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## Force Field Analysis and Diagram - Kurt Lewin

## FFA - Analyzing Change Factors: Driving Forces and Restraining Forces

Kurt Lewin  
 1890-1947

Kurt Lewin was an American social psychologist and having contributed to science **group dynamics** and **action research**, he is regarded one of the founders of modern psychology. But Lewin is perhaps best-known for developing **Force Field Analysis**, using **Force Field Diagrams**.

According to Kurt Lewin "An issue is held in balance by the interaction of two opposing sets of forces - those seeking to promote change (**driving forces**) and those attempting to maintain the status quo (**restraining forces**)". Lewin viewed organizations as systems in which the present situation was not a static pattern, but a dynamic balance ("equilibrium") of forces working in opposite directions. In order for any change to occur, the driving forces must exceed the restraining forces, thus shifting the equilibrium.

The **Force Field Diagram** is a model built on this idea that forces - persons, habits, customs, attitudes - both drive and restrain change. It can be used at any level (personal, project, organizational, network) to visualize the forces that may work in favor and against change initiatives. The diagram helps its user picture the "tug-of-war" between forces around a given issue. Usually, there is a planned change issue described at the top, and two columns below. Driving forces are listed in the left column, and restraining forces in the right column. Arrows are drawn towards the middle. Longer arrows indicate stronger forces. The idea is to understand and make explicit all the forces acting on a given issue.

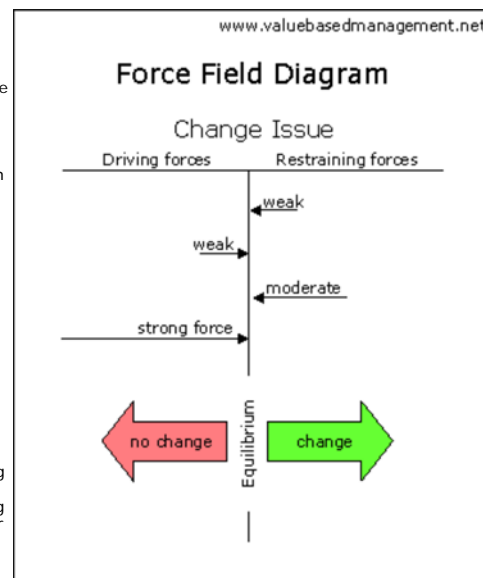
**The Force Field Analysis is a method to:**

- investigate the balance of power involved in an issue
- identify the most important players (stakeholders) and target groups for a campaign on the issue
- identify opponents and allies
- identify how to influence each target group

**How to conduct a Force Field Analysis?** Typically the following steps are taken:

1. Describe the current situation - 2. Describe the desired situation - 3. Identify where the current situation will go if no action is taken - 4. List all the forces driving change toward the desired situation - 5. List all the forces resisting change toward the desired situation - 6. Discuss and interrogate all of the forces: are they valid? can they be changed? which are the critical ones? - 7. Allocate a score to each of the forces using a numerical scale e.g. 1=extremely weak and 10=extremely strong - 8. Chart the forces by listing (to strength scale) the driving forces on the left and restraining forces on the right. 9. Determine whether change is viable and progress can occur - 10. Discuss how the change can be affected by decreasing the strength of the restraining forces or by increasing the strength of driving forces. 11. Keep in mind that increasing the driving forces or decreasing the restraining forces may increase or decrease other forces or even create new ones.

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# Force field analysis

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**Force field analysis** is an influential development in the field of social science. It provides a framework for looking at the factors (*forces*) that influence a situation, originally social situations. It looks at forces that are either driving movement toward a goal (helping forces) or blocking movement toward a goal (hindering forces). The principle, developed by Kurt Lewin, is a significant contribution to the fields of social science, psychology, social psychology, organizational development, process management, and change management.

Lewin, a social psychologist, believed the "field" to be a Gestalt psychological environment existing in an individual's (or in the collective group) mind at a certain point in time that can be mathematically described in a topological constellation of constructs. The "field" is very dynamic, changing with time and experience. When fully constructed, an individual's "field" (Lewin used the term "life space") describes that person's motives, values, needs, moods, goals, anxieties, and ideals.

Lewin believed that changes of an individual's "life space" depend upon that individual's internalization of external stimuli (from the physical and social world) into the "life space." Although Lewin did not use the word "experiential," (see experiential learning) he nonetheless believed that interaction (experience) of the "life space" with "external stimuli" (at what he calls the "boundary zone") were important for development (or regression). For Lewin, development (or regression) of an individual occurs when their "life space" has a "boundary zone" experience with external stimuli. Note, it is not merely the experience that causes change in the "life space," but the acceptance (internalization) of external stimuli.

Lewin took these same principles and applied them to the analysis of group conflict, learning, adolescence, hatred, morale, German society, etc. This approach allowed him to break down common misconceptions of these social phenomena, and to determine their basic elemental constructs. He used theory, mathematics, and common sense to define a force field, and hence to determine the causes of human and group behavior.

## Contents

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## Further reading

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- Lewin K. (1943). Defining the "Field at a Given Time." *Psychological Review*. 50: 292-310. Republished in *Resolving Social Conflicts & Field Theory in Social Science*, Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1997.

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## See also

Field theory (psychology)

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Force Field Analysis is a useful technique for looking at all the forces for and against a decision. In effect, it is a specialized method of weighing pros and cons.

By carrying out the analysis you can plan to strengthen the forces supporting a decision, and reduce the impact of opposition to it.

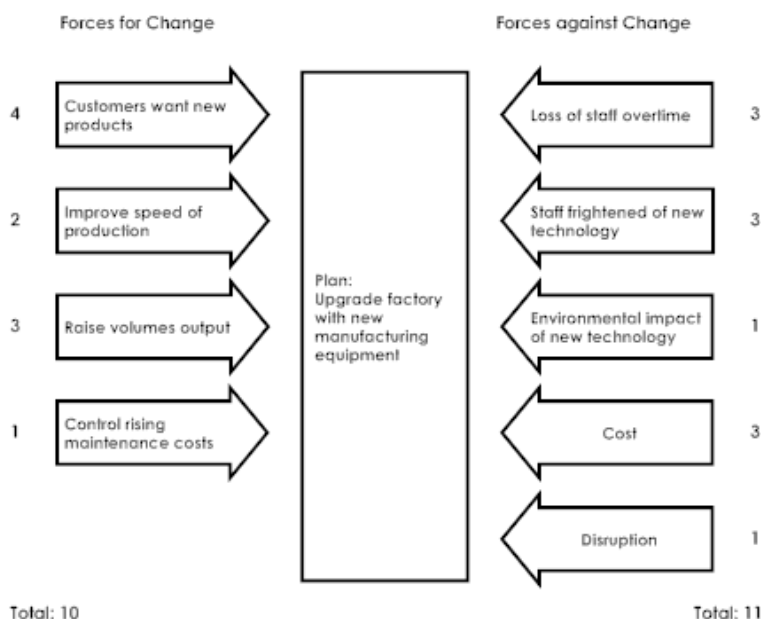
## How to Use the Tool:

To carry out a force field analysis, first download our free [worksheet](#) and then use it to follow these steps:

- Describe your plan or proposal for change in the middle.
- List all forces for change in one column, and all forces against change in another column.
- Assign a score to each force, from 1 (weak) to 5 (strong).

For example, imagine that you are a manager deciding whether to install new manufacturing equipment in your factory. You might draw up a force field analysis like the one in Figure 1:

Figure 1:  
Force Field Analysis



Drawn using SmartDraw. Click for [free download](#).

Once you have carried out an analysis, you can decide whether your project is viable. In the example above, you might initially

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question whether it is worth going ahead with the plan.

Malawi

Where you have already decided to carry out a project, Force Field Analysis can help you to work out how to improve its probability of success. Here you have two choices:

- To reduce the strength of the forces opposing a project.
- To increase the forces pushing a project.

Often the most elegant solution is the first: just trying to force change through may cause its own problems. People can be uncooperative if change is forced on them.

If you had to implement the project in the example above, the analysis might suggest a number of changes to the initial plan:

- By training staff (increase cost by 1) you could eliminate fear of technology (reduce fear by 2)
- It would be useful to show staff that change is necessary for business survival (new force in favor, +2)
- Staff could be shown that new machines would introduce variety and interest to their jobs (new force, +1)
- You could raise wages to reflect new productivity (cost +1, loss of overtime -2)
- Slightly different machines with filters to eliminate pollution could be installed (environmental impact -1)

These changes would swing the balance from 11:10 (against the plan), to 8:13 (in favor of the plan).

## Key points:

Force Field Analysis is a useful technique for looking at all the forces for and against a plan. It helps you to weigh the importance of these factors and decide whether a plan is worth implementing.

Where you have decided to carry out a plan, Force Field Analysis helps you identify changes that you could make to improve it.

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