

Force Field Analysis

This technique was developed as a result of research carried out by Kurt Lewin. He noticed that in organisations there were always "forces" operating that would, in an ideal world, bring out change. These he called "driving forces". However, he also observed that there were forces that are likely to inhibit change ie "restraining forces". These two sets of forces working against each other tend to create a "dynamic equilibrium" which would shift if either the driving or restraining forces altered.

He also observed that for a situation to change it was not enough to address and encourage driving forces into the situation to enable change, but that the restraining forces had to be addressed and removed as well.

Force Field Analysis (FFA) helps analyse situations that you want to change. Using it you can tackle seemingly immovable obstacles to change. The technique has been around for decades, outlasting many other management aids. As a tool of great resilience, it continues to be taught on management courses.

Generations of working managers have found FFA simple to understand, easy to use and that it works. It starts by assuming that:

At any given moment, any situation in an organisation is in a state of equilibrium.

This is a version of the physical sciences' law that a body will be at rest when all the forces acting on it cancel each other out. This does not mean that everything is locked into a static state or permanent *status quo*. In an organisation there is dynamic tension between a whole set of counteracting forces that maintain the *status quo*.

Some of the forces push towards goal achievement, others oppose it. Suppose some specialist staff in an organisation decide that they should be paid more. They have many forces pushing them to obtain this goal, such as extra work being thrust on them, longer working hours, market demand for their skills, family pressures, inflation and so on. There may be equally strong counter forces, such as the wish of management to restrain further wage rises, the wish of other staff to preserve differentials, the desire not to let this group of specialists become too important, and so on.

Change is possible only when one or both of the following occur:

Restraining forces weaken

Driving forces strengthen

There are consequently two distinct if sometimes complementary routes to making things happen. It may be feasible to strengthen the driving forces pushing the situation towards a particular goal. For instance, the specialists in the above example might make themselves even more indispensable by taking on important new roles or projects.

If it is possible to increase the driving forces then perhaps it may be feasible to weaken the restraining forces which are preventing change. In the above example the specialists might let it be known that they are all job hunting, which may weaken management's resolve to resist change. Or the managers might strengthen the resisting forces by limiting dependence on the specialists by subcontracting some work to outside suppliers.

When the equilibrium of driving and restraining forces is disturbed, that is the forces become out of balance, change occurs towards, or away from, the desired goal.