

Force field analysis for organizations and individuals in transition

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Purpose

Force field analysis was developed by Lewin (1951) and is widely used to inform decision-making, particularly in planning and implementing change management programmes in organizations. It is also a useful tool for self-analysis. It is a powerful method for gaining a comprehensive overview of the different forces acting on a potential issue, and for assessing the source and strength of these. The driving and restraining forces should be sorted around common themes and should then be scored according to their 'magnitude', ranging from 1 (weak) to 10 (strong). The score may well not balance on either side, resulting in non-equilibrium.

Description

To drive change effectively:

- First, an organization has to unfreeze the driving and restraining forces that hold it in a state of quasi-equilibrium.
- Second, an imbalance is introduced to the forces to enable the change to take place. This can be achieved by increasing the drivers, reducing the restraints or both.
- Third, once the change is complete, the forces are brought back into quasi-equilibrium and re-frozen.

Process

The coach works with the client in the following way:

- Describe the current situation as it is now and the desired situation as the vision for the future.
- Identify what will happen if there is no action taken.
- List all the driving and restraining forces for the change.
- Discuss the key restraining forces and determine their strength.
- Discuss the key driving forces and determine their strength.
- Allocate a score to each using a numerical scale where 1 is very weak and 10 is very strong.
- Chart the forces by listing, in strength scale, the driving forces on the left and the restraining forces on the right.
- Explore the restraining forces and the best way to address them.
- Explore the driving forces and the best way of advancing them.
- Identify priorities and produce an action plan
- Some types of forces to consider:
 - available resources
 - traditions
 - vested interests
 - organizational structures
 - relationships
 - social or organizational trends
 - attitudes of people
 - regulations
 - personal or group needs
 - present or past practices
 - institutional policies or norms
 - agencies
 - values
 - desires
 - costs
 - people
 - events.

Pitfalls

None.

Bibliography

Lewin, K. (1951) *Field Theory in Social Science*, London: Tavistock.