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## Yes Minister! An exploration of the experience of organisational politics in the UK Senior Civil Service with reference to psychological flexibility

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"...you basically have to...[engage in politics]...these are not people who involve others [...] they are short term Whitehall streetfighters." Hugh, Director

"My personal values are a very strong commitment to public service ethos, delivery and fairness." Lorraine, Director

### SUMMARY

This qualitative research explored the experience and perceptions of organisational politics in the UK Senior Civil Service with reference to psychological flexibility. Using semi-structured interviews and template analysis, interactions were found between the constructs of organisational politics (OP) & the processes of psychological flexibility (PF).

### FINDINGS

#### Integrative Theme across all data – a "junction box" between OP & PF



#### Organisational Politics

**2. PERCEPTIONS** – Seen as a "dark art" reserved for a "brooding group" – reduced in recent years. Reflections on "bandwidth required" to manage "Whitehall streetfighters" which resulted in "less effective and durable policy."

**3. POLITICAL WILL** – findings supported a model of development from "naive to mature actors." (Doldor, 2015)

**4. POLITICAL SKILL** – participants were highly skilled in influencing, communication & authentic presentation.

#### Psychological Flexibility – First Order Themes & Illustrative quotes

##### 5.1 DO WHAT MATTERS

**5.1.1 Find the meaning** – "...I know what I do is making life better for quite a cohort of people."

**5.1.2 Take bold action** – "Being bold and taking action comes partly from experience [...] often making no call is worse than either of the alternatives you might be worried about."

##### 5.2 BEING PRESENT

**5.2.1 Compartmentalise** – "...recognise that some meetings will take more out of you."

**5.2.2 Flexible attention & curiosity** – "I keep reflecting back on where I can be adding most value."

**5.2.3 Detachment** – "...you need to be able to represent the department & also know when to just let it go when you walk out of the office."

##### 5.3 OPEN UP

**5.3.1 Acceptance & growth** – "I consciously said I'm not very good at presentations, I don't like doing them and should do them more, so I feel better about them."

**5.3.2 Recognise & engage with support** – "I haven't got all the capabilities to do it, but it doesn't freeze me [...] what I think now is 'how do I get that?'"

**5.3.3 Self-doubt & delay** – "it's the fear of being seen to get it wrong, you can make a fool of yourself calling it the wrong way and that can get in the way..."

### OUTCOMES

Research used as a framework for senior discussions on dysfunctional & functional aspects of OP.

Interventions to cultivate PF in leaders in development within HM Treasury.

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