

# Change and the Shadowside

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## Introduction

In our last article, we talked about the nine sources of power including the importance of understanding the informal networks that operate in an organisation.

This article examines these informal networks and processes (or 'Shadowside') in more detail and discusses their importance in making change work.

The nine sources of power and influence are as follows:

1. Position Power (related to position in organisation and formal authority)
2. Resource Power (finance, head count etc)
3. Coercive Power (often associated with bullying)
4. Expert Power
5. Experience Power (corporate memory)
6. Trust Power (derived from personal integrity)
7. Numbers Power (familiarity and facility with numbers)
8. Presence Power (personal impact)
9. Network Power (relates to both the formal aspects and Shadowside of organisations).

Understanding the Shadowside, will help you influence the informal side of organisational behaviour. Networks are a critical source of influence in today's flatter structures. However, time and energy is required to sustain your networks.

## What is the Shadowside?

The Shadowside is defined as:

***“Those realities that often disrupt, and sometimes benefit the business, but which are not dealt with in the formal settings of the organisation.”***

*Gerard Egan*

## Politics

Organisational politics are usually self-serving, and if given free reign can have a negative impact upon the organisation. They often lead to communication break down, and infighting at all levels. Outcomes resulting from organisational politics include:

- Individuals keep valuable knowledge to themselves and do not share it with those who need to know
- Morale and motivation falls
- The best people tire of this wasted energy and often leave
- While the internal battles rage the competitors take your customers.

## Idiosyncratic Behaviour

It is important that individual characteristics and diverse views are allowed to flourish, rather than the cloned approach of the recent past. However, the maverick, the eccentric, the insensitive and the insecure as well as the downright cavalier, all add to the stresses and distractions to those wishing to work collaboratively.

## Informal Social Systems

From the Grapevine, to the email system, the curry club, to the banished smokers outside, there are often a myriad of informal social groups that will be expressing their views about the organisation and the key players.

## Organisational Messiness

There isn't a single organisation that doesn't have the fudge factor when it comes to procedures. Even in the most regulated industries, such as nuclear power, aerospace pharmaceuticals, there is some cutting of corners and reinterpretation of procedures to get things done on time or to react to unexpected and urgent. In fact if everyone followed all procedures to the letter, most organisations would grind to a halt.

## Change and the Shadowside

All these aspects of the Shadowside need to be thought about when change is planned. It is all very well considering changes to formal structures and processes, but if the informal part of the organisation is not addressed, your proposed changes will not necessarily permeate the whole organisation and may well get blocked by any of the above.

The key is to be aware of the key aspects of the organisation that may have an influence. For example, you should ask yourself questions such as:

- Is the organisation riven by politics? Who are the key players in this and where do these have a particular impact. How might this stand in the way of change and what can be done to prevent this?

- Who are the mavericks within the organisation? What power do they hold? Are they onside with change and if not what would persuade them to come onside?
- Who are seen as the movers and shakers in the organisation? Who values their contributions? Can they provide positive influence for an organisational change initiative?
- What are the key informal networks within the organisation? Who belongs to them? How can they be communicated with and influenced? Who is the best person to undertake this communication?
- How are formal processes and procedures interpreted in practice? What impact does this have on the organisation and how does your proposed change impact on these?

### **Conclusion**

Organisations are messy and imperfect creations. Organisational Change programmes need to tackle these imperfections if change is going to stick. The problem is that many organisations fail to recognise or admit to these imperfections. However, the Shadowside is a fact of life and is unlikely to go away, no matter how successful the organisation is. It must be recognised and addressed if change programmes are going to work.

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If you have any questions about the subjects covered in this white paper or you would like to find out more about how Oakleigh Consulting could help your organisation, please contact us on 0161 835 4100 or [email us](#).

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