Indeed, political organizations have similar needs to other types of organizations: they must attract, recruit and retain talented individuals who will perform to the best of their abilities, present a positive image of the political party, and maximize the party's chances of attaining power. Yet despite similarities with employee attraction, selection and retention, there has been surprisingly little attention paid to how I/O psychology knowledge and practice might be usefully deployed by political organizations. The next section considers why this may be so by

focusing on three areas: selecting politicians, developing politicians, and reviewing political performance.

Selecting Politicians

'Democracy substitutes election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few' George Bernard Shaw (1903)

Despite Shaw's pessimistic view of democracy, one of its most valued aspects is the freedom that members of the public have to vote for whomever they choose, using whatever criteria they consider important. This freedom to choose electoral criteria contrasts with employee selection where it is more likely that a small group of appointed decision-makers assess candidates using agreed shared criteria. Yet selection can lie at the heart of electoral processes. In the UK and most other Western countries¹, most politicians represent a political party. As a consequence, the electorate must vote for one of several candidates who have been carefully selected by a political party before being allowed to fight an election. In fact recruiting individuals to legislative office is recognized as a core function of political systems, with the quality of candidates selected ultimately affecting the quality of government (Gallagher & Marsh, 1988; Katz, 2001). Political parties are therefore gatekeepers to government (Lovenduski, 2005) and have a responsibility to ensure that the best candidates are encouraged to stand for election. In reality political selection is dominated by political processes: over a century ago Ostrogorski (1902) pointed out that the distribution of power within a political party is highly affected by the methods of candidate selection it employs. More specifically the power of an individual or group to influence selection decisions can help to enhance that individual or group's future power to build alliances and influence political outcomes. Not surprisingly, candidate selection takes place far away from the glare of public scrutiny (Lundell, 2004) and to date very little consideration has been given to how

¹ The US is unique in that the two political parties that dominate do not control who can run (and be elected) for political office. These individuals are therefore comparatively independent of party discipline, policy and finance. This makes US politics unlike that of most countries and particularly unlike that of the highly disciplined European countries with which it is usually classed (Stokes, 2005, p. 121).

political selection processes compare with employee selection. Importantly, there has been little systematic investigation of whether political selection systems are fair (Lovenduski, 2005) or that they demonstrate good criterion-related validity (Silvester & Dykes, 2007).

While there is clearly an opportunity to apply I/O psychology knowledge and methods to political selection, to do so effectively would depend on developing greater knowledge in three areas. Traditional selection practices are based on person-job fit. This assumes that jobs vary in terms of the knowledge and skills they require, that applicants possess different levels of such knowledge and skills, and therefore job performance can be enhanced by matching the most suitable individuals (i.e. those with the appropriate knowledge and skills) to the job. Applying this model to political selection would mean selecting political candidates on the basis of their possession of the knowledge skills and abilities (KSAs) required of a politician, yet there have been relatively few attempts to map political roles using traditional job analysis methods. One exception to this is the list of tasks for US legislators provided by the National Center for O*NET Development (O*NET, 2007). For the most part, however, we have little detailed and systematic evidence of the day-to-day work tasks and responsibilities undertaken by politicians, including the time spent on these, the different ways in which politicians tackle them, or the KSAs they require (Silvester & Dykes, 2007). It is, of course, possible to speculate about characteristics that might prove important. For example, politicians must be able to deal effectively with conflict and rejection, they must also be able to sift through large amounts of information, identify key arguments, balance conflicting demands, and respond quickly. Politicians must listen to the needs of their constituents, communicate these in government, and persuade potential voters of their intentions, competence and commitment. There is also evidence that political roles have increased in complexity over recent years (Weinberg & Cooper, 2003), and that the media plays a much stronger role in creating public impressions (Caprara & Zimbardo, 2004). As a consequence politicians must be able to tolerate a 24/7 life style and constant media intrusion into personal lives. Characteristics such as analytical skills, communication skills, motivation, resilience and self-confidence, are therefore likely to be important (Valenty & Feldman, 2002; Winter,

2002). Presumably political skill will also be of central importance, and political selection may constitute an important practical opportunity to evaluate political skill research.

Silvester and Dykes (2007) provide one example of the use of job analysis to create a competency model for the selection and development of prospective members of Parliament on behalf of a major UK political party. Competency models make explicit important role-related behaviour enabling organizations to facilitate a shared understanding and common language around what is required of role incumbents (Schippmann, Ash, Battista, Carr, Eyde, Hesketh, Kehoe, Pearlman, Prien, & Sanchez, 2000). Silvester and Dykes conducted semi-structured critical incident interviews and focus groups with representatives of stakeholder groups including current Members of Parliament (MPs), prospective Parliamentary candidates, past MPs, senior party members, party volunteers and party agents to elicit positive and negative behavioural indicators. The emergent six competencies were: 'Communication Skills' – a capacity to communicate messages clearly and persuasively across a variety of audiences and media contexts, recognizes need to listen and create opportunities; 'Intellectual Skills' - understands, learns and prioritizes complex information quickly, presents ideas in a transparent manner, is intellectually curious and open to new ideas; 'Relating to People' – an ability to relate easily to people from all backgrounds – demonstrates tolerance, approachability and a capacity to inspire trust in others; 'Leading and Motivating' – a capacity for leading and motivating people through recognition of their contribution, involving them, and providing support when required, and accepts responsibility for outcomes; 'Resilience and Drive' – an ability to cope effectively and positively with pressure (e.g., high work volume, long hours, work-home balance) and remain persistent in the face of challenge, set-backs and criticism; 'Political Conviction' – a commitment to Party principles and public service, including the need for integrity and courage in securing opportunities to disseminate and defend beliefs. Each competency was further defined by using four positive and four negative behavioural indicators. This competency model was then used as the basis for an assessment centre for selecting prospective Parliamentary candidates.

Other work has sought to identify cross-party skill sets for local politicians as part of a wider UK project aimed at attracting individuals into political roles (Silvester, 2004, 2007). Using critical incident interviews and a questionnaire survey of 240 politicians and officers in local government, the research captured shared views about what these roles entailed (their roles and responsibilities) as well as shared beliefs about good and poor performance. Six competencies were identified for all local politicians (local leadership, communication skills, political understanding, regulating and monitoring, working in partnership, scrutiny and challenge) plus an additional three for executive level politicians (providing vision, managing performance, and excellence in leadership). Example definitions of two of these competencies (political understanding and local leadership) with their negative and positive behavioural indicators are provided in Tables 2 and 3. Morrell and Hartley (2006) and Leach, Hartley, Lowndes, Wilson and Downe (2005) have also developed a framework of ten capabilities associated with effective political leadership by local politicians, including: questions thinking, decision making, personal effectiveness, strategic direction, advocacy and representation, political intelligence, communications, organizational mobilization, systems and tasks. Although the language differs slightly, similarities between these studies suggest an underlying shared construction of political work. More detailed investigations of political roles using job analysis methods could therefore provide useful insights into the types of generic skills and support needed for political office.

INSERT TABLES TWO AND THREE HERE

Developing political skill

'Politics is perhaps the only profession for which no preparation is thought necessary'

Robert Louis Stevenson (1882)

Although Stevenson made this comment over a century ago, it is still valid. For the most part politicians do not engage in development activities and no qualifications are required to become a politician. Moreover, many politicians consider 'career politician' a derisory

term, possibly because it can convey an impression of being motivated to seek power for self-interested reasons. This illustrates the dilemma for politicians: to be seen as living 'for' politics as opposed to living 'off' politics (Max Weber cited in Gerth & Mills, 1946, pp.83-4). As members of the public must trust politicians to act for the public good, they can become suspicious of strategies, such as skills training, that might enhance personal power. Indeed, one has only to think of Stalin and Hitler to recognize that the development of political skill can have dangerous as well as positive consequences. However, the idea of a political career is also problematic, because it implies that a progressive development of knowledge and skills is required for competence in political office. From a democratic perspective this challenges the view that anyone should be eligible for election to a political role, irrespective of any previous experience and training. In reality, the development of skills for political office is an under-researched area. This is partly because it is assumed that elected politicians bring with them a sufficiency of knowledge and skills for government gained through work experience and other voluntary activities. However, this has been an informal process, largely driven by individuals, and interest is growing in how this process might be supported more formally (Green & Brock, 2005). Political roles and the skills they require are also changing: politicians like many other professionals are expected to cope with a more complex and faster paced work environment (Weinberg & Cooper, 2003). There is also interest in how to encourage the involvement of a wider range of individuals in politics, particularly those with little exposure to political or work environments traditionally associated with developing political and social capital (Silvester, Wheeler, Martin, Usher, Kerrin, Collins & Dipper, 2007). For example, Norris (2004) describes how the emergence of a new style of citizen politics in Western democracies has emphasized the need for more active public participation in politics, which in turn depends on individuals developing the social capital and skills necessary for political engagement (Putnam, 1995). Although social and political capital have traditionally been a research focus for sociologists, I/O psychology could have much to offer, particularly in terms of investigating the transferability of work skills to politics and vice versa. There has also been growing concern among many political parties in the West about reducing levels of political engagement (Putnam, 2002). Norris (2004) cautions that lower levels of political

engagement are not found in all countries (i.e. there has been very active engagement in new democracies such as East Timor, South Africa, Ukraine and Cambodia). However, she argues that in more established democracies there is evidence that younger people and individuals from minority groups are becoming less engaged in politics. Such findings have prompted questions about how individuals might be attracted to political roles, and what strategies might be employed to ensure that elected politicians are representative (Meadowcroft, 2001; Ogai, 2001). Undoubtedly, research and theory concerned with career development (see Arnold & Cohen, 2008; Pfeffer, 1989) could support a much better understanding of how people develop political competencies and build political careers. It is also possible that democratic process and political competence can be enhanced through provision of more structured training and development opportunities. An interesting example of this is the United Nations training programme for elected leaders in developing countries (UN-HABITAT: Fischer & Tees, 2005).

Therefore, efforts to understand how aspiring and elected politicians develop political skill and competence, and the role played by political parties and other professional employers and agencies in doing this, is likely to prove an important topic. It is also an opportunity for I/O psychologists to demonstrate how their knowledge and expertise might contribute towards the support and development of elected representatives. For example, researchers have suggested that political skill in the workplace can be developed through coaching (Ferris, Perrewé et al, 2000), mentoring (Perrewé & Nelson, 2004), learning and experience (Ahearn et al. 2004; Ferris, Anthony, Kolodinsky, Gilmore & Harvey, 2002; Maniero, 1994; Witt, 1995), and global assignments (Harvey & Novicevic, 2004). There is also some evidence that the use of peer mentoring by local politicians can help to develop knowledge and skills (Whiteman, 2004). Training and development are also relevant to political engagement. However, there is also a need for a note of caution in relation to the link between politician development and issues of power and control. Politicians instinctively understand that knowledge is power, and the ability to shape meaning and understanding invests power in an individual (Wilson & Game, 2002). In a political context there are important questions about who gets access to

Politics and Politicians at Work

development opportunities, who decides what knowledge and understanding is important, and who decides which individuals need development. For politicians who depend on public perception, admitting development needs can be akin to admitting incompetence: a weakness that makes them vulnerable to challenge from the media, their political opponents as well as their own political colleagues. The power to define training objectives and the types of knowledge important for political roles also has important political implications. Successful training and development for politicians will therefore require sensitivity to the political nature of knowledge and the power of the trainer.

Political Performance Review

'A good politician is quite as unthinkable as an honest burglar'

H.L. Mencken (1925)

Perhaps the most challenging area for I/O psychology involves defining what constitutes effective and ineffective political performance, and how such performance might be measured most appropriately. Previous studies from political psychology have used a range of criteria to define the performance of U.S. Presidents. These include: 'entry into wars and war avoidance', 'number of great decisions cited', 'quality of international relations', 'domestic and international economic success', 'number and quality of peace initiatives', 'type of appointments and legislation made', and 'successful resolution of crises that could have developed into wars' (e.g., Murray & Blessing, 1983; Spangler & House, 1991; Winter, 1987). However an obvious challenge from politicians is the claim that the only important measure of performance is how well they do in the next election: put simply, if the public decide they have performed poorly, they will not be re-elected. While this may be the case from a democratic perspective, there are inevitably limitations to using periodic elections as performance criteria. For example, members of the public may vote out of allegiance to a political party rather than for an individual (Lodge & Steenbergen, 1995). Consequently, individual electoral performance may have comparatively little to do with how well an individual has performed as a politician in their constituency. In the UK context, introduction of increased responsibility allowances

has led to debates about the individual accountability of politicians. Specifically, how can politicians demonstrate that their performance justifies these payments? In the workplace more generally effective employee performance is typically defined by managers in terms of performance criteria that relate to organizational goals, including core technical proficiency and in some cases OCB (Arvey & Murphy, 1998; Campbell, McHenry & Wise, 1990; Schmitt & Chan, 1998). As such performance review has been a top-down process, dominated by a single stakeholder group (managers) who are responsible for communicating their expectations regarding good and poor performance among organizational members. These shared performance criteria provide a basis for a range of organizational systems including performance review, training needs analysis, allocation of rewards and determining the criterion-related validity of selection systems (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). While not everybody will hold the same beliefs about what makes good and poor performance, formalizing performance criteria by embedding them in organizational systems serves to enhance the power of management to control the behaviour of organizational members.

Efforts to define political performance in a similar way are more problematic. First, there is no single group with the right to define political performance: politicians have multiple stakeholder groups (e.g., the electorate, political party, media, citizen groups, support workers and public officers) each of whom has a legitimate right to define political performance in unique and potentially contradictory ways. Consequently, while politicians may perform well in the view of one particular group (e.g., political colleagues), they may perform poorly according to the views of others (e.g., their constituents). Thus, to a much greater extent than employee performance, political performance can be considered good, bad or both depending on whose interests are being considered (Ammeter et al. 2002; Pfeffer, 1981). Interestingly, the need to accommodate multiple legitimate stakeholders is also a factor in appraising the performance of senior managers. A second issue in relation to defining political performance relates to democratic legitimacy: electoral processes are based on collective opinion and with majority support politicians have a democratic mandate to act as they see fit. Introducing formal performance review for politicians has the potential to undermine the democratic

balance because it implies the existence of another powerful group or entity with the right to determine how politicians should act. In reality, however, politicians must pay attention to judgments from all sectors (e.g., media and constituents) in order to be aware of support and opposition. This means that while there may be no formal performance management systems similar to those in the work context, informal and unstructured performance feedback plays an important role in helping politicians to decide how to act.

I/O psychologists might therefore have a role to play in identifying more effective and balanced feedback mechanisms for politicians. One possibility might be the use of multi-source feedback (MSF) systems. Despite being used increasingly as part of formal organizational reviews, MSF was originally introduced for development purposes as a fairer method of capturing performance feedback from different groups (Fletcher, 2001; London & Smither, 1995). There is some evidence that MSF systems are also being used with politicians as a means to provide feedback on performance and to increase self-awareness (Silvester, 2007). However, there are still difficulties in using MSF with politicians. Using feedback to change how politicians react to different situations and groups may be construed positively and negatively. It could be seen as evidence that politicians are paying heed to their electorate by changing how they behave.

Alternatively, it could be perceived as a Machiavellian strategy to curry favour and votes. Performance feedback and review for politicians therefore raises interesting questions about the political nature of HRM processes and I/O psychology more broadly: issues that will be considered in more detail in the next section.

A Political View of Human Resource Management

There are undoubtedly opportunities and challenges for I/O psychologists in political contexts. One important issue is the possibility that the introduction of formal HR systems can serve to consolidate the power of a ruling group making it less easy for others to influence decision-making. In a political context, therefore, any potential risk to democratic process needs to be managed with care. However, this work raises a further challenge: can I/O psychologists learn from politicians? According to Ferris and King

(1991) HR is the organizational function that labours most under assumptions of rationality. It is responsible for the design and implementation of systems that reduce ambiguity and maximize consistency in decision-making about people at work. It is also one of the rational and sanctioned organizational systems that Mintzberg (1973) describes as providing a counter to political activity. However, HR also generates many of the incidents perceived to be political, such as promotions or reward decisions based on favouritism rather than merit (Gandz & Murray, 1980). Indeed, it has been claimed that the organizational and political context of performance appraisal can exert a stronger influence on performance ratings than appraiser capabilities and limitations (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995). As a result, researchers have been interested in identifying how political processes can influence HR procedures such as executive appraisal and selection (Bozionelos, 2005; Fletcher, 2001; Gioia & Longenecker, 1994; Longenecker, Sims & Gioia, 1987). The following section looks at two ways in which power and politics are important for HR processes and I/O psychology. The first focuses on the possibility that politics undermines reliability and validity by leaking into otherwise rational and objective decision-making processes (Kacmar et al. 1999). The second takes a different perspective by considering how HR is itself a political function.

Unconscious effects of power and politics on HRM

Although organizational politics is generally defined in terms of intentional acts of influence to enhance or protect the self-interests of individuals or groups (Allen et al. 1979), studies have shown that power can also exert an unconscious influence on HR decisions. David Kipnis and his colleagues explored the potential corrupting influence of power on decision-makers in a series of studies (e.g., Kipnis, 1972; Kipnis et al. 1980; Lee-Chai, Chen & Chartrand, 2001). They concluded that actor-observer differences in person-perception mean that power-holders fail to take full account of their power and status when explaining why others agree with them. Leaders, for example, typically overlook the power dependency of their subordinates and are more likely to believe that subordinates agree with their decisions because the leader's decisions are good. As such leaders tend to overlook the subordinate's need to curry favour with someone who can

control their future. Kipnis and his colleagues argue that power corrupts because over time power-holders come to believe that their own views are superior and devalue the worth of subordinates.

Fiske and her colleagues have also explored power in interpersonal decision-making. In her power-as-control theory Fiske (1993) identified three reasons why powerful people are more likely to stereotype less powerful others. First, because power-holders already have control over the organizational resources they require to achieve their needs, they have less need to expend the cognitive effort required to overcome stereotypes and individuate others. Secondly, powerful individuals at higher organizational levels usually have a large span of control, which means that compared to less powerful others they need to make more effort to pay attention to and individuate those people for whom they are responsible. Thirdly, individuals who self-select for positions of power or who are appointed to them may be less motivated to individuate those lower in a hierarchy, or lack the personal resources needed to do so effectively. Thus a combination of cognitive, situational and individual factors can impact upon decisions made by powerful individuals about less powerful others. In practical terms, power holders may not devote sufficient attention to, or effortful processing of, information about their subordinates during performance appraisal (Dépret & Fiske, 1999; Fiske & Glick, 1995; Goodwin, Operario & Fiske, 1998). However, Fiske (2001) also suggests that lack of power can influence subordinates' perceptions and behaviour because dependency on a powerful other undermines the individuals' sense of control and motivates them to attend closely to the attitudes and behaviour of their superiors. Low power sensitizes individuals to unexpected actions on the part of significant others, and political behaviour out of line with established norms. Outcome dependency also motivates individuals to make more trait inferences when they encounter disconfirming information leading observers to create more individualized personalities for power-holders (Fiske, 2002). These findings have implications for political contexts where there may be psychological as well as power-based reasons for why politicians attend to powerful groups. However, the findings also indicate the need for I/O psychologists to recognize and incorporate the

effects of power into models of interpersonal decision making and assessment in work contexts.

HRM as a Political System

A more radical stance is that HRM (supported by I/O psychology) is itself a political system, because it formalizes and legitimizes managerial perspectives (e.g., Novecevic & Harvey, 2004). This does not necessarily contradict the view that HRM is a legitimate system capable of reducing ambiguity and encouraging fairness through evidence-based decisions (cf. Andrews & Kacmar, 2001). It simply raises questions about who defines the basis on which decisions are made and, as such, who controls legitimacy? According to Kirk and Broussine (2000) politics involves a set of beliefs, principles or commitments that drive actions and interventions. Politics can therefore be viewed as a means of using power to create desired societies or organizations. Indeed, Dawson (1986) defines power as “the capacity to get decisions and actions taken and situations created which accord with, and support, one’s investments” (p.147). The formal rules and procedures created and enforced by HRM serve to legitimize and reflect the power of management to define how organizational members should behave and be rewarded. Organizational systems stipulating behavioural norms (e.g., training, selection, socialization, and performance management) are political because they involve constructing shared beliefs about what is legitimate (Kamp, 2000) and what is good and poor performance. These also serve to institutionalize power relationships by reflecting organizational members’ acceptance of the way in which they are governed and led (Novicevic & Harvey, 2004).

Conceptualizing HRM as a political system draws attention to the distinction made by Foucault, (1977) between episodic power (discrete individual political acts) and systemic power (vested in the routine ongoing processes of organizations such as socialization, accreditation processes and performance management). Where I/O psychology research has considered issues of power, most has focused on episodic power rather than the diffused systemic power of HR systems and practices (Lawrence et al. 2005). Compared with very little consideration of power and politics in areas such as employee selection,

far more discussion has focused on politics in relation to organizational development, learning, and change (Coopey & Burgoyne, 2000; Kirk & Broussine, 2000; Schein, 1985; Walumba, 1999). Indeed, Lawrence et al. (2005) define organizational learning as a political process, because the transformation of new ideas into coherent collective action involves political will and political skill. They argue that embedding new organizational practices depends on the actions of institutional entrepreneurs, whose success in turn depends on their access to, and ability to leverage required resources. Therefore organizational learning requires active, interested members who are willing to engage in political behaviour, push ideas forward, and ensure their integration, and institutionalization. Interestingly, Ferris and Judge (1991) make a similar claim in relation to HRM. They argue that the extent to which HRM can successfully help an organization to achieve its strategic purpose depends on the ability of individuals within the HRM function to mobilize political influence. They emphasize the need to understand how political influence can be mobilized to help shape shared (and accepted) organizational realities.

The use of HRM systems to formalize and consolidate the power of an organizational elite challenges the distinction drawn by Mintzberg's (1984) between the legitimacy of HRM decisions and the illegitimacy of political decisions. However, it is also possible that political behaviour becomes progressively but informally sanctioned through social norms as individuals move to higher organizational levels. This is well illustrated in the case of employee selection where the use of systematic selection procedures steadily declines with increasingly senior roles. Sessa (2001) found that whereas structured assessment centres, psychometric testing and biodata are commonplace at lower organizational levels, executive-level appointments tend to involve interviews, resumes and references, traditionally some of the least reliable methods of selection. Bozionelos (2005) suggests that performance criteria become more blurred and ambiguous as roles increase in seniority, and as such interviews for critical posts in middle and upper organizational levels are most susceptible to political contests. He argues that interviewers at this level also have more personal interest in who is appointed, because that person will have the power to control resources that could impact on the

interviewers' own power. Ferris & Judge (1991) suggest that the opportunity and motive to engage in politics increase at higher organizational levels because the benefits and losses in relation to power become greater. Managers may also select or promote individuals similar to themselves because similarity facilitates network building and alliance formation, which in turn can help to increase their personal power base (Ferris & King, 1991). All of this suggests a tension between the need to implement structured objective selection systems, and managers' desire to maintain power by influencing selection decisions. This may in part explain the fact that I/O psychologists have been less successful at influencing recruitment to higher level appointments. Similarly, while selection decisions based on possession of requisite KSAs may be adequate at lower organizational levels, those at higher levels (and possibly more political environments) may depend more on an individual's political and social capacity.

CONCLUSIONS

Charles de Gaulle (French General and President of France 1959-1969) once commented that *'Politics are too serious a matter to be left to the politicians'* (Attlee, 1961 cited in Jay, 2004, p.105). He was responding to the UK Prime Minister Clement Attlee's claim that, whilst de Gaulle may have been a very good soldier, he was a poor politician. This exchange demonstrates an implicit belief that political leaders need different skills to those required by leaders in other fields such as the military or business. As we have seen, research evidence to support such assertions is still in its infancy, but political skill and political leadership are topics that deserve more attention from mainstream I/O psychology. Indeed, if the discipline is to have broader influence, I/O psychologists cannot afford to ignore political roles: some of the most important work roles that exist. De Gaulle's comment that politics is too important a matter to be ignored, is therefore also pertinent to the need for I/O psychologists to understand how they might support and help to enhance the performance of individuals in political work. To summarize, the main arguments presented in this chapter are:

1. Politics implicitly recognizes the existence of multiple perspectives and needs.

2. Although much of the organizational politics literature construes politics as a cause of conflict, politics in a wider sense is also about mediating between the priorities of competing groups and where possible resolving conflicting needs.
3. For the most part, political activity in organizations has been seen as 'bad' if it impedes achievement of organizational goals and objectives.
4. However, political skill is conceptualized as 'good' if it is used to achieve organizational goals and objectives.
5. Therefore, whether politics is seen as 'good', 'bad' or 'ugly' depends upon the views, interests and perspective of the observer.
6. HRM (supported by I/O psychology) can itself act as a political system in that selection, development and performance management processes formalize the power of the organizational elite.
7. Consequently, introducing more structured selection, development and review systems into politics must be undertaken with care because they can influence the balance of power between politicians within political parties, between democratically elected politicians and their electorate and between individual politicians and central government.
8. Using I/O psychology with politicians emphasizes the need for performance criteria that can accommodate pluralistic and potentially conflicting views of effectiveness.

The failure to consider how research and practice might be applied to the broader political context of government organizations is a missed opportunity on the part of I/O psychologists. Not only does this area offer new and important challenges it also provides

the opportunity to question managerialist assumptions that often prevail in I/O psychology. For example, efforts to define political performance may help to improve our knowledge and understanding of how a multiplicity of views can be accommodated within performance review systems in the workplace: an area identified as an important future challenge for performance measurement researchers (Bennett, Lance & Woehr, 2006). Similarly, organizational politics researchers might benefit from considering how their findings relate to political roles and government organizations. Given that politicians might also be considered consummate experts in political skill, there is also the possibility that organizational research might benefit from exploring the strategies and skills used by politicians in order to better understand how leaders can gain influence at senior and inter-organizational levels.

While political work holds many opportunities for I/O psychology, however, the extent to which these are seized and challenges successfully met may well depend on I/O psychologists' ability to critically reflect on their own role in political systems. Hollway (1991) argues that I/O psychologists have been particularly poor at addressing the political nature of the knowledge that makes up their discipline. As such they risk being too narrowly focused on managerial perspectives and insufficiently aware of their own role in supporting or undermining power relations between different organizational groups. For I/O psychology to make a useful contribution within political contexts it is therefore important to recognize, acknowledge and accommodate the role played by power and politics traditional systems of selection, development and assessment. Politicians are one of the most important groups of workers; their performance affects the well-being and economic security of people across the world. The study of politicians and political work should therefore not remain the exclusive domain of sociologists or political theorists.

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Table 1: Definitions of Political Behaviour

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Intentional acts of influence to enhance or protect the self-interest of individuals or groups. (Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick and Mayes, 1979)2. Self-serving behaviour (that is) a deviation from techno-economic rationality in decision-making (Gandz & Murray, 1980)3. The pursuit of self-interest at work in the face of real or imagined opposition (Murray and Gandz (1980).4. Behaviour not formally authorized, officially certified, or widely accepted by the organization - efforts to maximise self-interest, perhaps at the expense of others and/or the organization (Ferris, Frink, Bhawuk, Zhou & Gilmore, 1996).5. Self-serving behaviour (involving) tactically assertive behaviours (Harrell-Cook, Ferris & Duhlebohn, 1999).6. The exercise of tactical influence by individuals which is strategically goal directed, rational, conscious and intended to promote self-interest, either at the expense of or in support of others interests (Valle & Perrewé, 2000).7. Behaviour not formally sanctioned by the organization, which produces conflict and disharmony in the work environment by pitting individuals and/or groups against one another, or against the organization (Treadway, Adams & Goodman, 2005).8. Behaviours designed to foster self-interest taken without regard to, or at the expense of, organizational goals (Andrews, Witt & Kacmar, 2003; Hochwarter, Witt, & Kacmar, 2000; Witt, Andrews & Kacmar, 2000).

9. Actions by individuals which are directed toward the goal of furthering their own **self-interests** without regard for the well-being of others or their organization (Andrews & Kacmar, 2001; Harris & Kacmar, 2005; Zivnuska, Kacmar, Witt, Carlson & Bratton, 2004).
10. Intentional actions (covert or overt) by individuals to promote and protect their **self-interest**, sometimes at the expense of and without regard for the well-being of others or their organization (Byrne, 2005).

Table 2 Behavioural Indicators for Local Leadership

Local Leadership: Engages enthusiastically and empathetically with the community in order to learn, understand and act upon issues of local concern. Mediates fairly and constructively, encouraging trust by representing all sections of the community.

Positive Behavioural Indicators:

- Engages with their community, canvasses opinion and looks for new ways of representing people
- Keeps up-to-date with local concerns by drawing information from diverse sources and hard to reach groups
- Encourages trust and respect by being approachable and empathizing with others
- Creates partnerships with all sections of the community, ensuring their participation in decision-making
- Mediates fairly and constructively between people and groups with conflicting needs
- Acts as a champion for others by campaigning with enthusiasm courage and persistence

Negative Behavioural Indicators:

- Doesn't engage with their community, waits to be approached & is difficult to contact
- Keeps a low profile, not easily recognized in their community
- Treats groups or people unequally, fails to build integration or cohesion
- Has a poor understanding of local concerns & how these might be addressed
- Concentrates on council processes rather than people
- Is unrealistic about what they can achieve & fails to deliver on promises

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Table 3. Behavioural Indicators for Political Understanding

<p><u>Political Understanding:</u> Acts ethically, consistently and with integrity when communicating values or representing group views in decision-making or actions. Works across group boundaries without compromising values.</p>	
<p>Positive Behavioural Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly represents the group’s views and values through their decisions & actions • Helps to develop cohesion within the group & good communication between the group & council • Communicates political values through canvassing & campaigning • Actively develops their own political intelligence (e.g., understanding local & national political landscapes) • Looks for ways to promote democracy & increase public engagement • Is able to work across political boundaries without compromising their political values 	<p>Negative Behavioural Indicators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks integrity, has inconsistent political values & tends to say what others want to hear • Puts personal motives first or changes beliefs to match those in power • Has poor knowledge of group manifesto, values & objectives • Fails to support political colleagues in public • Doesn’t translate group values into ways of helping the community • Shows little understanding of central government policy or its implications for council & community

From Silvester (2007) Political Skills: A Tool Kit for Councillors.