



Influencing beyond the **formal** **hierarchy**

REVISITING OUR
APPROACH TO
INFLUENCING IN
A NEW WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Traditional, hierarchical models of power and influence, based on ‘command and control’ leadership styles, are no longer hitting the mark in inspiring people to change. Outside the formal organisational structure, there are influencers with informal power. These less obvious influencers who build their relationships through trust, peer rapport and social capital are critical to supporting change initiatives. Along with techniques to apply subtle, personal influence, we can see that a great deal of influence can occur outside the formal construct of positional power.

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INTRODUCTION

There's a widely held belief that to drive change initiatives, we need senior stakeholders with positional power to support and communicate our key messages.

Business environments are becoming increasingly complex and fraught with extreme uncertainty. At the same time, organisations are adopting new and agile ways of working. In this rapidly changing climate where power is shifting, the more traditional methods of communication and engagement may be less effective than informal channels.

Influencing stakeholders and end users relies on trust. Yet, with shorter appointments in contract project and change management roles, trust and rapport needs to be built more quickly.

It's no surprise that this is a common challenge across numerous industries. A question often asked is:

“ *How might we influence our stakeholders to embrace agile ways of working?* ”

The key is to look beyond the formal hierarchy and find other ways to influence, both personally and through others.



PART ONE

Beyond the formal channels

Shifts in the external and organisational environments have redistributed power.

In conventional change management approaches, we looked at an organisational chart to identify senior decision makers as key influencers to support and champion our change efforts.

This analysis informed our communication and engagement plans, with a strong focus on 'cascading' communications from the top down.

When we take a closer look at the **social architecture** within the organisation, we uncover hidden influencers. These are the people with social capital who hold **new power**.

New power teaches us that influence is now less top down and more co-created. This clearly suggests we need to explore different ways to plan change activity.

But how do we find these hidden influencers?

In his book, *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell identifies these people with a 'rare set of social gifts' as connectors and mavens. It's their message, or 'social mojo' that can create the tipping point in influencing and spreading the message.





Social Architecture

What is Social Architecture?

Social Architecture is a concept pioneered in the change space by Belgian change practitioner, Luc Galoppin. It plays to the need to find what are traditionally known as change champions, but also to sustain the change post launch / release or go-live.

Traditionally, we looked to organizational charts that mapped the hierarchy for us to work out who we needed to engage with.

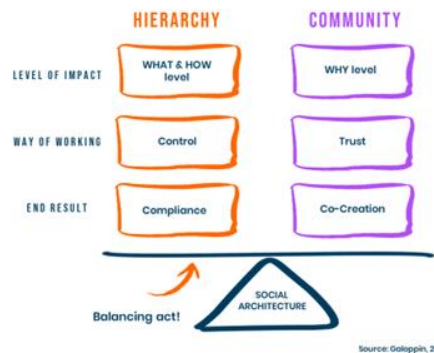
When we consider the Social Architecture of an organization, we recognise that organizational change is an activity that occurs within communities and networks.

Galoppin urges us to look to the white space that is between the boxes and lines of an organizational chart, to understand how to make change happen.

When introducing a change initiative, we need to design a Social Architecture to sustain our changes.

When we focus on the Social Architecture of the organization, we do not ignore the hierarchy.

A Social Architecture is a balancing act of both **hierarchy** and **community** that ensures that the balance of control and compliance works with trust and co-creation.



You can gain insights on these less obvious networks with an Organizational Network Analysis. – sometimes available from your ESN administrator.

There are also platforms such as Swoop Analytics that can identify online influencers within your organization.

Don't forget the old-fashioned way – who is it that people stop to chat to in the building?





The 3% rule

What is the 3% rule?

Through Organisational Network Analysis (ONA), Danish firm *Innovisor*, carried out years of analysis to uncover insights to further complement social architecture.

Innovisor's years of analysis and findings proposes we rethink how we deliver change by considering what they call 'the three percent rule'.


This rule means that 3% of your workforce are the key influencers with the capacity to reach over 85% of your employees. The key is to find out who they are, then leverage their impact. Once you find them, these are the people who can build trust in your change initiative.

Innovisor goes on to explain that of the three most common ways to identify your change champions:

1. Nominated by senior leaders
2. Self nominated
3. Peer identification

the one that is most effective is **peer identification**.

People identify more with their peers and trust them to represent their voice, thoughts and feelings. Keep in mind, these hidden influencers are less known to senior leaders and often introverts, making them harder to find.



**The key is to find the 3%...
then leverage their impact!**



New Power

Finding the right people in that white space in your organization's social architecture is also the place of 'new power'.

What is New Power?

Agile and new ways of working translate to increased autonomy for individuals and times. At the same time, in the macro environment, power is shifting. It's no surprise that the distribution of power, and how power is exercised in a business environment is also shifting.

There are several external forces that are driving the shifts in power base - globalisation, generational skews towards millennials, digital, multiple generations in the workplace, technology, and mobility to name a few, that are shaping the future of work.

In his TED talk titled '*What new power looks like*', Jeremy Heimans used the table below to summarise the key shifts.

OLD POWER	NEW POWER
Currency	Current
Held by few	Held by many
Downloads	Uploads
Commands	Shares
Leader-Driven	Peer-Driven
Closed	Open

The message here is clear. Traditional, hierarchical models of power with command and control leadership are less relevant for engaging and influencing. And, if you've noticed that Old Power/New Power reads a little bit like the difference between a more conventional team and an agile team, you are spot on!



New Power

How it plays out

Command and control is being replaced by connection and collaboration. Information, the commodity that was once restricted and served a power base for senior executives, is now easier to access and share. Power and status are being disrupted, and agile behaviours are the ones just right for these new ways leading, engaging and communicating with our teams.

New power is built on trust and sharing of knowledge. If we contrast this to positional power and centralised knowledge, we can see that information is no longer distributed via a vertical stream, from the top-down, as a cascaded approach.

New ways of working, open plan work spaces, distributed teams and Enterprise Social Networks, are enabling the shift. Massive Open Online Courses, known as MOOCs, are social networks that are brilliant examples of how knowledge is now available to every one at a low or no cost, anytime, and from anywhere.



What does this mean for influencing?

Look beyond stakeholders with positional power to also leverage the impact of the new influencers.


Peer-to-peer engagement is effective so seek them out to be your change champions and ambassadors.

Finding the white space, the new power and the 3% who influence through their social capital is the key.

Often they are comfortable with social media within their workplace and outside the organisation where they establish a broader network of industry connections. Confident and likeable, they connect effectively across the company's business divisions.

Don't overlook the quiet achievers either. To uncover the less obvious ones, ask around to find out who is sought out for their advice and counsel.



A blue-tinted photograph of two women in an office environment. The woman on the right is smiling and looking towards the woman on the left. They are both holding coffee cups. In the background, there are office lockers and a desk with a laptop. A large white circular graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

People who are highly connected have twice as much power to influence change as people with hierarchical power.

Leandro Herrero

PART TWO

Insights from behavioural science

Insights from the field of behavioural science remind us of our ability to influence people around us in more subtle ways with gentle nudges, actions and words.

As humans, we're hardwired to mimic others.

So simply modelling the behaviours and practices we want to see will rub off!

This is a great reminder for us to NOT underestimate our own *personal ability* to influence.

Lead and nudge by doing, with your actions. The ripple effect of how we act has a significant impact on what others will do.

A couple of thoughts to ponder with personal influence:

- ☆ What footprint do I leave through my actions and thoughts?
- ☆ How have I been influenced by others, either positively or negatively, through their actions?





The ripple effect

What is the Ripple Effect?

Whether we are leading others or not, we need to keep in mind that how we act is noticed and has an impact on others – there is a ripple effect. This plays a significant role in how safe people feel around others and how we influence.

Our subconscious behaviours create a ripple effect when we are around others. Take this familiar scenario. When we are around people who are negative and constantly complaining, we feel tired and drained. You might even call these people emotional vampires. The flip side is that when we surround ourselves with positive, upbeat people, we feel energised. It's no wonder that on some days we are more exhausted than we should be, for no other reason other than the company we've kept.

When this happens, we are experiencing **emotional contagion**, which is defined as the transfer of moods.

The reason it's so easy to absorb others' emotions, or even mimic behaviour around us, is that we are hardwired to do so. Mirroring and absorbing the emotions of people around us is an evolutionary survival skill, as it was critical to harmonise with our tribe. *Mirroring* is a psychological term to describe the behaviour of subconsciously imitating the characteristics of those around us.

As social creatures, we are naturally *designed to align* to moods and emotions, so we mirror others at a subconscious level. And this takes place with both negative and positive emotions.

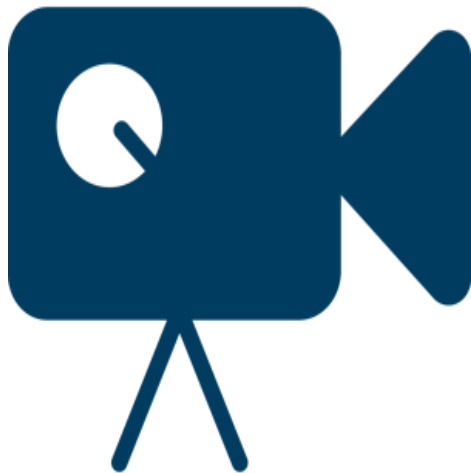
Social conformity, such as Groupthink, is another example of the how we are easily swayed by others.

How we behave plays a significant role in how safe people feel around others and how we influence.





Watch the RIPPLE EFFECT in action



You can watch the ‘ripple effect’ in action.

In the 1950’s, psychologist Solomon Asch, carried out human conformity experiments.

One of these human behaviour experiments became popular when it appeared on television in the early 1960s in a program called *Candid Camera* as the ‘face the rear’ elevator test.

Simply google ‘face the rear of the elevator’ and you will find an old black and white clip that simulates one Asch’s elevator experiment.

In this experiment, three ‘plants’ in the group deliberately face the rear of the elevator, whilst one person enters and firstly faces the door. It’s not long before the one facing the front of the elevator mimics the others and faces the rear.

This reminds us how easy it is for us to conform.





More on emotional contagion

What we do has a big impact

Emotional contagion teaches us that we must not underestimate the effects of our own actions. Be mindful that the way we act will have an immediate impact on how our team members and colleagues feel.

At an individual level, we are always modelling behaviours – consciously and unconsciously – and the people around us will copy us at a subconscious level. The ripple effect and emotional contagion of how we act has a significant impact on what others will do.

If we want to invite divergent thinking, promote curiosity, and help our people thrive in an environment of ambiguity and complexity, they need to feel safe to speak up, experiment, fail and learn. Awareness of emotional contagion helps us understand the scope of impact one person can have on the people around them.

Whether or not we are formal leaders, it's about rethinking the behaviours we model each day. There are small things we can do to support and create a culture where it's safe to bring our best and whole selves to work. Often, it's simply the awareness of what's happening (or not) that prompts observation, reflection and then action.

We are always modelling through our words and actions – consciously and unconsciously – and the people around us will copy us at a subconscious level.

When you model collaborative and transparent practices that support new ways of working, you will observe the interest and subtle shifts take place.





Priming and nudging

Mind your language

Our actions and emotions can be primed by events and use of language that we are not even aware of. Small shifts in the words we use when we talk about change can make a big difference.

The way we communicate and engage with others, along with the way we absorb incremental change in our personal and professional lives, is all accelerating and continually being reshaped.

This makes it a good time to closely look at the words we use (or over-use) in conventional change management to realign our practice and language to the dynamic nature of the business environment. It's time to reframe, and yes...challenge the language.

For example, we can replace the words 'senior stakeholder' with 'business influencer', we **prime** our people to associate influencers with both formal **and** informal/new power.

Nudge Theory

Ground breaking research, undertaken by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, looks at a concept called 'choice architecture' that explores methods on how we can be 'nudged' in a certain direction without taking away our freedom of choice.

A simple example of subtle influencing by 'nudging' is to strategically place healthy foods in a school canteen at eye level, while putting less healthy junk food in places that are harder to reach. Students are not prevented from consuming whatever they want, however, by repositioning the food choices available, it has the effect of decreasing the consumption of junk food and promoting healthier foods.

Examples of nudge theory applied in the workplace include:

- Fruit boxes to encourage healthy snack choices
- Adjusting printer default settings to double sided to save paper
- Signs near elevators that suggest the option to use the stairs



CASE IN POINT

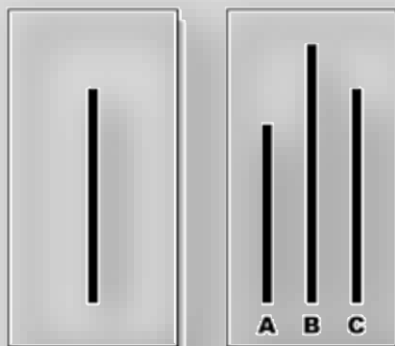
The power of peer influence

HOW LONG IS A PIECE OF STRING?

The Asch experiments highlight the persuasiveness of group opinion to the point where individuals clearly ignore the evidence of their own logic to incorrectly answer a simple question relating to visual judgement.

In this experiment, two pictures were shown: one picture depicted a vertical line while the other picture displayed three lines of varying length. Each person in the room was asked to state aloud which comparison line was most alike between two pictures that were shown. During the experiment, a participant was sent out of the room unaware that others remaining in the room had been scripted by the experimenter to act in a certain way and provide an incorrect answer.

Surprisingly, 35% of the individuals who returned to the room, unaware that other participants had been primed, conformed along with the clearly 'incorrect majority'. Why did they conform so easily? Post experiment interviews revealed that they thought most of their own answers seemed odd, but had gone along with the group for fear of being ridiculed whilst others believed in the collective wisdom of the group.





WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR CHANGE DELIVERY?

We lead and deliver change differently

New ways of working are now calling for new ways to influence across different channels and networks.. It's time to revisit our conventional approaches to engagement and communications to influence change n practices, behaviours and mindsets. Shifts in the external and organisational environment have redistributed power.

This means that the traditional focus on one-way and top-down approaches needs to be balanced carefully with less formal channels that offer opportunities for two-way engagement.

We can leverage the power of peer-to-peer influence by identifying the networkers and connectors who are not apparent by studying an organisational chart. It's about finding the people who are trusted. Conventional change management communication approaches that focus on one-way and top-down approaches need to be balanced carefully with less formal channels that offer opportunities for two-way engagement.

At the same time, insights from the field of behavioural science gives us clues to how we influence at a personal level and through social conformity. As we are hardwired to mimic others, a great deal of behaviour shifts occur through modelling behaviours and user of language. We know the innate human desire to conform and fit in is another indicator of how effective peer influence is.

It's not only the senior people, decision makers or those directly involved in the change initiative we need to consider. We need to also look for the hidden influencers who have *informal power* through their association with others



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WHO WROTE THIS PAPER?

Both **Dr Jen Frahm** and **Lena Ross** are seasoned change facilitators with experience in delivering change and building change capability in a large number of organisations (NAB, ANZ, AGL, Melbourne Water, Aurecon, Mercer Financial Services, Honda, VMware, Energy Australia, Virgin Velocity, Sportsbet to name a few).

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They published their books *Hacking for Agile Change* and *Conversations of Change – A guide to implementing workplace change* in 2017 and formed the Agile Change Leadership Institute in 2019 after several successful collaborations.

Their latest book *The Agile Change Playbook* was released in August 2020.

WORK WITH US

We help companies design change approaches, build change capability, carry out maturity assessments, and assist in enabling mindset and behaviour change, so reach out if we can help!


We also share content and resources on our LinkedIn company page and our personal accounts along with our business Facebook page. So connect with us and follow us!



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