

Phase 2: Identify best influencing strategy

Understand the change process

If you are to find the best route to influencing change, the first and most important thing you must do is to understand the change process that you are trying to influence.

If you are trying to influence a policy decision of government, business or other organisation, then there are four fundamental questions to answer:

- Who makes the decision?
- How is the decision made?
- When will/could the decision be made?
- What influences the decision?

If you are trying to influence the practice of an institution, the questions to ask are:

- Who is responsible for that practice?
- Why does this practice take place? What factors influence that practice?
- What are the incentives and barriers to adopting the change that you are promoting?

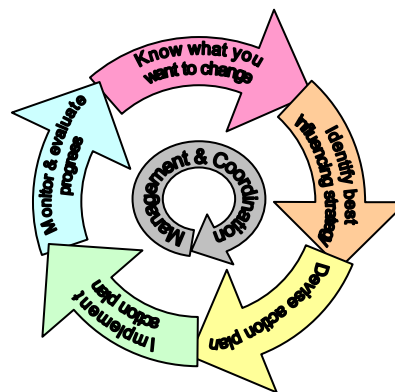
If you are trying to influence the behaviour of a group of individuals, similar questions need to be answered:

- Why do they practice the behaviour that you want to change? What needs do they have that this behaviour meets?
- What are the incentives and barriers to adopting the change that you are promoting?

In general, to influence the behaviour change of groups you also need an understanding of social psychology. For organisational practice change, social psychology is also useful but some understanding of organisational theory and management is useful. Government policy change requires you to understand the political dynamics that are present.

To help you understand the institutions that you want to influence, there are a number of mapping tools that can be used. Simple organigrams are a good start to help identify areas of responsibility and lines of accountability and authority, but they don't always help us to understand internal power and influence. Bringing together some experts to create a systems map may show internal influence and relationships. Decision flow charts are often useful, even if not completely accurate. A force-field analysis to identify the factors influencing a decision or behaviour is usually very valuable.

Whatever approach you use to understanding the change process, it is essential to establish who the decision maker is. For almost any policy change



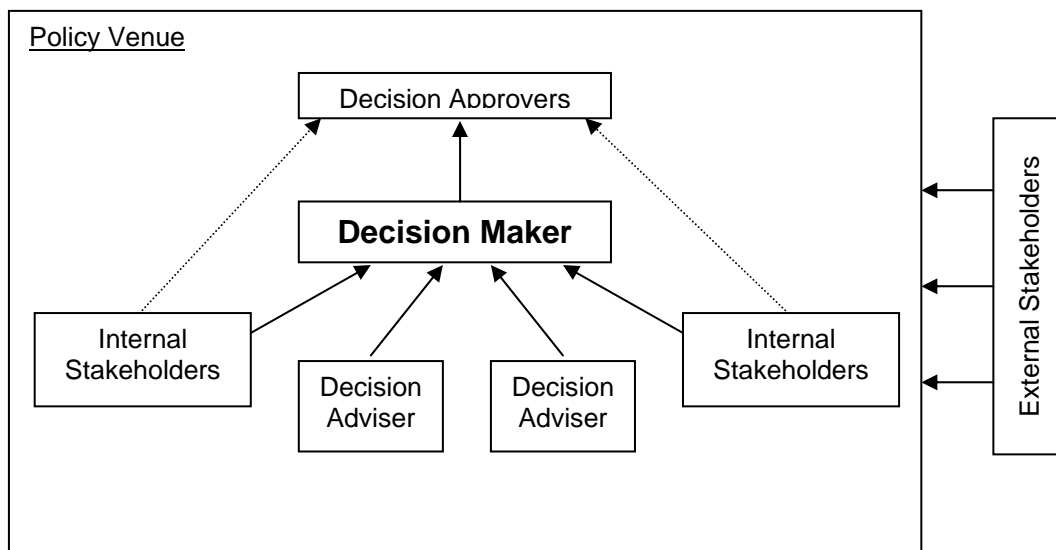
objective, there must be an associated “Decision Maker”. The Decision Maker is always an individual within an institution, being the person responsible for that decision. The Decision Maker should be distinguished from Decision Approvers, Decision Advisers and other stakeholders in the policy making process.

The Decision Maker may not have the authority to decide the policy on their own, but they are always the gate-keepers for that policy. They are responsible for formulating the policy that will go to the decision approvers for formal adoption.

For example, in a cabinet-style government such as in the UK, the decision maker may be a cabinet minister. The decision approvers could be the Prime Minister, the Cabinet or the Parliament (or all of these acting in concert or separately). Other cabinet ministers as individuals may be key stakeholders. In this scenario, the decision advisers will be civil servants and formal consultative groups. However, for less politically charged decisions, the decision maker may be a civil servant within the ministry, with a senior civil servant or the minister being the decision approver.

In some instances the decision approvers will be no more than a “rubber stamp”, rarely disagreeing with the decision maker. In other cases, the decision approver(s) will wield real independent power, be willing to reject the decision, and will need to be treated as an advocacy target in their own right.

In its simplest form, the process can be represented as follows:



By breaking down your target in this way and identifying the decision maker, it makes it easier for you to design your influencing strategies and focus your activities to best effect. It is often said that you don't influence institutions, only individuals, and all advocacy and campaigning should be personalised.