# 5.   Force Field Analysis

Force field analysis was developed by Lewin (1951) and is widely used to inform decision-making, particularly in planning and implementing change management programmes in organisations. It is a powerful method for gaining a comprehensive overview of the different forces acting on a potential policy issue, and for assessing their source and strength.

Detailed Outline of the Process

Force field analysis is best carried out in small group of about six to eight people using flip chart paper or overhead transparencies so that everyone can see what is going on. The first step is to agree the area of change to be discussed. This might be written as a desired policy goal or objective. All the forces in support of the change are then listed in a column to the left (driving the change forward) while all forces working against the change are listed in a column to the right (holding it back). The driving and restraining forces should be sorted around common themes and should then be scored according to their 'magnitude', ranging from one (weak) to five (strong). The score may well not balance on either side. The resulting table might look like the following:

Figure 5: Force field analysis
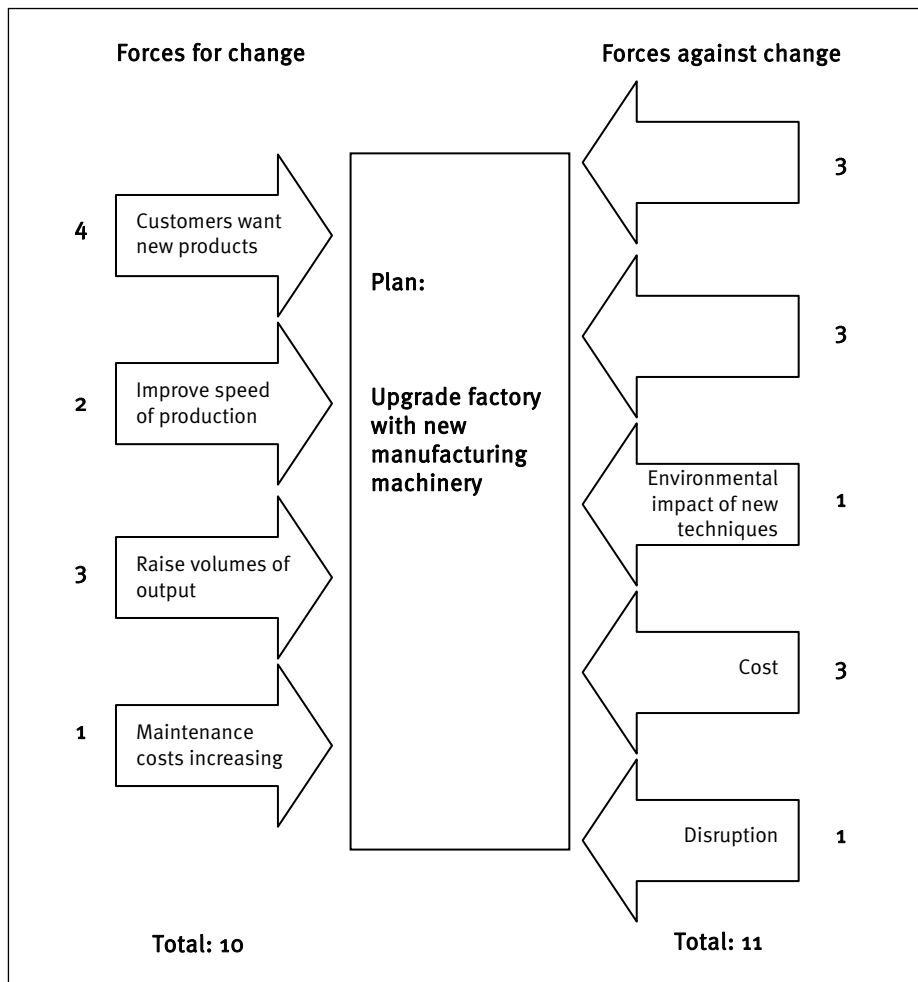
Throughout the process rich discussion, debate and dialogue should emerge. This is an important part of the exercise and key issues should be allowed time. Findings and ideas may well come up to do with concerns, problems, symptoms and solutions. It is useful to record these and review where there is a consensus on an action or a way forward. In policy influencing the aim is to find ways to reduce the restraining forces and to capitalise on the driving forces.

Force field analysis is natural follow-on from Problem tree analysis which can often help to identify objectives for policy change. A useful next step on from Force field analysis is Stakeholder analysis in which the specific stakeholders for and against a change are identified, together with their power, influence and interests.

A Good Example

Force field analysis has been used in diverse fields ranging from participatory rural appraisal and social research to strategic planning and organisational change. As part of a DFID sponsored participatory poverty profiling in Bolangir, a drought prone district in Western Orissa, India, a team of facilitators from PRAXIS used various participatory tools to conduct a study of the poverty profile of the district. Seasonal migration poses a serious problem with the rural poor and a Force field analysis was conducted with a group of villagers to study the factors leading to migration. Drought and lack of land emerged as the most important factors contributing to migration. Among the forces inhibiting migration were emotional attachment to the village and excessive work during migration. The information generated from the analysis has been useful in that it has led to designing a livelihood project, to be implemented by the Government of Orissa, supported by DFID, India.

Further Information

The case study above comes from: PLA Notes (1999), Issue 36, pp.17-23. IIED, London, at: www.worldbank.org/participation/PRSP/plna/plan_03604.pdf

Another case details the use of Force field analysis in a school situation to assess the potential to change from teacher-centered methods of working to greater pupil participation in planning. See: www.crossroad.to/Quotes/brainwashing/force-field.htm

For original literature of Force field analysis see: Lewin, K. (1951) *Field Theory in Social Science*, Harper and Row, New York.

Simple step-by-step guides to carrying out force field analysis are available at:
- www.mindtools.com/forcefld.html for examples of the use of force field analysis in management
- www.psywww.com/mtsite/forcefld.html for examples of the use of force field analysis in psychology
- For a brief overview see www.mycoted.com/Force-Field_Analysis

Examples of the application of force field analysis in different areas are available below:
- Change management: www.accel-team.com/techniques/force_field_analysis.html
- Health (MSH and UNICEF): http://erc.msh.org/quality/example/example5.cfm

For computer software to conduct force field analysis see:
www.skymark.com/resources/tools/force_field_diagram.asp

6.   Problem Tree Analysis

Problem tree analysis is central to many forms of project planning and is well developed among development agencies. Problem tree analysis (also called Situational analysis or just Problem analysis) helps to find solutions by mapping out the anatomy of cause and effect around an issue in a similar way to a Mind map, but with more structure. This brings several advantages:

- The problem can be broken down into manageable and definable chunks. This enables a clearer prioritisation of factors and helps focus objectives;
- There is more understanding of the problem and its often interconnected and even contradictory causes. This is often the first step in finding win-win solutions.
- It identifies the constituent issues and arguments, and can help establish who and what the political actors and processes are at each stage;
- It can help establish whether further information, evidence or resources are needed to make a strong case, or build a convincing solution;
- Present issues – rather than apparent, future or past issues – are dealt with and identified;
- The process of analysis often helps build a shared sense of understanding, purpose and action.

Detailed Outline of the Process

Figure 6: Problem tree analysis
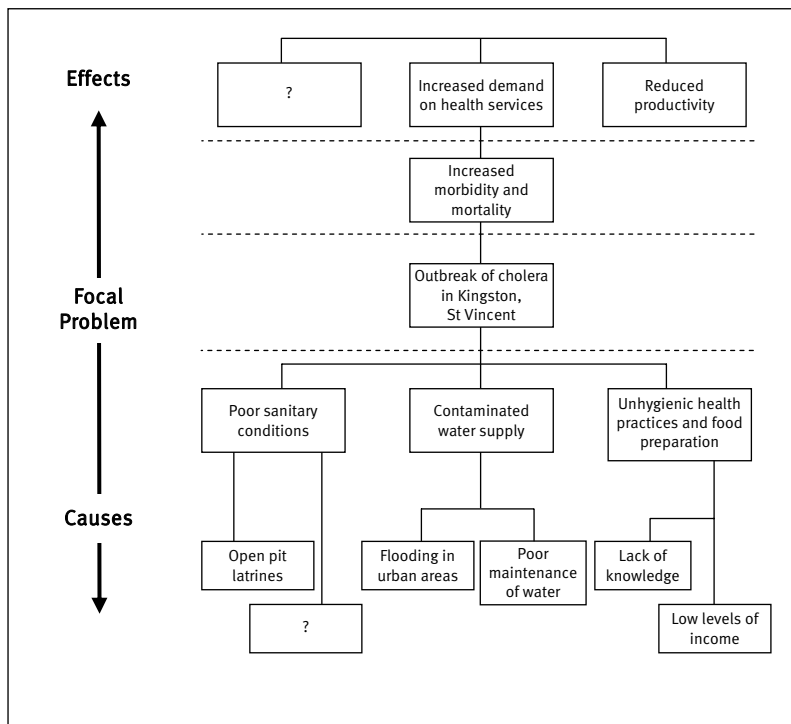
Problem tree analysis is best carried out in a small focus group of about six to eight people using flip chart paper or an overhead transparency. It is important that factors can be added as the conversation progresses. The first step is to discuss and agree the problem or issue to be analysed. Do not worry if it seems like a broad topic because the problem tree will help break it down. The problem or issue is written in the centre of the flip chart and becomes the 'trunk' of the tree. This becomes the 'focal problem'. The wording does not need to be exact as the roots and branches will further define it, but it should describe an actual issue there everyone feels passionately about.