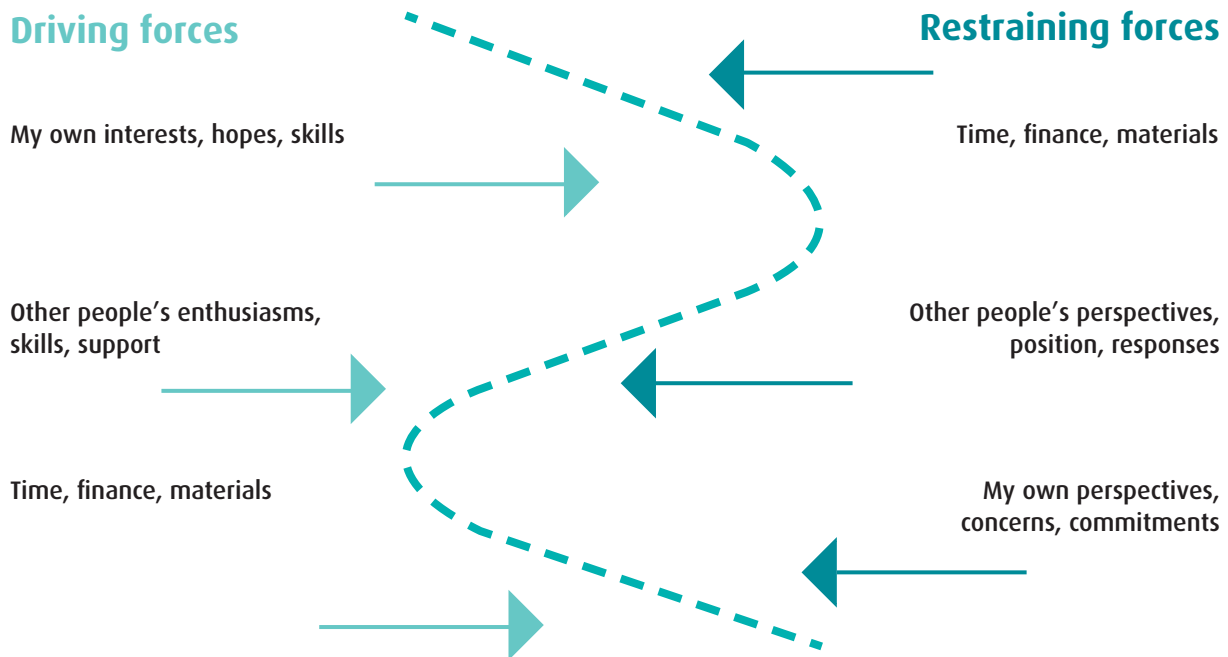


## Force-field analysis

1/2

The diagnostic device shown in *Figure 1* was developed from Kurt Lewin's (1936) celebrated force-field technique.

*Figure 1: Force-field*



It suggests that a development project is poised between two sets of opposing forces: the forces that may work for the development, the driving forces; and the forces that may work against it, the restraining forces. In preparing and planning the project, it is necessary to identify the dynamics of the relationship between helping and hindering forces. Sometimes it is more profitable to look to the hindering (restraining) forces first, and devise ways to work on them so as to create a more conducive climate for change and development. A capacity to sense these dynamics and to identify accurately appropriate stances and entry points is essential if we are to navigate through the powerful dynamics that operate in most organisations. Sometimes simply activating the helping (driving) forces can create too strong a wave of change and cause resentment, threatening the project itself.

You can undertake this analysis individually, or carry it out in groups around a flip chart or whiteboard. This will generate lively discussion, further enabling the complexities of the various forces to be teased out and understood.

What the project analysis will do is to identify a range of discrete activities that will have to be undertaken. If, for example, the active support of the leader has been specified as one of the helping forces, then it will be necessary to activate this support and give it shape and direction. Thus enlisting the leader's support becomes a target, and engaging in dialogue to secure that support will be the activity required to achieve it.

It is only when we have clarified the forces at work in relation to the project that we are in a position to set specific targets and specify the activities necessary to achieve them.

Lewin (1936) describes this change process as having three phases:

1. unfreezing
2. changing or moving
3. refreezing or embedding

In the unfreezing stage, the leader has to work with people to help them to identify the need for change, and to accept that a change process, however problematic, needs to be implemented.

During the changing or moving stage, where change is actually taking place, the leader's role is to encourage people to experiment with new ideas and ways of working. In the final stage, refreezing, the changes become embedded into the organisation's life.

## References

Lewin, K, 1936, *Principles of topological psychology*, New York, McGraw-Hill

Lewin, K, 1952, *Field theory in social science*, London, Tavistock Publications