

# Change management and force field analysis

Change takes place constantly in business. **Paul Hoang** considers the barriers to change and looks at how managers can bring about change effectively

**B**usinesses are dynamic in nature and are subject to the forces of change. Handling change is one of the most difficult tasks for any manager. **Change management** refers to the processes and techniques used to plan, implement and evaluate any changes in business operations in order to achieve a required objective.

Examples of changes in business include any alteration to the organisational structure, the introduction of new policies, the setting of new targets, a merger or an acquisition, and crisis management. Change moves a business away from its position of equilibrium, so any change will affect staff and needs to be managed carefully. Trying to force change on staff may cause problems — people can be resistant to change (see Box 1) and can be uncooperative if change is made compulsory.

## Box 1 Reasons why people resist change

- Misunderstandings — the purpose of change has not been communicated properly.
- Uncertainties — fear of the unknown and of the future.
- Self-interest — people may be more interested in the implications of change for themselves rather than the benefits change can bring for the organisation.
- Loss of equilibrium — people like familiarity rather than disruptions.
- Fear of being made redundant, e.g. new production techniques and efficiency gains may mean that fewer people are required in the organisation.
- Fear of failure, such as fear of not being able to work within an automated environment.

Change for change's sake is undesirable and a waste of scarce resources. It should only be pursued if there is a clear purpose and goal.

## Lewin's force field analysis

Force field analysis is a specialised technique of weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of a project, to help decide whether any proposed change is worth implementing. The technique was first developed by Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist, in 1951. Lewin outlined two types of forces of change: **driving forces** which push for change and **restraining forces** which act against a proposal for change. These forces compete against each other — if the current situation is in equilibrium this is because the driving forces are cancelled out by the restraining forces. To bring about change from the existing position, the driving forces must be increased or the restraining forces must be reduced (see Figure 1).

Lewin's force field analysis can be a useful decision-making technique for highlighting and quantifying the forces acting for and against change. If a change

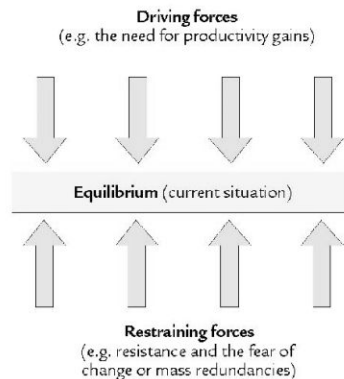
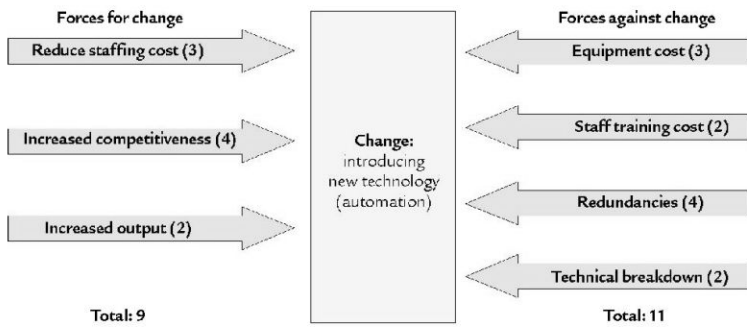


Figure 1 Forces of change

is desired, then managers can influence those factors to make such change happen.

## Applying the technique

Imagine you are a managing director deciding whether to automate production in order to increase your firm's productivity. Your force field analysis might look similar to the one in Figure 2. The stages involved in carrying out a force field analysis are as follows:



**Figure 2** Force field analysis

- List the encouraging forces for change and the forces against change.
- Draw a diagram (see Figure 2) showing the forces for and against change.
- Allocate a weight to each of these forces, from 1 (weak) to 5 (strong).

From this initial analysis, you and your managers can then investigate how the driving forces can be strengthened or how the restraining forces can be reduced or eliminated.

After studying Figure 2, your managers may think twice about opting for automation, because the change may be difficult to bring about (the restraining forces,

scoring 11, are greater than the forces for change, which score 9). However, if your managers have already decided to go for this option, force field analysis can help them work out *how* to improve the project's chances of success. In this case, they could look at how to reduce the opposition from staff due to expected redundancies and/or see if they can reduce the costs or technical breakdowns in any way. The problems of change management are not solved by this model, but managers can assess the forces more clearly and see what are the key issues on which to focus.

Nevertheless, there are a couple of potential pitfalls in using force field analysis:

- Not all relevant forces may be considered.
- The weights attached to the forces are often subjective and decision makers can be biased in their allocation of weights, highlighting the issues they want to push and downplaying ones they do not want to address.

## Conclusion

Change management in an organisation is an inevitable feature of modern day management, particularly in today's fast-paced global environment. However, in the pursuit of change, managers often face resistance from their staff. Force field analysis, in addition to other techniques, can be used to help decision makers in their pursuit of controlled and effective change management. Successful implementation of change will help improve an organisation's success and survival.

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