

Force-Field Analysis

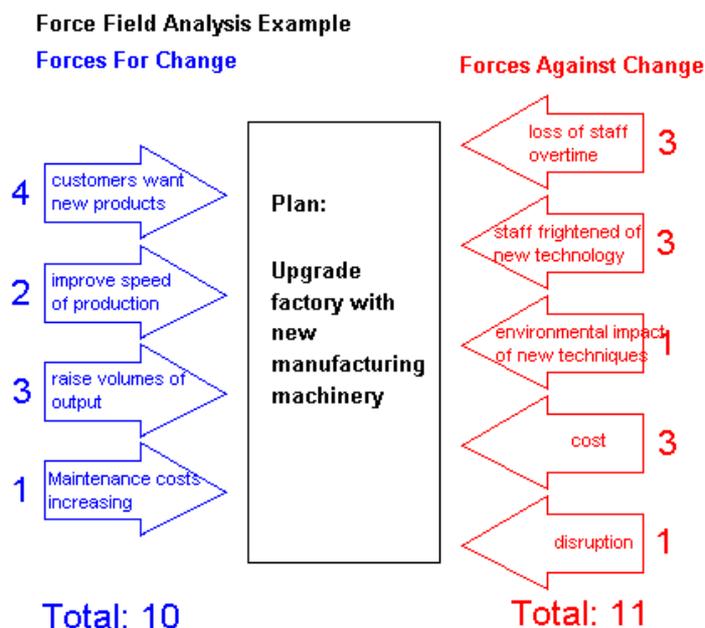
Introduction

Force field analysis was developed by Lewin (1951) and is widely used to inform decision-making, and in particular in planning and implementing change management programmes in organizations. It is a useful method for gaining a comprehensive view of the different forces (their source and strength) involved in a policy or organizational change.

Force field analysis can clarify the 'driving forces' and identify obstacles or 'restraining forces' to change. As a result it can help identify the relative priority of factors on each side of the issue. For bridging research and policy, it can be used to analyse the forces affecting a situation or to assess the forces affecting whether particular research might be adopted as policy. It might also be used to identify where research may help tip forces towards a change.

Detailed Outline of the Process

A force field analysis is carried out with a group using a flip chart or overhead transparency. The first step is to discuss and agree on the current situation and the goal of the policy or institutional change. This goal should be written on the chart or transparency between two columns. All the forces for change should then be listed in one column and all forces against change in the other column. The next step is to brainstorm the 'driving' and 'restraining' forces and write them in the appropriate column. The 'driving' and 'restraining' forces should be sorted on common themes and/or prioritised according to their 'magnitude' towards change by assigning a score to each force, ranging from 1 (weak) to 5 (strong). The last and the most important step is to discuss action strategies to reduce the 'restraining' forces and to capitalise on the 'driving' forces. The resulting table might look like the following:



Source: Mind Tool, available at <http://www.psywww.com/mtsite/forcefld.html>



A Good Example

Force field analysis has been used in diverse fields ranging from organisational change to self-development. There are some good examples of practical applications of force field analysis from India. One example used force field analysis to focus on the factors responsible for the poor state of primary education in State of Bihar. Another case focused on the factors inducing and inhibiting migration in the State of Orissa. For details of both cases, see:

www.worldbank.org/participation/PRSP/plna/plan_03604.pdf

Another case details the use of force field analysis in a school situation to assess the potential to change from teacher-centered methods of working to greater pupil participation in planning. See:

www.crossroad.to/Quotes/brainwashing/force-field.htm

Further Information

For original literature of force field analysis see: Lewin K. (1951) 'Field Theory in Social Science', Harper and Row, New York.

PRA: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 36, pp.17-23. IIED, London.

Simple step-by-step guides to carrying out force field analysis are available at:

- www.mindtools.com/forcefld.html for examples of the use of force field analysis in management
- www.psywww.com/mtsite/forcefld.html for examples of the use of force field analysis in psychology

Examples of the application of force field analysis in different areas are available below:

- Change management: www.accel-team.com/techniques/force_field_analysis.html
- Health (MSH & UNICEF): <http://erc.msh.org/quality/example/example5.cfm>

For computer software to conduct force field analysis see:

http://www.skymark.com/resources/tools/force_field_diagram.asp

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