

# Building Organizational Politics and Power Equilibrium Through Group Emotional Intelligence

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## Abstract

There is increasing wave of organizational politics and power squabbles in many contemporary institutions that may have their roots at the levels of lack of emotional capacity to build necessary rapport. This phenomenon is dangerously detrimental to organizational effectiveness and prosperity. The study examines the relationship between group emotional intelligence and organizational politics and power equilibrium because it is a learned competency based on emotional intelligence and recognizes the need of group identity, group efficacy, trust and organizational awareness as necessary ingredients to foster co-operation and collaboration in organizations to balance group interests to achieve organizational effectiveness. Politics and power coalition is common in organizations today, but a gifted CEO of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond imbued with requisite emotional capacity is very likely to provide the strong leadership and to manage emerging organizational politics and power polarization to enhance organizational interests without comprising the interests of organizational members. The result of the study shows positive relationship between group emotional intelligence and organizational politics and power equilibrium and offers suggestions for further study. It recommends that good labour-management relationship is imperative in reducing organizational politics and power squabbles.

## Keywords

Gifted Ceo, Emotional Capacity, Emotional Challenge, Rational View, Political View

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## 1. Introduction

The growth and complexity in modern organizations have given rise to intensive organizational politics and power squabbles in attempts to allocate scarce resources, remain competitive and also to maintain equilibrium between the opposing groups. In efforts to achieve such cohesion, organizations realize that emotion grows out of social interaction, in which case, the factors of building trust and co-operative behaviour, become the potential approach for group effectiveness. Trust and co-operation are factors of intelligent behaviour necessary for teamwork. Intelligent behaviours depend hugely on emotional intelligence which can be defined in terms of emotional empathy, attention to,

and discrimination of one's emotions, accurate recognition of one's own and others' moods, mood management or control over emotions, response with adaptive emotions and behaviours. It is the ability to validly reason with emotions and to use emotions to enhance thought [1]. Emotional intelligence reflects individual emotional intelligence which contributes to positive group emotional intelligence. People interact daily in organizations and many human emotions grow out of social interactions. Emotion is a pervasive psychological concept and understanding its role in groups, teams and organizations is important in managing organizational dynamics, in terms of organizational politics and power distribution. Because of the nature of social behaviour in organizations and the disposition ability of emotional intelligence at work, group emotional intelligence

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can be a catalyst for building organizational politics and power equilibrium. Group emotional intelligence is the ability of a group to generate a shared set of norms to manage the emotional process in a way that builds trust, group identity, and group efficacy. It involves the emotion-behaviour-emotion cycle which can spiral either positively or negatively. However, a group with high emotional intelligence creates a positive cycle through norms it develops to influence the emotional process. They emphasize that emotionally competent behaviour is linked empirically to group effectiveness. Organizational politics is defined as the tactics by which self-interested but independent individuals and groups seek to obtain and use power to influence the goals and objectives of the organization to further their own interests. On the second leg, to play organizational politics, the individual must have power. Power can be defined as the ability of one individual, function or division to cause another individual, function or division to do something that it would not otherwise have done. Power in this context differs from authority which comes from holding a formal position in the hierarchy. This type of power comes from the ability of the individual to informally influence the way other parties behave. It is the ability to influence behaviour, to change the course of events, to overcome resistance, and to get people to do things that they would not otherwise like to do. Politics and influence are the processes, the actions and behaviours through which this potential power is realized. Realizing these processes through group emotional intelligence leads to an equilibrium between the opposing views. This is critical because if an organization can maintain checks and balances at top management levels, politics can be a healthy influence, because it can prevent overzealous senior managers from becoming complacent about the *status quo* and thus avert organizational decline. Literature on organizational politics and power reveals that if politics grow rampant and if powerful senior managers gain such dominance to suppress others who oppose their interests then major problems may arise. In this case, checks and balances fade away, debate is restricted and performance declines. Often the best chief executive officers (CEOs) recognize this phenomenon and crave to create a strategic context to promote a win-lose situation and to reap the rewards for successfully balancing opposing views for the greater interests of the organization [2-4].

### 1.1. Research Problem

The problem behind this study lies in the fact that those who live to play organizational politics often do so in pursuit of their own self-interest and advancement, and they study the invisible network of power, its weakness to protect their own ambition. Therefore, a disdain in organizational politics is not the best, because the inevitable politics of organizational life

create competing coalitions and power struggles. In the circumstance, a sensitivity to these political coalition and rivalry makes a person more understanding of the underlying problems and better able to address what really is critical in key decision making. In organizations, an accurate understanding of the organizational chart is not enough. It is also necessary to appreciate the informal structure and the unspoken power centres in the organization.

### 1.2. Research Objective

The study was designed to examine the relationship between group emotional intelligence and organizational politics and power equilibrium.

### 1.3. Research Questions

Is emotional self-awareness a factor of group emotional intelligence?

Can organizational awareness help in building organizational politics and power equilibrium?

Is group identity crucial in group emotional intelligence?

Do you think group efficacy can lead to co-operative or collaborative work team?

Is trust a major factor of group emotional intelligence?

### 1.4. Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework shows the main variables of the study in relation to the study problems. It is frequently expressed as a model. A model is a representative of reality, and used to demystify issues that would otherwise be buried in an excess of words. The model for this study is shown in figure 1.

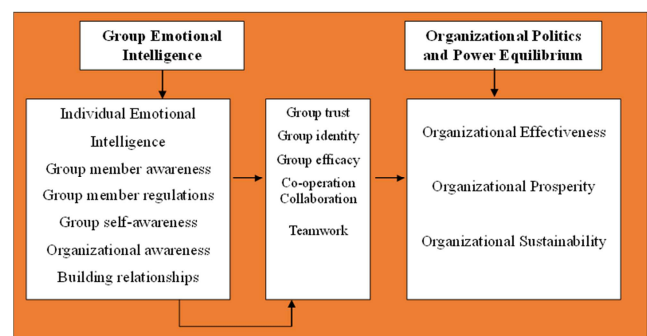


Figure 1. Group Emotional Intelligence and Organizational Politics and Power-Equilibrium Model.

The model of this study is conceptualized within the context that emotion as a psychological concept leads to behavior that in turn leads to changes in the relationship between the individual and the environment. Accordingly, this cycle can take a positive or negative direction. It can create an upward self-reinforcing spiral of trust, group identifies and group

efficacy or it can create a downward self-reinforcing spiral of dysfunctional conflict and detachment. Consequently, an emotionally intelligent response to stimuli contributes to the development of a positive cycle. In this context, individual emotional intelligence seeks to influence the interpretation of the situations and thus resulting to emotional arousal. The influence of individual emotional intelligence is supported by group cultural influences that channel the interpretation of emotional stimuli and subsequent behaviors in ways that have a positive impact on group effectiveness. Group member awareness enhances interpersonal relationships, while group member regulation deals with the enforcement of group member norms. Group self-awareness is critical for team self-evaluation and feedback that is necessary for effective performance [5]. Group self-regulation factor seeks to overcome emotional challenge, creating conducive environment and to ensure that group members are proactive in problem-solving situations. Organizational awareness directs members and intergroup focus towards organizational effectiveness and this is supported through building robust relationships within and outside of the organization. These processes result to group trust, group identity, group efficacy, and collaboration as well as team work, and organizational politics and power equilibrium. Trust is an essential ingredient for building co-operation in groups and it arises out of affection and friendship vis-à-vis reciprocal attention and concern. Trustworthy relationship in a work environment encourages the assumption that an obligation will be fulfilled and an expectation met, thus creating a system of mutual trust. Thus, obligations, expectations and reciprocity are related constructs that can turn trust into a powerful group resource fostering partnership and identity. Group identity is a collective belief that facilitates the sense among group members that their goals and futures are positively linked. This increases members' commitment to each other and facilitates the co-operation and collaboration necessary for group success [6]. Also, group efficacy as the collective belief in a group of its effectiveness has been consistently found to be linked to its task effectiveness [7-12].

## 2. Literature Review

Druskat, and Wolff [13] reveal that co-operation and collaboration are fundamental interaction processes in work group and fundamental ingredients for group effectiveness. They suggest that group trust, group identify, and group efficacy also result from group emotional intelligence to form group cohesion necessary for group performance. Emotions play important role in groups and an understanding of how emotions affect behavior in groups is therefore useful in understanding and predicting group behavior. Emotions contain important information that can alert group members

to issues that require the group's attention and response. For example, a feeling of tension can alert a group member to the existence of unresolved conflict in the group, and this automatically affects behavior. As soon as emotions reach consciousness, their interpretation and expression are influenced by expectations such as those that exist as part of the group's culture. Consequently, the influence of cultural norms on the interpretation of an emotional stimulus and on the resulting behavior forms an integral element of the definition of group emotional intelligence as the ability to create group cultural influences that channel the interpretation of emotional stimuli and subsequent behaviours in ways that result to group cohesion and effectiveness. Group emotional intelligence is based on the expressive theory of emotional intelligence. Goleman [14] proposes that emotional intelligence has two overall categories both of which are related to the management of the emotional process. The first is *personal competence* and involves self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation. The second category is social competence and he defines *social competence*, to involve social awareness and the skills of empathy. These involve the ability to help others to manage their emotions to achieve their goals. It involves individual emotional intelligence as a factor that influences the interpretation of a situation and the behavioral reactions to emotional arousal. Also in the personal competence category includes trustworthiness and conscientiousness, among others. And in the social competence category also involves organizational awareness, leadership, building bonds, teamwork and collaboration among other competencies. A distinguishing feature of the group context is that awareness and regulation mechanisms focus on three distinct arenas of interactions, interpersonal, group and cross-boundary. Therefore, the group must develop cultural influences that facilitate awareness and regulation of the emotion of individual members, the emotion of the group, and the emotion inherent in relationships with group and individuals outside the group boundary. However, in the group emotional intelligence construct, there are some basic dimensions, including group awareness of members, group regulation of members, group self-awareness, group self-regulation, group social awareness, and group social skills, or organizational awareness. For example, group awareness of members relates to interpersonal understanding of the feelings, interests, concerns, strengths and weaknesses of group members. This knowledge allows group members to predict and cope with one another's day-to-day behavior in the group. Group regulation of members seeks to create a balance between ensuring predictable group member behavior and allowing members a sense of control and individuality. It is argued that, paradoxically, the more a group allows its members to exert their individuality, the

more its members will be open to place their individualism aside for the good of the group [15-17]. In the group context, it refers to the ability of the group to be aware of and understand the *social and political system* of which it is a part. In a study of self-managing work teams, Druskat [18] finds that highly effective teams have a better understanding of the organization's culture including how and why managers make certain decisions. This understanding serves the team well when they need external resources. Also, it is explained that emotionally intelligent groups recognize the expectations and needs of other groups in the organization, through the influence of *intergroup awareness*. Research consistently points out that the most effective units in an organization are those with high levels of intergroup agreement and agreement among teams about intergroup norms and processes is more important for effectiveness than the specific processes adopted [19-25].

### 2.1. Organizational Politics

The concept of organizational politics continues to draw attention because even the best CEOs cannot afford to remain *apolitical* due to the necessity to reconcile their own interests, the interests of organizational members and the interests of the organization. Organizational politics involve actions and behaviours by individuals, teams or groups to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources, in order to obtain preferred results where there is uncertainty or disagreement among different interest groups about choices. Organizational politics relate to any action taken by individuals or groups to gain power and to secure goals and benefits that they personally desire. It is a network of interactions by which power is acquired, transferred, and exercised over others. There is no doubt that politics and struggles for power exist in organizations, but what is not common is the way to balance the interests. In formulating the corporate mission and setting policies and goals the board of directors (BODs) strives to maximize corporate wealth. This step of strategic approach is known as the *rational view*. It suggests that for management to achieve corporate goals it must follow a planned or calculated, rational plan in which only shareholders' interests are considered. However, in reality, strategic decision-making is quite different, and management decisions seem to further personal, functional, or divisional interests. However, in the *political view* of decision-making, goals and objectives are set through compromise, bargaining, and negotiations. In the process, the board and management often clash over what the correct policy decisions should be, and this results in power struggles and coalition building which manifest as a central part of strategic management. In this context, Hill and Jones [26] define organizational politics as the tactics by which self-interested but interdependent individuals and groups seek to

obtain and use power to influence the goals and objectives of the organization to further their own interests. They stress that organizational politics stem from the disagreement between the rational view and the political view of organizations. The rational view assumes that complete information is available and no uncertainty exists about outcomes. According to the rational view, the board and management always agree about appropriate organizational goals and the appropriate means, or strategies for achieving these goals. The political view, on the other hand, suggests that choice of goals and means is linked to each individual's functions, or division's pursuit of self-interest. In the process, disagreement over the best course of action becomes inevitable because of the merits and demerits of the opposing views. This situation leads to coalition building and employees' and managers' joint coalitions to lobby for their interests, because in doing so they increase their political capacity and muscle in relation to their organizational opponents. With teamwork, collaboration and relationship management a competent CEO can forge a balance of interest between the opposing groups for the greater interests of the organization through a high dose of emotional capacity.

### 2.2. Organizational Power

Power is the ability to influence the behavior of others. The term power can be applied to persons, groups, teams, organizations and countries. In this context, power is necessary in organizational management. Power in organizations can be obtained through networking, coalescing or co-opting among other sources. For example, networking relationship management do not only involve the *big people* at the top, influential colleagues and competent subordinates can promote an individual's quest for power. Coalescing is a manifestation of the principle of *esprit de corps* which implies that there is strength in unity. It is the process of individuals, teams or groups combining their resources to pursue common objectives. On the other extreme is co-opting, where groups or teams form alliances for the purpose of reducing or eliminating threats or opposition to their power base. This process is defined as the method of increasing power and creating alliances in which individuals or groups whose support is needed are absorbed into another group. To utilize power in organizations, it is important to understand the sources of power. This then requires diagnosing the point of view of interest groups as well as the basis for their positions which will assist in negotiating with them and predicting their response to various organizational initiatives. Managing with power means understanding that to get things done the individual needs power, more power than those whose opposition he or she must overcome. It becomes imperative therefore, to understand where power comes from and how these sources

of power can be developed. Pfeffer [27] explains that managing with power means understanding the strategies and tactics through which power is developed and used in organizations, including the importance of timing the use of structure, the social psychology of commitment and other forms of interpersonal influence. Balancing organizational politics and power is critical for organizational effectiveness. For example, it is believed that power and politics strongly influence a company’s choice of strategy and structure, therefore, the company has to maintain an organizational context that is responsive both to the aspirations of the various groups, management and the external environment. Balancing of interests is thus, important because those in power never voluntarily give it up, but excessive organizational politicking and power struggles reduce company’s flexibility, cause inertia, and erode competitive advantage. In an organization where there is opposing powerful coalitions, and politics is of the *cutthroat* power-play variety, employees and managers who fail to meet such aspirations lose out. This necessitates the need for an organizational structure that creates a power balance or organizational politics and power equilibrium for group effectiveness. It is believed that a gifted CEO can create an organizational context in which politics can facilitate the change process and lead to a balance. When the CEO uses his expert knowledge as his power, he provides the strong leadership that allows an organization to overcome inertia

and change its strategy and structure. Consequently, it becomes part of the strategic approach to learn how to manage politics and power to enhance corporate interests because organizational politics and power balance is an essential part of the process of effective management [28-31]. Attempts at building organization politics and power equilibrium may not necessarily amount to attempts at building organizational democracy, but instead will result specifically in balancing of interests through the intervention of group emotional intelligence.

### 3. Research Methodology

The qualitative technique of the survey research design was used for the study. As a qualitative approach, the study relied on primary data generated from the respondents [32]. A researcher designed 5-point Likert-type scale questionnaire adapted from Schutte, et al, [33] emotional intelligence scale was used to generate data. The population comprised the people in Nigeria, and the sample was selected by the judgmental method. The sample size was determined through the sample ratio technique at 190. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical method and findings expressed in terms of the percentages, the frequencies, the mean, and the grand mean and presented in table 2, while the profile of the respondents was explained in table 1.

### 4. Presentation of Result

Table 1. Profile of Respondents (n=190).

S/N	Description	Category	Total	Percentage
i	Gender	a) Female	70	36.84
		b) Male	120	63.16
ii	Education	a) Diplomas	50	26.32
		b) Degrees	80	42.10
		c) Others	60	31.58
iii	Age	a) 18–35 years	45	23.68
		b) 36–60 years	90	47.37
		c) 61-75 years	55	28.95
iv	Experience	a) 5 - 10years	35	18.42
		b) 11 - 15years	65	34.21
		c) 16 - 35 years	90	47.37
v	Status	a) Low	30	15.79
		b) Middle	75	39.47
		c) Top	85	44.74

Table 2. Analysis of Frequencies, Mean, Decision Mean and Grand Mean for Responses to Research Questions.

S/No	Restatement of Research Questions	Scores									
		SA		A		N		D		SD	
		5	4	4	3	3	2	2	1	1	1
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
i	Emotional awareness is a factor of group emotional intelligence	80	42.11	95	50.00	5	2.63	2	1.05	8	4.21
ii	Organizational awareness helps in building equilibrium	85	44.74	90	47.37	4	2.10	1	0.53	10	5.26
iii	Group identity is not crucial in group emotional	20	10.53	10	5.26	3	1.58	7	3.68	150	78.95

S/No	Restatement of Research Questions	Scores									
		SA		A		N		D		SD	
		5	4	4	3	3	2	2	1	1	0
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
iv	intelligence Group efficacy can lead to co-operation	70	36.84	65	34.21	6	3.16	9	4.74	40	21.05
v	Trust is a major factor in group emotional intelligence	50	26.32	70	36.84	2	1.05	8	4.21	60	31.58
vi	Power is important in management	95	50.00	70	36.84	7	3.68	13	6.84	5	2.64
vii	Politics is common in organizations	65	34.21	75	39.47	8	4.21	4	2.11	38	20.00
viii	CEO leadership cannot influence organizational politics and power equilibrium	8	4.21	9	4.74	10	5.26	6	3.16	157	82.63
ix	Emotional intelligence cannot be a therapy in organizational politics and power equilibrium	7	3.68	3	1.58	9	4.74	15	7.90	156	82.10
x	Emotional intelligence influences stress management	75	39.47	60	31.58	2	1.05	3	1.58	50	26.32

Table 2. Continued.

S/No	Restatement of Research Questions	Row scores	No of Resps.	Mean	Decision Mean @ 3 points	Grand Mean
i	Emotional awareness is a factor of group emotional intelligence	807	190	4.25	Accepted	
ii	Organizational awareness helps in building equilibrium	809	190	4.26	Accepted	
iii	Group identity is not crucial in group emotional intelligence	313	190	1.65	Rejecter	
iv	Group efficacy can lead to co-operation	686	190	3.61	Accepted	
v	Trust is a major factor in group emotional intelligence	612	190	3.22	Accepted	
vi	Power is important in management	807	190	4.25	Accepted	3.12
vii	Politics is common in organizations	695	190	3.66	Accepted	
viii	CEO leadership cannot influence organizational politics and power equilibrium	275	190	1.45	Rejected	
ix	Emotional intelligence cannot be a therapy in organizational politics and power equilibrium	260	190	1.37	Rejected	
x	Emotional intelligence influences stress management	677	190	3.56	Accepted	

#### 4.1. Discussion

The conceptual model in figure 1 demonstrated clearly that group emotional intelligence through group trust and collaboration facilitates organizational politics and power equilibrium. Table 2 was used to explain the profile of the respondents in the study. Responses of the research questions were analyzed as in table 2. In table 2 (i) with a mean score of 4.25 and strongly agreed and agreed score of about 92 percent, the respondents imply that emotional awareness is a major factor of group emotional intelligence. This supports Bar-On [34] that emotional self-awareness promotes thought, intellectual and personal growth to build group emotional intelligence. In table 2 (ii) the respondents with a mean score of 4.26, and a combined strongly agreed and agreed score of about 92 percent suggest that organizational awareness is a powerful factor in building organizational politics and power equilibrium. This supports the view of Druskat and Wolf [13] that organizational awareness contributes to group emotional intelligence. In table 2 (iii), over a mean score of 1.65, and a combined disagreed and strongly disagreed score of about 83 percent the respondents refused to agree that group identity is not crucial in group emotional intelligence. This supports the

findings of Chen, et al [35] that group leadership and empowerment lead to high performance in teams. As in table 2 (iv) the respondents over a mean score of 3.61, and a combined strongly agreed and agreed score of about 71 percent agreed that group efficacy leads to co-operation/collaboration. This supports the ideas, of Renn, and Fedor [36] that self-efficacy is necessary for group efficacy in goal setting and work performance. In table 2 (v) the respondent over a mean score of 3.22, and a combined strongly agreed and agreed score of about 63 percent accepted that trust is crucial in group emotional intelligence. This supports the findings of Huang [37] that the role of trust in one's supervisor provides psychological empowerment for job performance. With regard to table 2 (vi) the respondents over a mean score of 4.25 and the strongly agreed and agreed score of about 87 percent strongly agreed that power is important in management. This supports Pfeffer [27] that the real secret of success in organizations is the ability to understand the influence of power. This also means understanding the strategies and tactics through which power is developed and used in organizations. As in table 2 (vii) the respondents with a mean score of 3.66, and a total strongly agreed and agreed score of about 73 percent agreed that politics is common in organizations.

According to Morgan [38] organizations are political systems. He posits that the political image of organizations emphasizes the plural nature of the interests, conflicts and sources of power that shape organizational life. He explains further that organizational politics often revolve around the *unitary*, *pluralist* and *radical* frames of reference. As regards table 2 (viii) the respondents on a mean score of 1.45 and a total disagreed and strongly disagreed score of about 85 percent could not accept that CEOs leadership cannot influence organizational politics and power equilibrium. This supports the notion that a gifted CEO can provide the strong leadership that allows an organization to overcome challenges and change its strategy and structure to learn how to manage politics and power to further corporate interests because politics is an integral part of the organizational process [39]. By table 2 (ix) the respondents on a mean score of 1.37 and a combined disagreed and strongly disagreed score of about 90 percent refused to accept that emotional intelligence cannot influence organizational politics and power equilibrium. This supports Ogilvie and Carskey [40] that emotional intelligence promotes relationships management and win-lose negotiations in organizations [41]. In table 2 (x) the respondents on a mean score of 3.56, and a total strongly agreed and agreed score of about 71 percent agreed that emotional intelligence intervention is a necessary ingredient in stress management situations. With a grand mean of 3.12 over a decision mean of 3.00 it was found that group emotional intelligence represented by factors such as individual emotional intelligence, trust, organizational awareness, group self-regulation, among others leads to organizational politics and power equilibrium. This is the objective of the study.

#### 4.2. Scope for Further Study

Many organizations suffer from the problems of bad organizational politics and power-sharing. It is important for further study to examine the CEOs leadership role in this phenomenon as a way of minimizing it for the greater interests of the people and organizations.

#### 4.3. Recommendations

1. Some organizations are notorious as theatres of conflict due to organizational politics. The BODs of companies should be composed of people who can exercise a measure of control over their emotions in the interest of their organizations.
2. Many people come to organizations with different intensions and interests, therefore, there should be an organizational frame that can play a balancing role by seeking to reconcile divergent interests for the good of the organizational members and the organization.
3. Good labour-management relationship is crucial in

reducing bad organizational politics and power squabbles, because it will help both parties in building a common group identity necessary for organizational effectiveness.

4. Teams are often characterized by *knowledge workers* that require autonomy. Organizations should respect the individuality of such workers and try to avoid appraisal or promotion politics to retain such talented employees for the growth and sustainability of the organization.
5. Economic prosperity is highly dependent on the gross domestic product (GDP), therefore, the Federal Government of Nigeria should be concerned in the areas of training middle and high level manpower in both private and public institutions. The current reality of focusing only on education and training in public institutions is bad national politics at the detriment of the nation.

## 5. Conclusion

The study was designed to explore the relationship between group emotional intelligence and organizational politics and power equilibrium because harmonizing these variables is crucial for organizational effectiveness. Society is confronted by situations whereby divergent interests of different groups in organizations seek to paralyze activities and render the organization incapable of making commensurate quantum of progress due to lack of emotional capacity. A gifted CEO imbued with critical emotional capacity can provide strong leadership to successfully manage the interests of different organizational groups to place the organization on the paths of effectiveness and profitability. Understanding the intricacies of organizational politics and the sources of power in organizations depends on organizational awareness skills and this will be of tremendous benefit in organizational management and prosperity. 190 respondents participated in the study conducted through the survey research design and the result showed strong positive correlation between group emotional intelligence and organizational politics and power equilibrium.

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