

The Art of Positive Politics A Key to Delivering Successful Projects

By Vijay K. Verma

(A book recommendation by R. Max Wideman, FPPI)

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Disclosure: *During the creation of this book, I was a mentor to author and long-time friend Vijay Verma. Therefore, I will simply confine my comments to quotations from the book.*

Introduction

In this latest book by well-established author Vijay Verma, Vijay aims directly at the most beguiling aspect of project management — handling the challenges of corporate politics in promoting projects. This especially includes the typically negative reactionary responses to a new project launch. Why do negative politics transcend positive politics? Because if you are comfortable with a project's planned impacts and outcomes, there is no need to say anything. After all, it is not your job to promote a project unless you are specifically assigned to do so.

Then the project manager's job is to turn that situation around. In the Art of Positive Politics,¹ Vijay explains how to analyze the political landscape, understand stakeholders' political positions from their perspective, and thereby convert opposition into support that results in even more successful results.

For those project managers appropriately inclined, managing the political environment can be an exciting and satisfying component of the project manager's job, especially when it enhances the ability to get things done. What is the best part of all? Vijay covers the broad landscape from the project level up to the top organizational level. Hence this book is highly recommended.²

As Vijay says:

I like to share my knowledge and experience with others because knowledge is power, and the more you share it, the more you get. Books are excellent media to achieve this because they allow me to reach many people I might be unable to meet in person.³

The concepts, ideas, and guidelines presented apply to initiatives and projects in any industry — government, information technology, construction, oil and gas, utilities, transportation, aerospace, mining, pharmaceuticals, research and development, financial, banking, insurance, hospitality, arts and service industries.⁴

This book should help senior management minimize the negative impact of politics by creating positive politics characterized by the attributes, keywords, and ideas described. Portfolio, program and project managers will learn to analyze their political landscape to understand three main political positions (Naives, Sharks, and Politically Sensibles) and stakeholders' various political behaviors. Academics and educators in business schools and project management programs can use this book to develop a course to teach practical ideas about power, influence, and politics.⁵

About the author

Vijay K. Verma is an internationally renowned speaker and author. He wrote a three-volume series on the Human Aspects of Project Management published by the Project Management Institute (PMI): *Organizing Projects for Success*, *Human Resource skills for the Project Manager*, and *Managing the Project Team*. Mr. Verma received the 2009 PMI Fellow Award (one of the highest and most prestigious awards presented by PMI), the 1999 PMI David I. Cleland Project Management Literature Award (for his book *Managing the Project Team*), and the 1999 PMI Distinguished Contribution Award for sustained and significant contributions to the project management profession.⁶

Book Structure

The contents of this book are set out in four main parts, each with a Summary, and an Appendix as follows:

- Table of Contents
- Tables and Figures
- Foreword and Preface
- Acknowledgements and Introduction
- Part I: Politics & Project Management
 - 1. Basic Concepts of Politics
 - 2. Politics in Project Management
- Part II: The Dynamics of Politics
 - 3. Two types of Politics
 - 4. Why Organizational Politics?
 - 5. Politics in Managing Stakeholders
- Part III: Understanding the Political Landscape & Stakeholder Behaviors
 - 6. Analyzing the Political Landscape
 - 7. Understanding Political Behaviors
 - 8. Managing Political Behaviors
- Part IV: The Art of Managing Politics
 - 9. Three Truths of life to Manage Stakeholders
 - 10. Managing Politics at the Management Level
 - 11. Managing Politics at the Project Level
- Appendix: Case Studies & Exercises
- End Notes and References

The book has 468 pages and includes an Appendix of Case Studies and Exercises. It does not include a Glossary of Terms. The book is well balanced, discusses its topics in depth, and is well written in a clear style. It has ample Figures and Tables.

What we liked

*The Part I Summary concludes with the observation:*⁷

Politics are part of life in project environments. Many projects are derailed because of politics despite good planning and project management processes. Project managers must understand the dynamics of politics and their use to get things done from project stakeholders. Politics have a negative connotation; however, politics can also be positive.

*The Part II Summary observes:*⁸

Politics are a necessary part of life in project environments because most projects have stakeholders with different interests, viewpoints, expectations, and personalities. Managing politics involves managing this diverse mix of stakeholders.

*The Part III Summary recommends:*⁹

Senior management should establish organizational values and team norms that discourage negative politics. In addition, power should not be centralized among a few managers and departments to avoid possible power corruption. Establish rules and policies that prevent team members from using their power and changing the project agenda to suit their goals. Establishing these policies also creates a framework through which project and organizational goals are defined, and everyone's efforts can be fused to meet overall organizational strategies.

*The Part IV Summary concludes that project managers must understand the three truths of life outlined in this part. These are:*¹⁰

People make or break things is the first truth. In other words, people make things happen and prevent things from happening. That is, people do projects, and therefore, people skills are critical to deliver successful projects. People behave differently under different circumstances and at an individual level, team level, or management level.

People do what is in their best interests is the second truth. People do things to help others but they look for an answer to the question "What's in it for me?" Therefore, to manage stakeholders and especially to manage upward, project managers should sell their projects by explaining the project benefits in terms of the stakeholders' interests, "What's in it for them!"

People support what they create is the third truth. Therefore, to gain support from project stakeholders for any initiative is to make them integral to the creation process so they take ownership and feel committed to successful outcomes. In this context, people's involvement and participation should be genuine, and they should feel free to express their opinions and concerns.

Politics in organizations are inevitable, especially in project environments.

¹ Vijay Verma's book *The Art of Positive Politics* is available from <https://www.amazon.ca/Art-Positive-Politics-Delivering-Successful/dp/1554891779>

² The foregoing text is from my comments made in the introductory *Praise for the Art of Positive Politics*, p2

³ *The Art and Power of Politics*, p26

⁴ *Ibid*, p27

⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶ *Ibid*, p467

⁷ *Ibid*, p93

⁸ *Ibid*, p204e

⁹ *Ibid*, p308

¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp415-416