

# Force-Field Analysis

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## What Is It?

Kurt Lewin (1969) adapted a technique from the physical sciences and developed it as a tool to understand problem situations in social science and to effect planned change. A problem situation exists when there is a difference between the way things are and the way you want them to be. The Force Field Analysis tool works on the assumption that any intractable situation is governed by a set of counterbalancing forces that keep it “stuck” in place.

"Force" does not refer to a physical force but to the broad range of internal and external factors influencing the situation. The group gains a better understanding of the situation and how to create positive change by analysing the forces that are working to change it in the desired direction and the forces that are opposed against it. The group must change the balance of opposing forces in order to effect change. They can do this by either augmenting the effect of existing positive forces, adding new positive forces, or eliminating or reducing the effect of negative restraining forces.

## The Model

The simplest representation of the model, shown on the next page, portrays driving forces (those that are working in the direction of change) and resisting or restraining forces (those that tend to support the status quo or resist change). These are arrayed against one another within a force field. The line of interaction between these two forces symbolizes current status. The model graphically illustrates that if the desired change is not occurring, the restraining forces are collectively stronger than the driving forces. The model enables a person to analyze the various forces and to develop strategies for creating change.

## How Does It Work?

When using a Force Field Analysis intervention, follow these steps:

1. **Clearly define the issue requiring change –**  
If you don't have this right, the rest of the process won't help! Clearly define both the issue and the current state of the situation. And while you're at it, also identify what you want the improved situation to look like and the results and benefits of that changed environment.
2. **Determine the number of driving and restraining forces –**
  - What things are 'driving' us to our goal?
  - What is restraining us from reaching our goal?

These counterbalancing forces do not have to necessarily be equal in number or in their impact on the situation. Write down the driving responses on one side of the diagram and restraining forces on the other side of the diagram, leaving plenty of space for additional items and illustrations. Wrap up this step when everyone has had a chance to contribute and there are no more ideas on offer.

3. **Prioritise the driving and restraining forces –**  
Give each force an illustrative arrow and show the strength of the driving/restraining force by the size and length of the arrow. Where possible, realign opposing driving and restraining forces against one another on the diagram.

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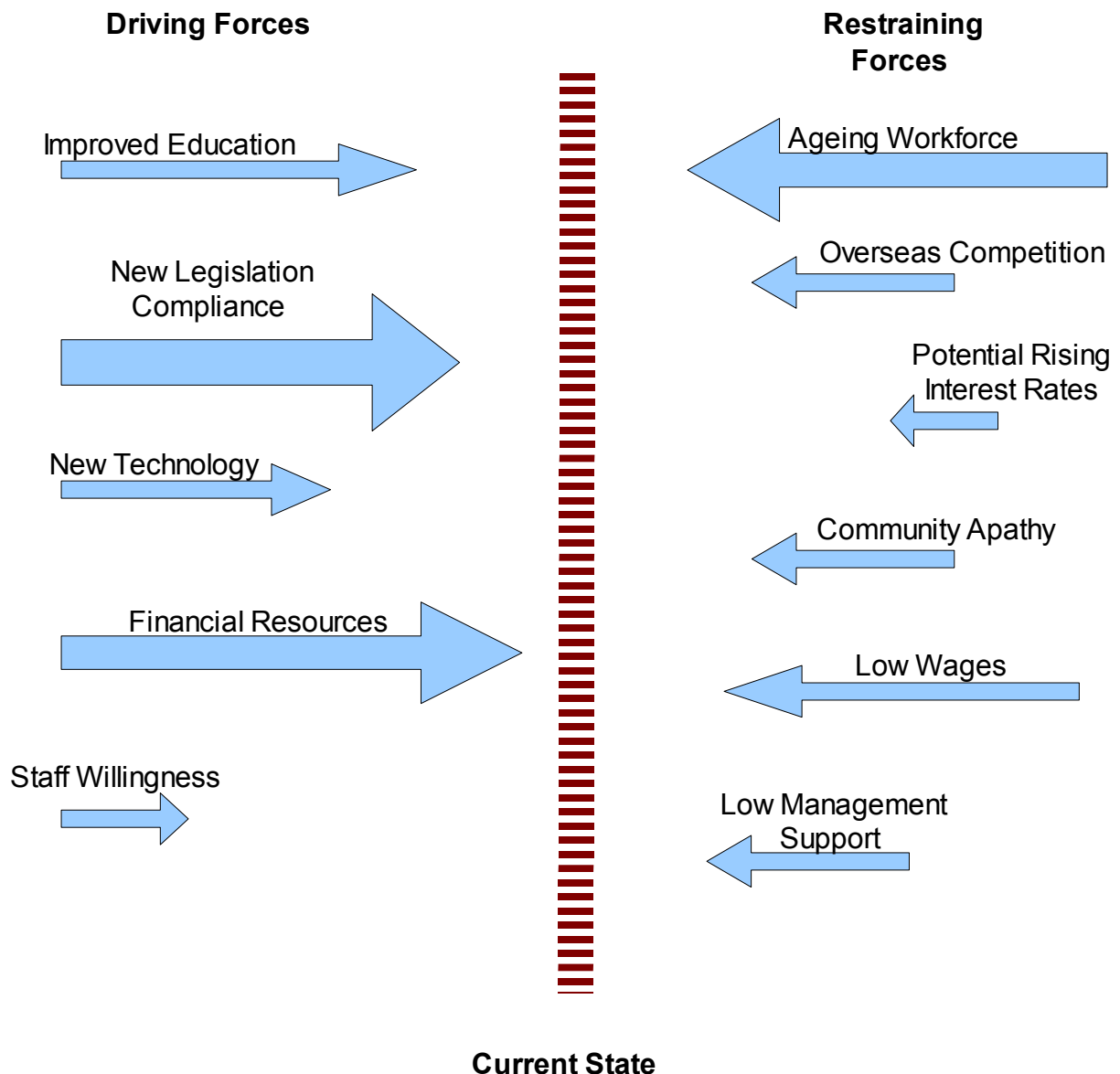
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## 4. Identify ways in which to –

- Increase the impact of current driving forces or introduce new ones
- Eliminate or reduce the impact of restraining forces.

## 5. Develop a plan of action –

It will not always be possible to have an impact on all forces (either positive or restraining), as some will be outside the range of influence of the group and others will take time to change. Some of the forces will be easy to impact and it is often useful to attack these first, as “picking the low fruit” shows quick results and motivates the group.



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## The Value of the Model

Like any good group problem solving technique, it offers a way to break down and analyze an issue, to identify what you want to change and how you will go about changing it. It clarifies concepts that people have been trying to deal with on an unconscious level and it helps people to realize what the resistance to change might be on an individual, group, or system-wide level, something that does not always happen in the course of organisational decision making. In organisational change management, it is an excellent tool to raise a group's "current state" awareness and motivate them to change. In a personal-growth setting, the model becomes a powerful tool for self-insight. An individual can ask, "What am I doing to keep myself the way I am?"

## References

Lewin, K. (1969). Quasi-stationary social equilibria and the problem of permanent changes. In W.G. Bennis, K.D. Benne, & R. Chin (Eds.), *The planning of change*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

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Spier, M.S. (1973). Kurt Lewin's "force field analysis." In J.E. Jones & J.W. Pfeiffer (Eds.), *The 1973 annual handbook for group facilitators*. San Diego, CA: University Associates.

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