

**SHEILA
MCKECHNIE
FOUNDATION**

**UNLEASHING
SOCIAL POWER**

It's all about power

A guide to thinking about
power to achieve deeper
solidarity for social change



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Play your part in building a more powerful sector where everyone feels they can belong





The challenge

SMK's Power Project hosted a two-year inquiry into social change, civil society and first-hand experience of poverty and inequalities.

The project heard that people with first-hand (or lived) experience are rejecting the social sector as a place through which to seek change.





This is a loss for all of us.

Trying to drive change on behalf of others isn't working – it risks reducing the legitimacy of the social sector and our collective strength.

There is a genuine desire in the sector to create more equitable ways of working and some successful attempts. But many more are failing – experienced as tokenistic or even exploitative.

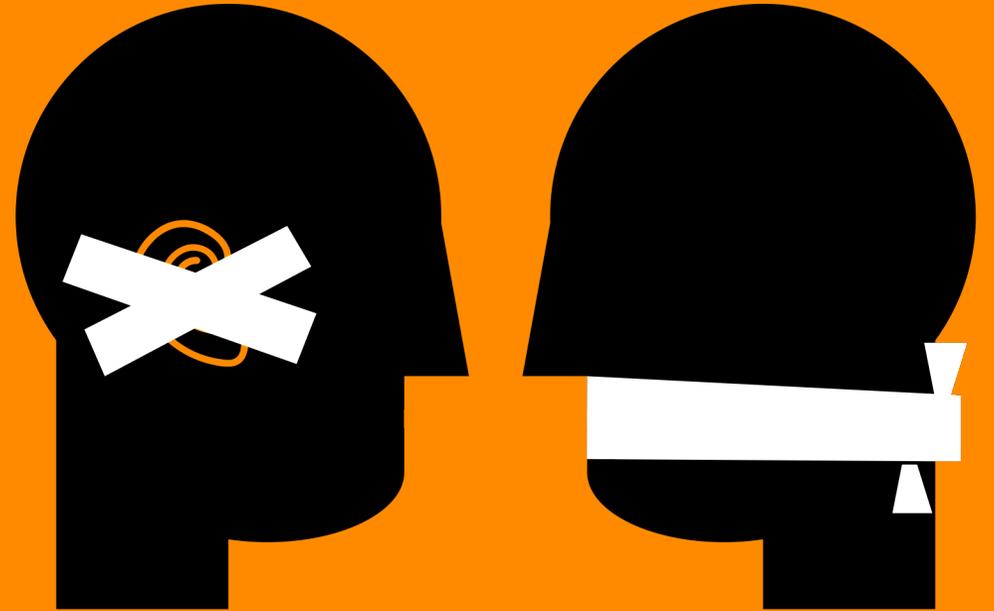
Learning to work together, in active solidarity, is a critical challenge for the sector. Understanding power can help.



The challenge

Why power?

“Talking about power seems simple, but actually it’s radical. It gets to the roots, shakes the foundations of the charity sector.”





Why power?

We need to start conversations about power to create the conditions, within each organisation, for more equitable relationships to flourish.

Understanding power is essential if we are to work in more active solidarity with people who profoundly understand the consequences of inequality.



Thinking differently about power for solidarity in social change

Power is not only in the ‘big stuff’ – it’s everywhere. It’s just the ability to create (or resist) change.

Power shifts. It’s in society’s structures and cultural norms, but it’s also in each of us. This means every interaction is an opportunity to resist or transform power – even if only in a small way.

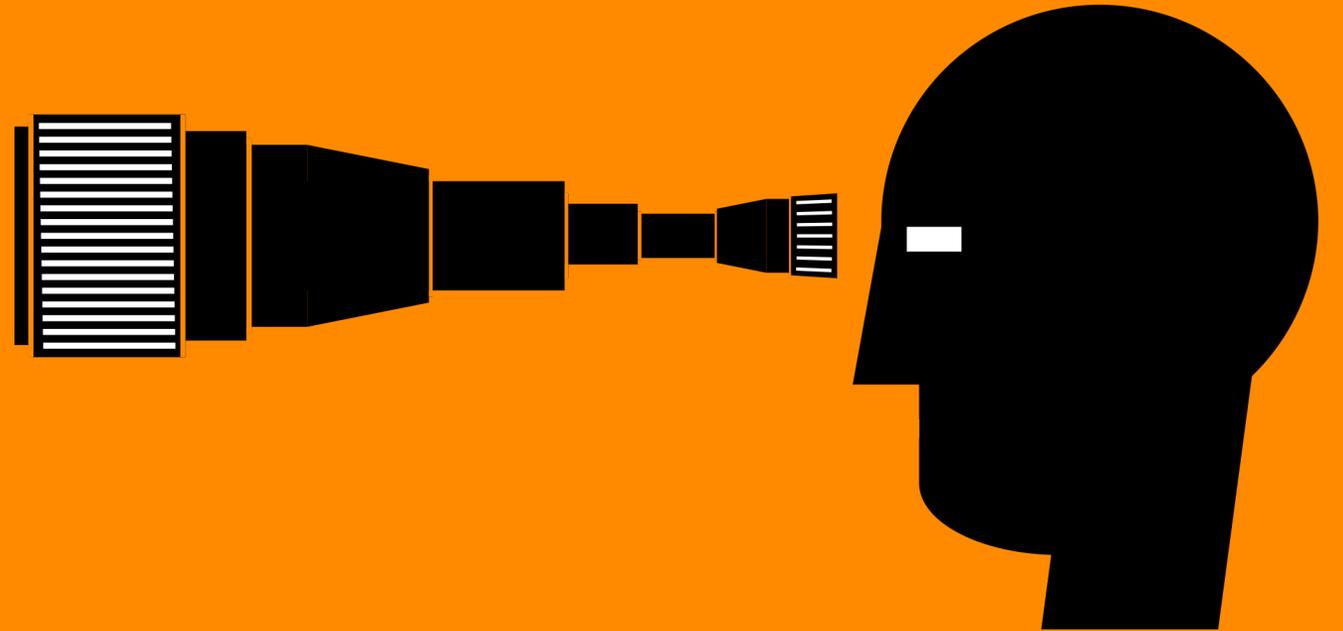
You are not on your own. There are some tools and ideas to help.

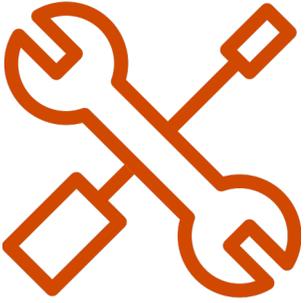


Why power?

See power

“This is the best and most significant conversation about power I’ve ever had. We’re all engaged with power, we just don’t talk about it.”



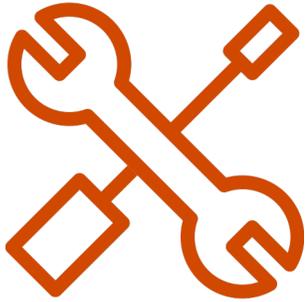


See power

We can only act to change what we can see.

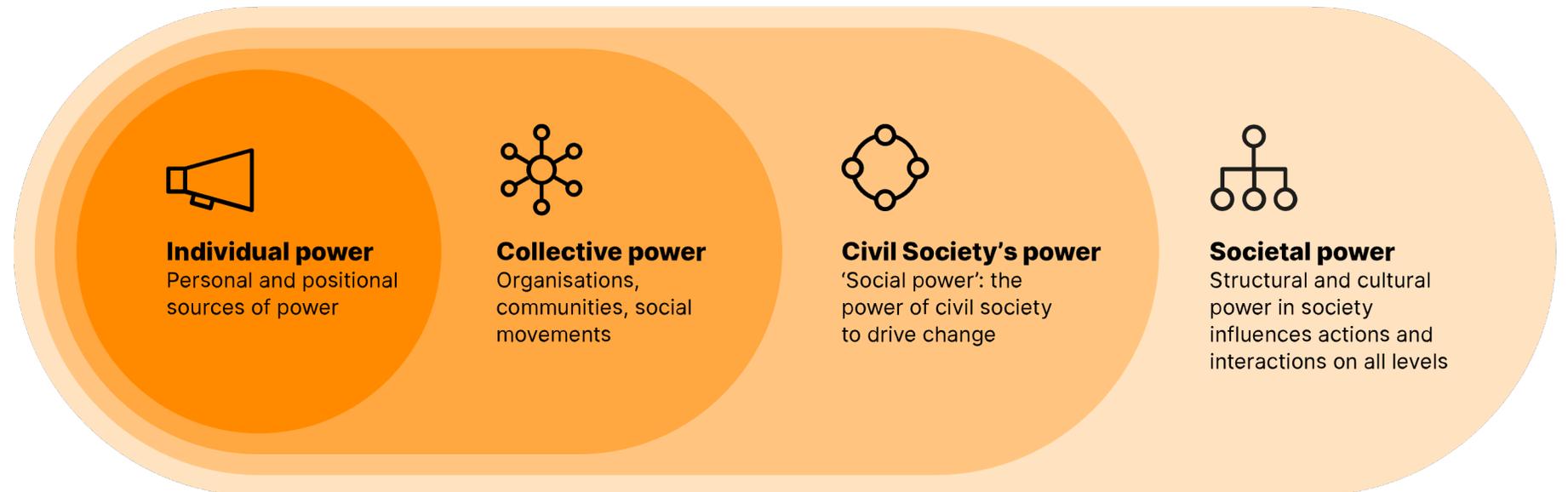
Holding a Power Lens to civil society can help us see power more clearly and set a path toward transformative action.

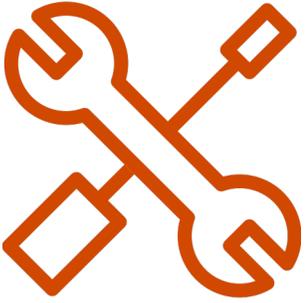




The Power Lens

The Power Lens tool offers a bird's eye view of the 'nested' systems that make up civil society, and the power that flows through and between each of them.





Individual power

Who we are, how we feel, and where in the system we are, affects our power.

Collective power

Joining forces means we can share resources, knowledge and networks – and grow our collective power.

Civil society's power

People, groups and organisations working for change make up civil society – at SMK we call this 'social power'.

Power in society

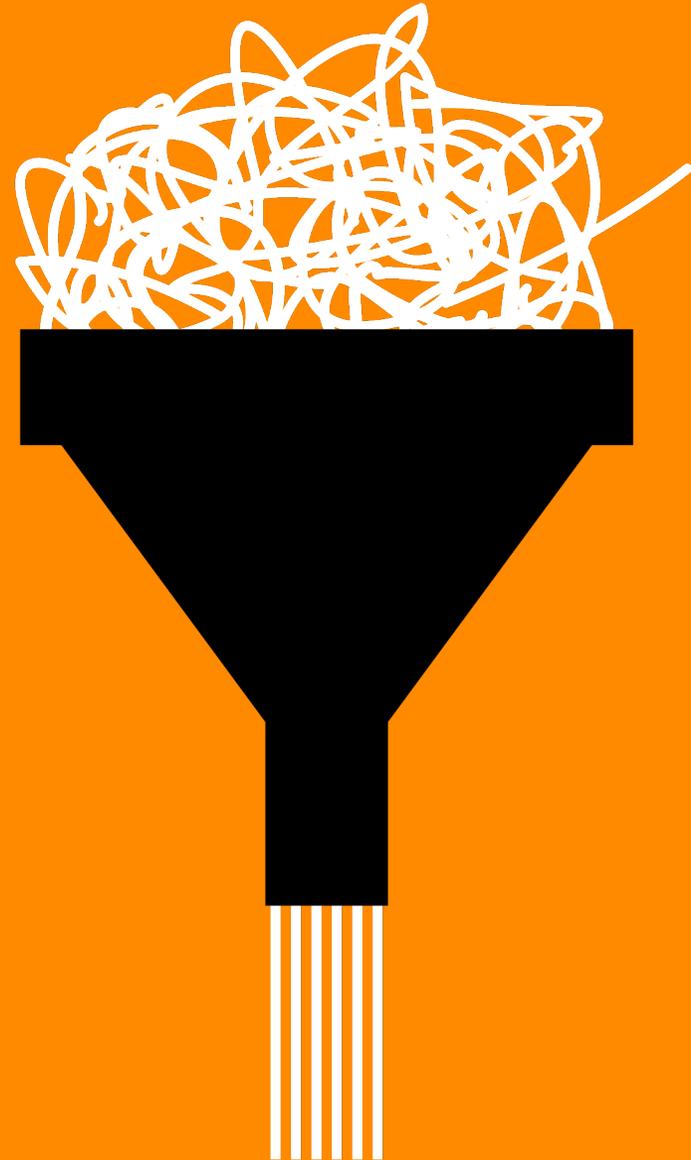
Structures and cultures of power in society influence – and are influenced by – all the other systems.

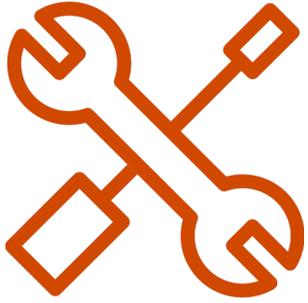


See power

Transform power

“There’s a simplicity beyond complexity. Change begins in the conversations and relationships you have every day.”

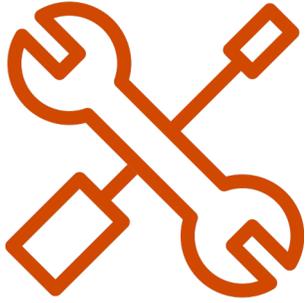




Transform power

Seeing power more clearly is critical but it's not enough.

We need to take action – to use power to build solidarity in our work for social change, rather than to undermine it.

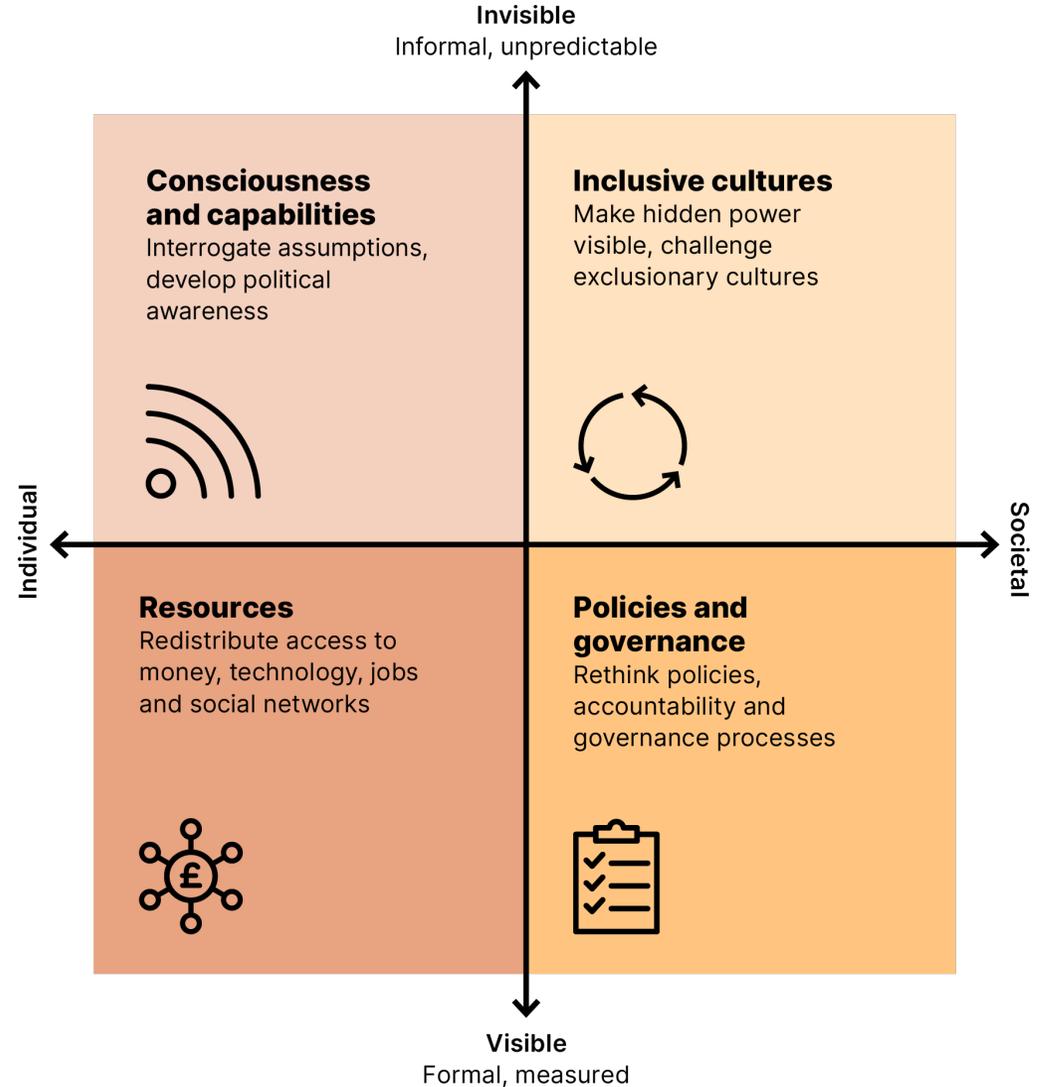


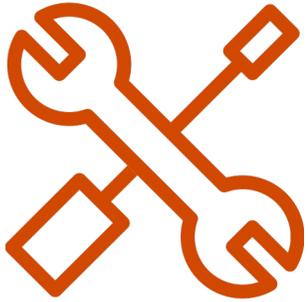
The Power Framework

Each quadrant of the Power Framework reveals a different dimension of power.

It shows how power is individual and societal, formal and informal.

It encourages us to pay attention to aspects of power that may be harder to predict.





Interrogate consciousness and capabilities

We are all part of the systems we are trying to shift – question your own perspective and assumptions.

Share resources fairly

Invest in overcoming barriers to participation – and always pay people properly for their time and expertise.

Create inclusive cultures

It takes time to build trust. Check your use of jargon and other social codes – and call out exclusionary practices.

Rethink policies and governance

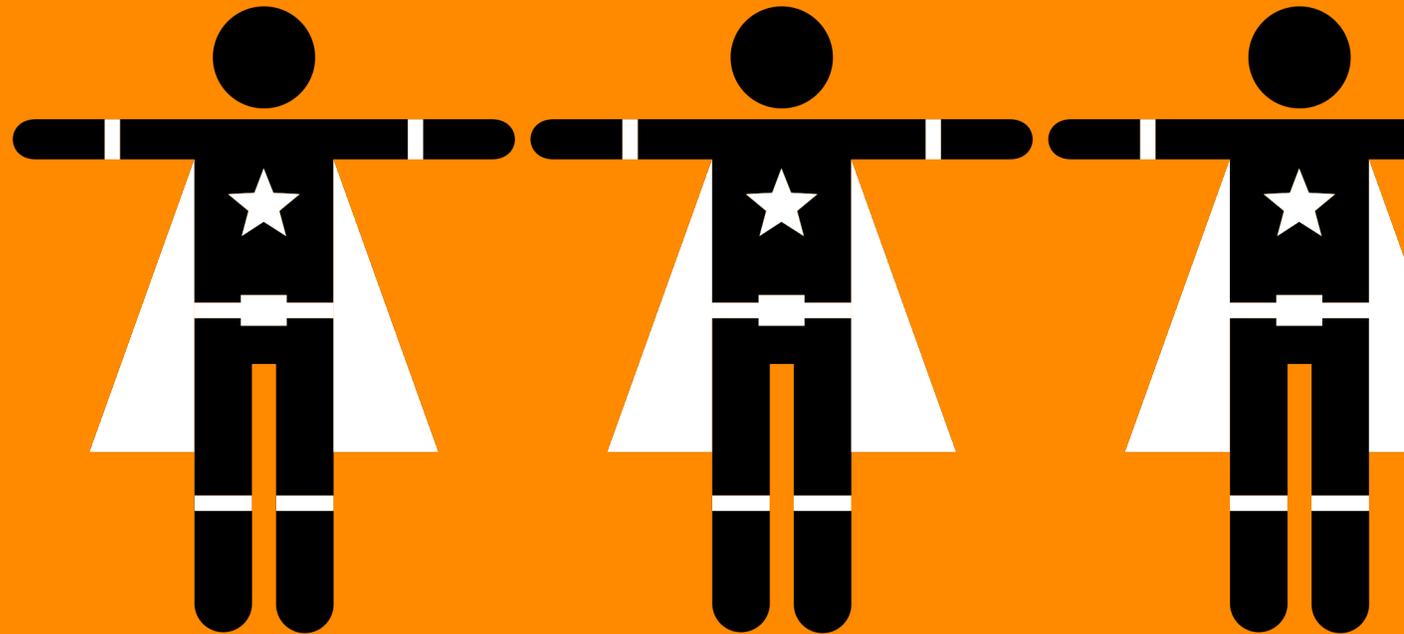
Don't just provide a seat at the table, support people to give their best. Put power-awareness at the heart of governance.



Transform power

Unleash power

“This is a key moment in history. The endings aren’t hidden. There are opportunities to shape new beginnings, but we need to be mindful of what we create.”





Unleash power

A systemic shift is needed in the social sector – a shift that goes beyond instances of engagement to transform the way it sees, thinks about, and acts on power.

Everyone in the social sector has a role to play to achieve deeper solidarity for social change.



Power, and opportunities for change, are everywhere.
Everyone can learn to see power more clearly and take action in their day-to-day work to transform the assumptions, structures and cultures that create exclusion and injustice in the social sector.

Imagine what we can achieve together...

... if we accept the power we have use and it to unleash the power of all of us – to work together in solidarity, to effect the change we need.

It is vital – for the future of the social sector, civil society, and the wider society we hope to build together – that we make a start.



Unleash power

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For more information, further reading and references see smk.org.uk/about-us/power-sharing-project

