



Getting buy-in and support in your organisation

Decision making for coastal adaptation is often bound up in uncertainties that make it hard to get organisational buy-in for action. There are approaches and tools that can help you get things done.

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At a glance

Climate change and sea-level rise have unique characteristics that can make it difficult to get organisational buy-in for adaptation action. These characteristics include the long-time scales involved, the uncertainties around climate change projections and the potentially complex interrelationships between adaptation actions.

Committing to action on the coast can run up against inherent social and political biases, or merely require your organisation to do things differently, leading to the kind of resistance that any new idea or change has to overcome.

Working out how to overcome these issues requires an understanding of the rules and procedures of the organisation.

It is also important to understand the underpinning psychological factors and biases that affect how decisions are made.

It may be necessary to take calculated risks to challenge the status quo to ensure your ideas are supported.

Main text

Introduction

Adaptation to climate change and sea-level rise has certain characteristics that can make it more difficult to reach a decision to invest in action. These characteristics are around:

- The time scales involved. Severe impacts from climate change may not be expected until several decades into the future, and so it is hard for organisations to take the decision to allocate human and financial resources—especially when there are many competing interests that are perceived as more urgent. However, where community acceptance is regarded as problematic, or when dealing with large infrastructure requiring long planning horizons, it may be necessary to start planning now for risks that may not be realised until several decades in the future.
- The uncertainties involved. There are uncertainties involved in all aspects of adaptation, starting from the projections of future climate change, but also taking in uncertainties around the appropriateness of courses of action, and how actions will interact to determine the final outcome. This necessitates the identification and pursuit of low-regrets actions that will deliver benefits under a wide range of climate futures. [Pathways approach](#) provides further information on decision-making under uncertainty.

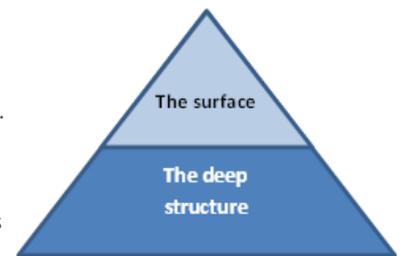
Committing to act can also run up against inherent social and political biases, or merely require your organisation to do things differently, leading to the kind of resistance that any new idea or change has to overcome.

When faced with the question of what to do about these biases, people often fall back on the same tactics: make aware, better inform and educate. Experience has shown that there is much more that can be done to get buy-in and deliver change, especially when dealing with a complex problem like climate change. The attached [manual](#) is a short introduction to the idea of influence, and is intended to provide some basic tools and techniques that others have found useful.

Understand the surface and deep structures

The first step in the process is working out how decisions are really made. Decision making in any organisation is much more than just the rules, policies and procedures that keep the place running. To understand how decisions are made, it is necessary to consider both the surface and the deep structure.

The **surface structure** of an organisation includes its policies, procedures and practices. The surface structure is what people in the organisation DO in the world and what other people see them DOING. As such, the surface structures of the organisation are what clients and staff encounter on a daily basis.



The way decisions are made is also based on accepted norms of behaviour, the personality of decision makers, existence of alliances and a whole host of other factors. The **deep structure** of an organisation refers to the decision-making processes, criteria, unconscious intentions, power relationships and power distribution.

Understanding decision making and power

Many people in an organisation can hold rank and influence well above or below their structural rank or title. The rank comes from a combination of:

- structural rank – where they sit within the organisation's hierarchy
- social standing – the manner in which factors including gender, race, social class, political associations and age manifest themselves in the context of the organisation
- psychological rank – personal style, intellect and mode of operation.

An effective tactic is to observe how decisions are made. For example, does it seem like key individuals influence a decision? How do they talk? How do they present themselves? Are there certain types of information or decisions that seem to get more consideration than others?

This style of critical questioning provides a mechanism to unpack the deeper decision-making structures. It will highlight where there are inherent resistances or biases that will need to be overcome to get an effective decision. The [manual](#) contains a range of tools and techniques that can be used to unpack decision making and power structures in an organisation.

Deciding what to do

There are a broad range of tools and techniques that can be used to support decision making. By working with (rather than against) the culture, biases and decision processes of an organisation, proposals are more likely to be adopted. The [manual](#) contains detailed instructions about how to identify what to do and then how to implement it.

Table 1 provides examples of some of the tools and techniques that can be used to overcome specific organisational resistance. The manual contains a larger range of responses.

Table 1: Tools and techniques to overcome specific organisational resistance

Area of resistance	Tactics
Lack of support at the senior level because they simply don't know how to respond, don't recognise it is an	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an expert reference panel to advise council. • Commission an independent report that outlines the risks and issues.

organisational responsibility or lack an understanding of the risk of doing nothing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have experts, or peers from a similar organisation, present how they have responded.
Don't want to be the first mover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlight the risks of inaction to council business. • Structure the proposal so that it is clear that inaction will create direct risks for those in charge. For example, a flooded community will significantly impinge on council resources during an emergency event.
Don't want to be informed to avoid having to respond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify community organisations that will raise the issue with council. • Identify if peak body, planning regulator etc., can write to council informing them of their responsibility. • Have a media organisation contact council and ask how they are responding to the issue.

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