

# **THE WORKPLACE POLITICS POCKETBOOK**

By David Bancroft-Turner

*Drawings by Phil Hailstone*








“This pocketbook helps you navigate through a very complex subject by providing practical and action-orientated advice. I will certainly be using it to improve my own effectiveness within my organisation.”

**Eleni Nicholas, Group Managing Director UK & Ireland, The Nielsen Company**

“I know from work that Dave has done with us over the last couple of years that he is a leading authority on workplace and organisational politics. This book provides a very practical insight into how people behave within organisations and suggestions on how to positively influence your working environment.”

**Mike Edwards, HR Manager, Management Development, Lloyds TSB**

# CONTENTS

	<b>INTRODUCTION</b> 5 Definitions, four political scenarios to consider, the costs of negative workplace politics, reasons to manage		<b>HOW POLITICAL IS MY ORGANISATION?</b> 81 A questionnaire to measure how political an organisation is
	<b>WHAT POLITICAL ANIMAL ARE YOU?</b> 21 The 4 animal model and summary of types, how to spot the animals, animal behaviour, how to succeed with foxes		<b>POLITICAL PERCEPTIONS</b> 87 Water cooler tale, self-fulfilling prophecy, questionnaire, common mistakes
	<b>POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE SKILL DEVELOPMENT</b> 47 Four key skills: communication, influencing, networking, factor X		<b>CREATING YOUR MASTER PLAN</b> 99 Political intelligence diagnostic, FAQs, recap, additional development opportunities
	<b>POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE TOOLS</b> 75 How to balance Reveal with Ask – the key to political intelligence		

WHAT POLITICAL ANIMAL ARE YOU?

HOW DO YOU MEASURE UP?



The key question to ask yourself is, 'What political animal am I?' One of the ways to find out is to measure yourself against two important criteria:

1. Your **goal alignment** – to what extent do you work towards your own goals or do you put energy and effort into working towards the goals of the organisation AND your own goals?
2. To what extent are you **politically intelligent**? In other words are you able to:
  - Read what is happening in the organisation at a time when everything is changing?
  - Understand how decisions are really made?
  - Use different types of power at different times with different people?
  - Know who are the key individuals in the organisation?
  - Know who and how to influence to get your ideas accepted?
  - Understand where different types of power are and how it moves over time?
  - Be clear about the different agendas that exist in the organisation?
  - Demonstrate similar skills to those of a chess player – thinking ahead of the many different moves and possible responses?

## WHAT POLITICAL ANIMAL ARE YOU?



### THE ANIMAL MODEL

If the two criteria of political intelligence and goal alignment are plotted against each other, the result is four distinct 'political animals':



WHAT POLITICAL ANIMAL ARE YOU?

## ANIMAL CHARACTERISTICS



Each of the four animals have very different positive and negative characteristics:

### FOXES



- Clever
- Cunning
- Adaptable
- Resourceful
- Sly
- Kill for fun
- Furry!

### OWLS



- Observant
- Kill for food
- Swift
- Silent
- Aloof and distant
- Wise
- Feathery!

## WHAT POLITICAL ANIMAL ARE YOU?

### ANIMAL CHARACTERISTICS



#### MULES



- Determined
- Hard working
- Noisy
- Bad tempered
- Heavy load carrier
- A plodder but sure-footed
- Hairy!

#### SHEEP



- Trusting
- Innocent
- Naïve
- Follower
- Gentle and timid
- Loyal
- Woolly!

In reality you may be a little bit of all these animals at different times. It is also important to note that none of them is 'right'. You need to make decisions about what animal you would like to be at any given time.

WHAT POLITICAL ANIMAL ARE YOU?

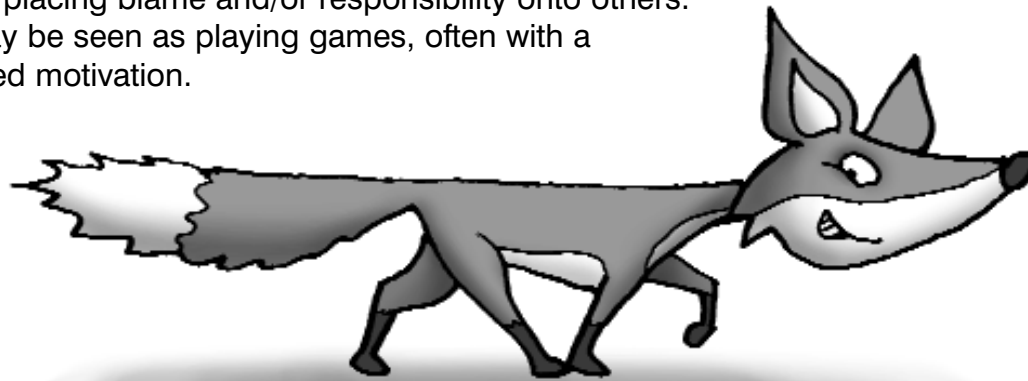
## FOXES ARE **CLEVER**



These people have high political intelligence and use it primarily in pursuit of their personal goals.

Clever characters are individuals who understand the political climate and are aware not only of the written rules but also of the unwritten ones, the ways to get things done both formally and informally. They may use this knowledge for personal gain, and may be skilful at placing blame and/or responsibility onto others.

They may be seen as playing games, often with a concealed motivation.



## WHAT POLITICAL ANIMAL ARE YOU?



### **OWLS ARE WISE**

These people have high political intelligence and typically this is used to align their personal goals with those of the organisation. (They believe time, effort and energy are wasted if goal alignment does not occur.)

Wise people know and understand the politics of the organisation. They, like the clever group, know how to manoeuvre around organisational procedures when required and do so by revealing their motivation to others so they are not misunderstood. They work in ways that are beneficial both to the organisation and themselves. They are unlikely to undertake activities solely in pursuit of their own interests.





## WHAT POLITICAL ANIMAL ARE YOU?

### **SHEEP ARE TRUSTING**



These people have low levels of political intelligence and are concerned to meet both the organisation's goals and their own.

Innocents tend to be suspicious of the whole issue of politics. This may be because they link political intelligence with Fox-like behaviour – associating with the negative aspects rather than the positive behaviour of the Owls. For others, politics is a game that must be avoided, either consciously or unconsciously.

They pursue the organisational goals and their own simultaneously. They tend to be innocent in terms of their blindness to power and organisational decision-making processes.



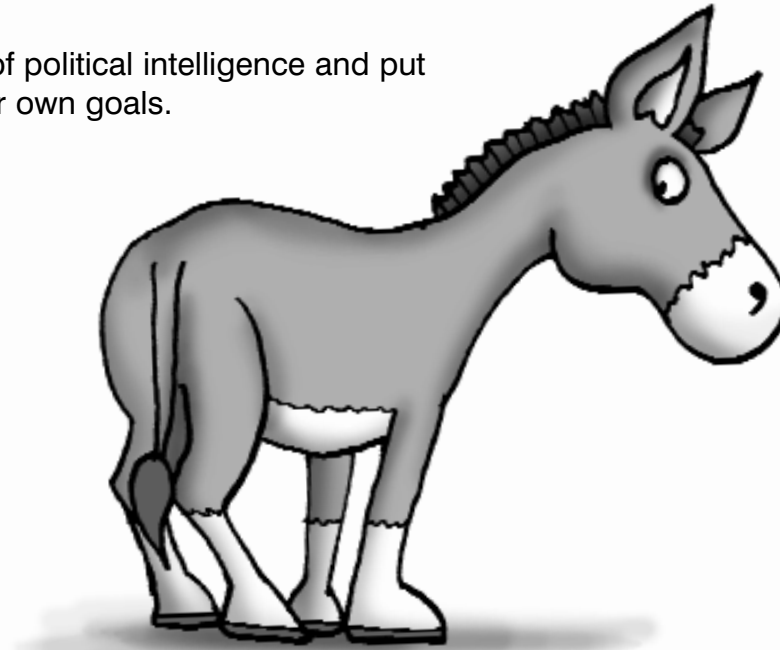
WHAT POLITICAL ANIMAL ARE YOU?

## MULES ARE DETERMINED



These individuals have low levels of political intelligence and put their energy into the pursuit of their own goals.

People in this quadrant can be unaware of the formal and informal power structures, and are primarily concerned with achieving their own goals. They tend to be determined individuals who stick resolutely to their plans. They are convinced that they are right and are not afraid of telling others, whether it is appropriate or not.



## WHAT POLITICAL ANIMAL ARE YOU?

## FOX OR OWL? SHEEP OR MULE?



In organisational life it can be fairly easy to recognise the four types.

Sometimes people are a combination of the different animals and therefore are more difficult to identify.

You now need to consider what type of animal you might be, and do the same for those individuals who are important to you in the organisation.

Where would you put yourself on the animal grid? Where would you put some of your colleagues? Write the initials of key colleagues in the appropriate quadrant of the model. What type of animal would you like to be?



WHAT POLITICAL ANIMAL ARE YOU?

## UNDERSTAND WHO HAS POWER



An important aspect of the animal model is that you probably started your organisational career somewhere near the 'low political intelligence' end of the graph. During the early stages of your working life you may have started to realise the need to understand how the organisation **really** works.

For example, the most powerful person in the organisation is normally the person with the most positional power – eg the managing director, CEO or head of the department or division.

The critical question is, who is the second most powerful? It is likely to be somebody who does not have a senior position but has **proxy power** – ie they 'borrow' it from another person who is powerful. In many organisations it is the secretary or PA of the MD/CEO who has a huge amount of power – which is why they are known as 'gatekeepers'. Upset them at your peril!

WHAT POLITICAL ANIMAL ARE YOU?

## YOU HAVE A CHOICE



So, you quickly learn in your organisation that it is not a good idea to upset the secretaries or PAs to senior management. But something else also happens at this time that can affect our career opportunities and our lives.

Because most political behaviour in organisations is perceived to be in the negative, many people associate the self-serving foxes with political intelligence and then either consciously or unconsciously say to themselves – ‘If that is what being political is, then I don’t want anything to do with it’.

**The good news:** there is an alternative! It is possible to develop political intelligence and, if you choose, to become more owl-like, to work towards the achievement of **both** your own goals and those of the organisation. This is a decision that is very personal to you (you may prefer to be a different animal). What is important is to understand the implication of being perceived as each of the animals.

## About the Author

### David Bancroft-Turner BA (Hons) MIPD

Dave is the Managing Director of the Academy for political intelligence. It is dedicated to the promotion of the positive aspects of organisational politics. The Academy is one of the country's leading authorities on organisational politics, having learnt what works and doesn't from a variety of Owls, Foxes, Sheep and Mules with whom they have worked with over the past 30 years.



The Academy runs a range of leadership development programmes all of which contain the 'unwritten rules of leadership' and how it is done in the real world. The Academy has 70 licensed practitioners worldwide, qualified to deliver its unique and practical political intelligence programme.

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