Resource : force field analysis

| | |
|---|---|
| What is it? | Force field analysis is a tool developed over 50 years ago by an influential psychologist, Kurt Lewin. He was the first to identify the three step model of change and was foundational in the development of group dynamics.<br><br>As a German Jew who had fled from the Nazi regime in the 1930's and moved to America, he was naturally very committed to the resolution of conflict between different groups in society and a strong believer in democratic approaches of working.<br><br>His perspective on change identified that individuals are heavily influenced by their group identity and values (their 'field' in his terminology) which exists in a quasi-stationary form and is what can create resistance to innovation and change<br><br>His insight was approach the process of change by viewing it as a balance between opposing forces in these fields - some that drive change forward and others that resist it. The relative balance of these then determines whether the change progresses or stalls. |
| Why use it? | This is a great way of unpacking a complex situation and providing clarity on the issues that are besetting a change, in a way that can help to identify actions to unlock a way forward.<br><br>It provides a method of breaking down the factors that are influencing a situation in a more neutral and measured way - legitimising different viewpoints, ascribing the strength or breadth of feeling to them and using this as a way to start to address them.<br><br>It provides a way of analysing a situation and addressing the underlying issues that might be blocking change. It can do this by helping to separate the issues from the individuals in a constructive way. |

| | |
|---|---|
| How to get ready to use it? | The approach can be used in such a wide variety of circumstances that it is difficult to be prescriptive. However, it is at its most useful where there is a substantive and clear change being considered where the positive and negative forces for proceeding with it can themselves be teased out with clarity.<br><br>It was originally designed for and works best with a group and process lead where the process leader is able to work through the issues with a neutral and relaxed stance, without individuals immediately associating the process leader with one view or another. |
| How to use it? | Steps<br><br>These steps can be completed through a series of meetings or interviews or in a single meeting with all participants. The process is most likely to be determined by the specifics of the situation.<br><br>• Clarify the proposed change<br>This involves being clear of **what** the scope and nature of the proposed change is and how this differs from the current position.<br>This process may in itself help understanding and clarity by ensuring that all participants understand exactly what is or isn't being proposed.<br>The definition of the change needs to be **all** those responsible for initiating the change, especially if there is a lack of clarity about the boundaries for what is begin proposed.<br>It can be helpful to write this up<br><br>• Gather a list of the forces for and against this change<br>As full a list of the different factors that people see are important. These should be listed in two columns (For/Against) and carefully understood, to get behind any shorthand that people are using (e.g. ‘we can’t afford this project’ needs to be unpacked to explain why this view is held. Is it a revenue, margin or asset issue and one that is specific to this unit or more widely etc) |

These will comprise a mixture of types of reason from costs/ benefits and ease/difficulty to resources, speed and implications. This is fine.

- Rate each factor for significance

    These factors should then be rated for significance. How influential or serious are they?
    Depending on circumstance this can be a reflection of the seriousness of the factor, the number of stakeholders who share a view of the importance of this.
    This can be done helpfully and visually by giving each force a scale (like the numbers on the Beaufort scale for wind .. which then gives you a pseudoscientific score for rating the outcomes) depending on their significance, or if using flip charts by scaling the significance of the force by the size of arrow in which it is written.

- Rain check

    Often at this point even the process of clarifying the change and the forces at work can have helped to unlock the decision and it is worth pausing with leaders to confirm that this change is still something that people want to work on and progress - or whether aspects of the process have already suggested that it is inappropriate to progress.

- Work on the forces

    Assuming that the change is still seen as desirable or at least a a variant of the change is desirable then the next step is to work on looking at how to address the forces impacting the change.
    This often flows naturally from what has been done before if the process is being approached in a single group.

| | |
|---|---|
| | However the key in this approach for then unlocking the change is to work on the underlying forces, beginning with the most serious ones and either:<br>- identifying ways to strengthen the drivers for change and make them more impactful or effective, or<br>- identifying ways to reduce the significance of the resistors for change<br>This is best done working from the most significant to least significant forces.<br>‘Ways’ can be an incredible variety of things depending upon the nature of change and the forces themselves. They can be specific actions that can be organised to directly address the force or to address supporting factors or obstacles that once addressed will unlock support. Sometimes they are simply attitudes based and as they are discussed the significance of the them will change anyway!<br>In many cases the forces identified will be viewpoints that are based on either a partial set of evidence or a set of assumptions that may or may not be real.<br>The actions that leaders take as a result of this should materially change the balance between pros and cons for the change and so, over whatever period of time planned, enable the change to be pursued.<br>Notice that actions will often have consequences on both sides of the forces and on multiple forces. Don't assume that there is 1:1 between actions and forces!<br><br>• Communication<br>It is helpful, when the analysis has been worked through, discussed and actions agreed, for the conclusions from the force field analysis to be summarised and communicated.<br>At its minimum this is to the leadership group. However, it can also be usefully used with the wider group of stakeholders involved in the change. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Watch-outs<br><br>• Beware using this as a planning tool. It is about the people and the issues and is best used for identifying and unlocking the motivations for a change. It is a way to harness energy not build a solid plan<br>• The actions coming out of this sort of exercise should address the perceptions that have informed the analysis. It is no good if the plan addresses only the substantive forces identified but does not address perceptions of all the stakeholders<br>• Beware pressing ahead with a change before the forces have been addressed. If the change is in the balance then it should be de-prioritised until the forces have been addressed and then it can be brought back for consideration<br>• This process is subjective - that is both one of its strengths and weaknesses - which makes it good for handling perceptions and emotions but not so good at addressing other topics (eg health and safety, safeguarding, technical feasibility) |
| How to find out more? | Source is Lewin's original work in the 1950's but the technique is well known and a lot of information and worked examples can be found on the internet.<br><br>Aside of searching on Google you can also visit specific sites that offer more information including:<br>wikipedia<br>mindtools |
| Revision date : 1 August 2014 | |