

Gathering intelligence

Get to know the unknown

To help create and test a plan, gather intelligence about the players and forces at work – how change works:

- Who takes which decision?
- Who influences them?
- What formal and informal decision-making processes are at work?
- Who owns whom?
- Who owes whom what?
- Who are enemies and allies?
- How has change happened before?
- How it all works – what the main processes are
- Which are the critical steps?
- Where the players get their information from
- Networks, associations and get-togethers
- Fears and concerns – what worries them?

Good sources may include:

- academic studies;
- websites and publications (it is amazing how few people actually read publicly available information they profess to be interested in);
- your own experiences and those of colleagues;
- professional or trade networks you have connections with;
- supporters;
- people who work in the target institution or business;
- rival suppliers and customers of a target company;
- trade journalists or consultants (commission them to do a project, 'brain dump' or workshop);
- politicians with a track record in the area concerned;
- gossip and loose talk (not to mention the old standbys of journalists, such as dustbins²) – few organizations resist the temptation to treat a particular bar or café as the alternative canteen, and many people talk more freely about the office once they are outside it;
- staff at a former advertising or PR company that has lost the account;
- relevant conferences, exhibitions and meetings (a good reason to accept invitations to talk at the conferences of the 'opposition').