

Leading with political awareness

Developing leaders' skills to manage the political dimension across all sectors

An understanding of policy and politics is an increasingly important skill for managers, whether they are located in the public, private or voluntary sectors.

Political skills are starting to be recognised in the management academic literature as elements of effective management.

Research findings:

The research has developed understanding in five main strands:

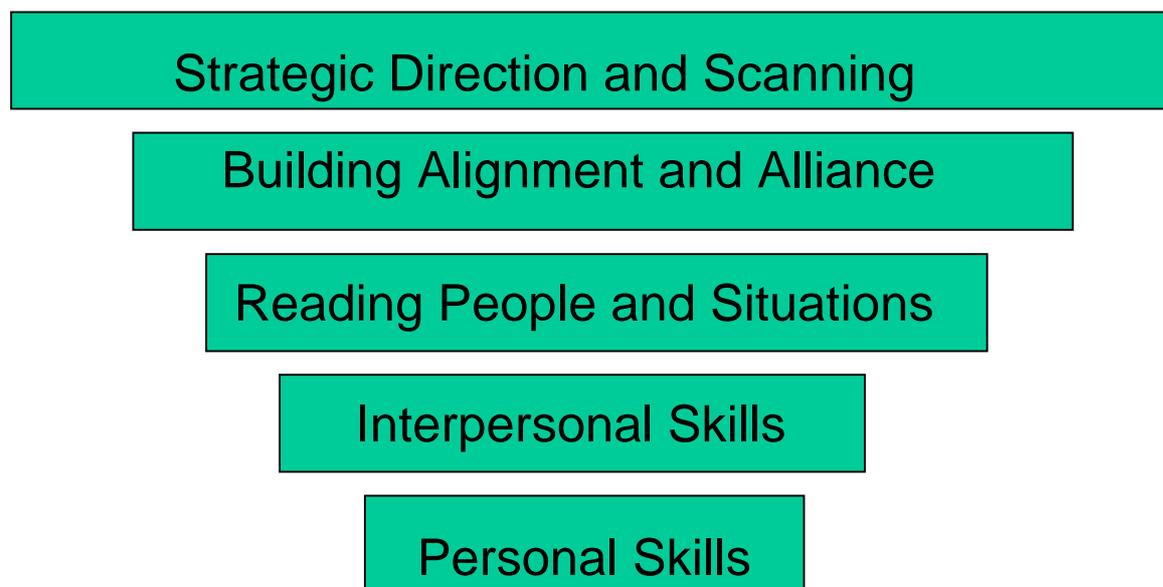
1. Defining and establishing the importance of the main political skills required to lead and manage with political awareness.
2. Designing and developing the first model / framework for political skills which reflects the complexity of management of external as well as internal contexts.
3. Analysis of the skills as used and seen by a large and varied number of UK managers at middle management level and upwards.
4. Mapping of where such skills are used – the contexts in which managers see these skills as important.
5. Providing important insights into how political skills are acquired and developed.

Summary findings:

Why political skills are important:

- Shaping key priorities within the organisation
- Building partnerships
- Promoting the reputation of the organisation
- Managing risks for the organisation

Developing the political skills framework:



How do managers rate themselves:

- 58% rate themselves overall as 'good' at political skills (Less than 1% say excellent and 18%, average)
- Political skills observed among their senior managers 3.7 from a scale 1 to 6 (between average and good)
- Specific dimensions of building alignment and alliances, strategic direction and scanning, more ratings of weak than of excellence

The contexts and challenges of using political skills:

- Working with influential people within the organisation (76%)
- Working with partners and alliances (73%)
- Thinking about the impact of public opinion on the organisation
- Working with tiers of government (including local government)
- Influencing regulation in their sector

How political skills have been developed:

- Learning by experience (on the job, mistakes and handling crises)
- Informal observation of senior managers
- Exposure to alternative organisational and societal cultures
- Observation, reflection and questioning of one's own behaviour and of others whilst dealing with politically sensitive situations

What individual managers can do:

- Check your political awareness skills (360)
- Develop good skills of observation, reflection and questioning
- How you can gain exposure to situations demanding political sensitivity
- Have a mental debrief on how well you read people and situations
- Improve your strategic scanning skills (networks)
- Further study to get exposure to different ways of thinking, challenge your mindset

Reference: Jean Hartley, Clive Fletcher, Petra Wilton, Patrick Woodman and Christoph Ungemach (2007)