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# Focusing leadership through force field analysis: new variations on a venerable planning tool

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## Keywords

Analysis of variance, Leadership, Plans, Cognitive mapping, Change management, Stakeholders

## Abstract

This forwards a new version of a tool long used in planned change and organizational development efforts – force field analysis. Existing applications of this technique are critiqued in light of cognitive heuristics known to erode judgment and analytical performance in plan development. A cognitive prompting template is combined with the existing the force field analysis technique to mitigate these problems. As such, the revised technique represents a significant improvement over the traditional application of the force field tool as used by the OD practitioner. Following an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of the revised technique, a case example is offered to illustrate the technique as it was used in a real organization. Finally, practical facilitation guidelines are offered to help leaders and planners conduct force field analysis sessions in multi-stakeholder change efforts.

I have always thought plans are useless, but planning is indispensable (Dwight D. Eisenhower).

Passion crashes into obstacles; reason peers around them (Mason Cooley).

The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men (Robert Burns).

## The planning challenge

As any experienced leader will attest, there is often a significant gap between one's plan and the actual results obtained upon implementing the plan. Popular wisdom captures this challenge with the aphorism: "the devil is in the details". Numerous organizational theorists have explored this gap between intention and reality (Gottschalk, 1999; Norman, 1991; School, 1998; Kotter, 1995; Beckhard and Pritchard, 1992).

To help address this planning and implementation challenge, this paper forwards an updated version of a planning technique known as force field analysis and illustrates its use in planning and organizational development initiatives. Such initiatives include execution of strategic plans, re-engineering efforts, quality improvement programming, merger and acquisitions, and, other project implementations. This planning process will be shown to help leaders develop effective responses to those organizational dynamics that will significantly influence plan implementation. Following an overview of the force field analysis technique, a case example is introduced highlighting some of the practical issues to consider as one deploys this technique.

## Force field analysis and application to organizational dynamics

Force field analysis is a time-honored problem solving and action planning

technique first described by the psychologist Kurt Lewin in the 1950s (Lewin, 1951).

In the organizational planning adaptation, a "force" refers to any influence acting in an organization such that the organization's state is changed by the presence of that factor. A graphical depiction of these forces may be shown in a force field diagram. In its simplest form, this diagram depicts the factors (i.e. forces) accounting for the *status quo* in the situation in question.

A simple force field diagram of this type is shown in Figure 1. This particular example illustrates forces influencing deployment of enterprise resource planning system in a business organization. As shown, the diagram depicts those forces that are currently helping the change on the right, and those forces that hinder the desired change on the left. This diagram thus captures some of the key implementation issues that must be managed by organizational leaders and other change agents.

In the typical organizational planning or problem-solving context, forces shown might relate to a wide variety of issues such as the power expressed by a particular stakeholder group, the system of rewards and punishments influencing stakeholder behavior, or the adequacy of resources in relation to the challenge at hand. When characterizing the organization's external environment, one might identify political, economic, social, or technological factors that are likely to influence the initiative.

## What is the value of force field analysis?

Peer Senge has noted that the leader's effectiveness is largely dependent on the accuracy of his/her mental map of the change environment (Senge, 1990). Similarly, the goal of force field analysis is to help leaders and other stakeholders identify, document, and understand those forces likely to influence plan

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implementation. Based on this understanding, leaders can then act to leverage helping forces and mitigate hindering forces. The technique assists change agents in developing effective action plans that are multidimensional and focused on high leverage issues (Bailey, 1994; Brager and Stephen, 1992; Hurt, 1998; Norman, 1991).

It should be noted that force field analysis can be used iteratively during multiple phases of the planning process. Prior to actually developing an action plan, the technique can be used to initially diagnose a problem or strategic context. In this situation, the tool helps answer the question: "What are the factors that account for our present situation (i.e. the *status quo*)?" At this stage, the analysis is used to develop initial responses to the current situation. Following this initial diagnosis and action planning, force field analysis can be re-introduced to explore helping and hindering forces governing plan implementation. Here the key question is: "What factors will have an impact upon our intentional movement from the present situation to the desired future state, as noted in our plan's goal statements and action tactics?"

As a "social architecture of planning", this method can create a productive dialogue among potentially contentious stakeholders. This dialog can externalize key assumptions and perceptions influencing the group's ability to reach consensus (Grimshaw, 2001; Innes, 1996). The need for stakeholder dialog is one of the reasons for quoting Eisenhower at the outset of the paper – "I have always thought plans are useless, but planning is

indispensable". Facilitated stakeholder dialog in force field analysis is useful because it supports learning and conflict management aiding plan implementation (Nambisan *et al.*, 1999; Rowden, 2001). It is essential that session participants be carefully chosen to maximize the value of the technique in promoting such stakeholder dialog. Ideally, representatives of all key stakeholder groups will be represented in the session(s). Once completed, the documentation from the analysis provides an efficient way to communicate plan implementation issues to relevant stakeholders (Wheeler, 1998).

Many leaders involved in change are currently using force field analysis to help them identify and address the key leverage points in their respective change processes (Charles, 1995; Kettinger *et al.*, 1997; Nicholas, 1989; Thomas, 1985). This planning technique has been applied in health care planning (Brager and Stephen, 1992), leadership development (Cacioppe, 1998), information systems management (Corbitt, 1991; Couger, 1993; Nicholas, 1989; Stokes, 1991), and general project management (Nicholas, 1989).

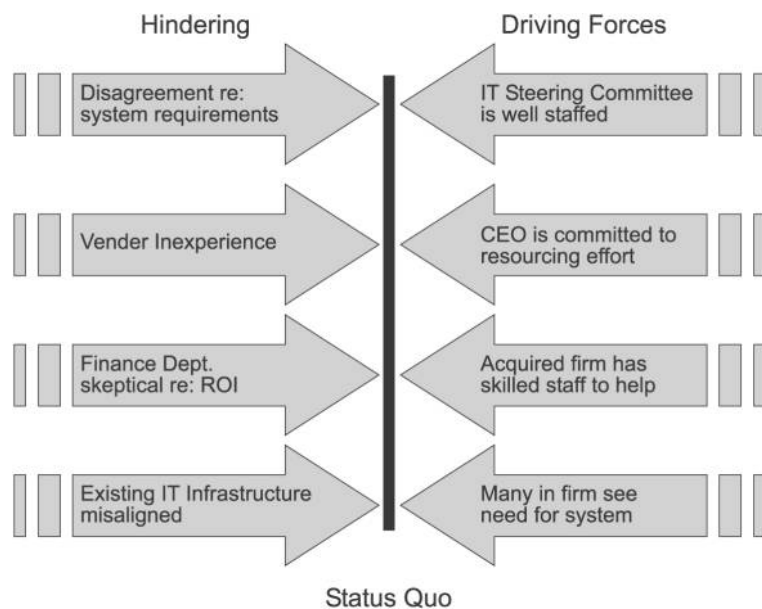
### Problems with the original technique

Over the last 15 years, the author has facilitated and observed other OD practitioners deploy a number of variations of the force field technique, both in the university classroom as well as corporate environments. One conclusion reached through this experience is that the technique is highly dependent upon the planner's experience, cognitive style, personality, and resulting mental models. This assertion is supported by a number of other researchers (Haley and Stephen, 1989; Kydd, 1989; McNamara, 1997; Spell, 2001). For example, in a technically-oriented engineering organization, one may find a bias toward conceptualizing force field factors in terms of predominantly technical issues such as information systems adequacy, lack of technical tools, etc. These issues may certainly apply, but, the technically oriented planning group may disregard other factors with which they are less familiar. Such overlooked issues might include behavioral and motivational dynamics, impacts of organizational structure, organizational politics, etc.

Compounding this problem of myopia are the numerous cognitive heuristics (mental "rules of thumb") that often overwhelm otherwise solid decision-making and judgment (Kahneman *et al.*, 1982; Schwenk 1986). Such decision-making biases include

**Figure 1**

Forces acting in ERP initiative



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preferences for concrete and vivid information and/or recently received information, and a host of other mental “shortcuts” shown to impede planning and problem solving performance (Kahneman *et al.*, 1982). All of these response biases can result in the force field analysis missing key influences that should be addressed. When added to the uncertainty and “noise” that inevitably arises in plan implementation, these biases can result in implementation failures that might otherwise have been avoided.

### Improving the analysis through “prompting” techniques

It is possible to address some of the problems of cognitive bias and heuristic errors in force field analysis through the use of structured techniques deployed in conjunction with force field analysis. In this way, it is possible to “overlay” a conceptual template or checklist to prompt planners to consider a more comprehensive array of helping and hindering forces. Such techniques encourage or prompt planners to consider implementation issues that may not naturally occur to them without a process of structured prompting. A number of researchers have experimented with such techniques and have shown resulting improvements in planning and problem solving (Browne, 2001; Browne *et al.*, 1997; Fischhoff, 1989; Fischhoff and Bar-Hillel, 1984).

A simple prompting template that will be used in this article’s case example is known as the “7S” organizational change model. This conceptual model highlights seven “issue clusters” that often influence planned organizational change. The framework was first developed at McKinsey Consulting and later described by Waterman *et al.* (1980). The 7S model has been useful in such areas as product development (Barclay and Mark, 1990; Dwyer and Mellor, 1991; Dwyer, 1990), analysis of a computer integrated manufacturing system (Hardaker and Pervaiz, 1995), and, as a general model for exploring strategic change and innovation (Pascale, 1990).

In conjunction with force field analysis, the 7S categories are used to prompt thinking about the impact of forces in each category. (Practical features of this technique are explained more fully in the next section.) The 7S framework was chosen for its simplicity, mnemonic hints and familiarity with many planners. Other models might be used based on the planning context. Possible alternatives include the capability maturing model in IT-related change (Hutchins, 2001),

the Malcolm Baldrige framework for process improvement change (Natarajan *et al.*, 2000), or Hanna’s organizational model as it might apply to organizational design changes (Hanna, 1988). The planner is encouraged to select a model or framework that illuminates critical implementation issues germane to their particular initiative.

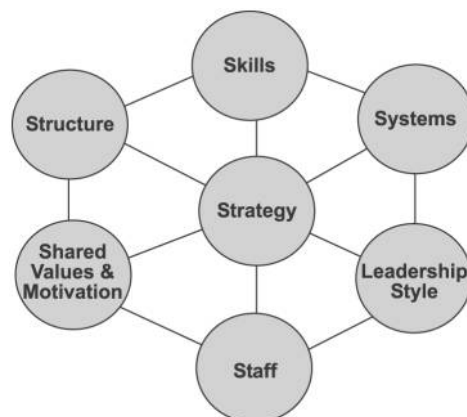
### The 7S prompting framework

A diagram of the basic 7S framework is shown in Figure 2. A brief description of each factor in the model is also provided. It should be noted that before using the framework, it is helpful to provide session participants with some kind of handout or brief training describing the model prior to its use in the subsequent planning session. Such education can assure that participants are thinking clearly and broadly about the factors contained in the framework.

### Factors in the 7S framework

Although each of the factors in the 7S framework is described briefly, a more complete exploration of these issue categories is beyond the scope of this paper. Readers interested in a more complete description of the model are encouraged to review the original article by Waterman *et al.* (1980) or the more recent writings of Pascale (1990). Inevitably, those using this framework will find that categories are not mutually exclusive. As will be shown in the case illustration, many implementation issues may relate to a combination of factors. The fact that the framework’s constructs are not totally orthogonal is not a serious problem as the model is only used to prompt a more thoughtful and complete analysis of

Figure 2  
The 7S framework



implementation issues versus being used as a part of a rigorous statistical analysis:

- *Skill*. This category asks the change agent to consider whether key people have the knowledge, skills and ability to make the required changes. Adequate analysis of this category will require the planning team to identify key performance areas (task analysis) and assess the skills required for each of these performances (Sanchez, 2001).
- *Systems*. This category relates to proceduralized reports, processes and technologies (e.g. meeting formats, information technology, reward systems, etc.). Examples of typical prompting questions focus on the impact of the change on given business processes, adequacy of technology, or influence of the formalized performance management processes.
- *Style*. These factors characterize how key leaders and managers behave in setting and achieving the organization's goals. Leadership style elements include communications style, decision-making preferences, symbolic behaviors, social needs, individual values and attitudes, etc.
- *Staff*. This category prompts questions such as: "Do we have the right people in the right positions in terms of their training, experience and interests?" Here one would be interested in such areas as quantitative staffing levels as well as the qualitative backgrounds of these staff in relation to the demands of the planned initiative.
- *Shared values*. This factor relates to the significant meanings or guiding concepts that an organization imbues in its members. Relevant values/cultural elements might include norms in relation to participation, values inconsistent with the change, organizational sub-cultures that might differentially react to the change, etc.
- *Structure*. This cluster of factors relates to the aspects of the organization's structure that might affect the initiative in question. This category refers to both the formalized and temporary structures such as task forces, teams, etc. that will be involved in the initiative.
- *Strategy*. This category of factors relates to the organization's plan for allocating scarce resources to reach identified goals. Issues explored in this category include clarity of goals in the planned initiative, linkage to broader organizational goals, understanding of the reasons for the initiative on the part of key stakeholders, etc.

### **Guidelines for using revised force field technique – a case example. Case illustration: stakeholder problems at "CivCo"**

In this section, a case example will be used to illustrate the use of the technique in a typical organizational context. The case relates to a large US civil engineering firm attempting to improve its operations in Brazil, a key market site for the firm (the hypothetical name "CivCo" will be used and some non-essential information will be changed to preserve client confidentiality.) This firm is involved in construction of many large public works projects such as airports, water treatment plants, etc. throughout the world. The materials shown below represent a sub-set of the larger analysis and action planning conducted for this effort. Here the goal has been to illustrate typical use of the technique versus fully illuminating the details of the planned change effort at CivCo.

In many of their foreign field offices, CivCo was having great difficulty collaborating with in-country stakeholders such as governmental regulatory agencies, agents, and in-county vendors. The problem was particularly troublesome in their Brazilian office. For example, Brazilian regulatory agencies consistently demonstrated little support for CivCo's actions and generally showed a lack of interest in communicating with them or assisting them in gaining necessary permits, etc. It was decided that relationships with these key stakeholders were critical to the future success of the firm.

Given this problem background, the next section outlines the six steps used to deploy the revised force field analysis methodology at CivCo.

#### **Step one: convene the planning task force and define the problem and general goal**

Based on initial feedback from the field, leaders in the South American division of the firm convened a task force consisting of the director of business relations, key project managers and representatives from primary support functions within the home office. This eight-person task force also retained a facilitator charged with conducting the various planning sessions discussed below. The group worked in a room with dry erase boards, flip charts and a computerized display projector. Most of the work on this initial analysis was conducted over a four-hour meeting period.

As was noted earlier, the composition of this task force has a significant impact on the long-term outcomes of the planning process. Experience with this technique has shown that much of the value derives from the dialog it engenders among stakeholders. The

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process provides a structure and context for these stakeholders to share their assumptions and mental models about the situation at hand. Properly facilitated, force field analysis sessions can be excellent vehicles for stakeholder communication and conflict management. As such, this approach is a useful tool for promoting “learning organization” practices (Rowden, 2001; Senge, 1990). Every effort should be taken to solicit representatives on the task force who have insight into the issues being addressed and the power to speak authoritatively for the interest group(s) they represent. Stakeholder mapping techniques can be particularly useful here to promote representation from all effected parties (Barrow, 2000; Blair, 1988; Cummings, 2000).

In the CivCo case, all the key internal stakeholders were represented on the task force. Where possible, this task force might include representation from external stakeholders such as customers, vendors, etc. In the CivCo case, it was decided that the analysis would be conducted without such external stakeholders due to legal and logistics constraints.

Once the analysis session was convened, the planning group first defined the goal sought in the planned change effort. The following goal was identified: “Better manage external stakeholder relationships in the large projects in our Brazilian operations”. (Although CivCo was experiencing difficulties in other countries, their initial approach involved a pilot improvement intervention in Brazil). It should be noted that this goal definition can sometimes take more time than one might expect. Here the facilitator should help the group effectively communicate by testing assumptions (Schwenk, 1988) and helping the group develop a common language to discuss relevant issues (Butterfield and Norman, 1996).

### **Step two: characterize the ideal situation**

To redefine the definition of the idea situation, the task force next explored what they meant by “better manage” in this situation. Here the facilitator asked the planning group to define some of the characteristics of the ideal state – “How will you know success when you see it?” Following a brief discussion, the task force decided that building a better relationship with any given stakeholder could be defined by the following:

- *improved level of communication* between the firm and the stakeholders;
- CivCo project managers and key in-country stakeholders would all have a better *understanding of each others’ interests* in relation to project activities;

- project managers would have a *greater ability to influence* the stakeholder in a direction favorable to the firm’s interests; and
- all CivCo staff in the Brazilian office would have a *higher level of personal contact* with members of important stakeholder organizations in the government and private industry.

### **Step three: characterize the present situation**

The present situation was then defined in relation to indicators listed above. Note that the facilitator captured discussion points on flip charts and tested consensus in regard to each of the points. Where further information was needed, this was noted on a separate flip chart. Items recorded in the session are noted below:

- Currently, communications are strained between the in-country stakeholders and employees of the firm. Each side shows little penchant for listening and most of the communications take the form of non-productive posturing for negotiations.
- When CivCo’s project managers were interviewed, they displayed a foggy and overly simplistic view of the interests of governmental stakeholders. They made inferences based on the espoused positions of governmental staff that were, on further analysis, not supportable. This reality was manifest in the most recent government-firm negotiation, where an inside government source noted that the firm’s contract negotiation team totally misrepresented the key points of the governmental negotiators. For this reason, they missed an obvious win-win strategy.
- Based on the above realities, the firm’s team floundered in their attempts to collaborate with key governmental agencies on the contracting and implementation elements of the project. Government representatives were suspicious of every move of the firm. Many of these same points applied to relations with in-county vendors and agents. CivCo seemed to not trust any of these Brazilian stakeholders.
- CivCo staff had few social relationships with members of any Brazilian stakeholder organization. Staff stayed to themselves and avoided social contact with Brazilian nationals unless absolutely necessary.

### **Step four: concisely summarize the gap between the ideal and actual**

In this case situation, it is easy to see that there is a considerable gap between the

actual and ideal situation. Poor communications and strained relationships yielded very poor negotiations outcomes for either party.

Every activity requiring collaboration between the parties was highly stressful and unnecessarily contentious. In short, the working relationship between the parties was strained and non-productive.

#### **Step five: list and discuss the helping and hindering forces accounting for the status quo**

The force field analysis was documented by listing forces in three primary categories:

- 1 helping forces;
- 2 hindering forces; and
- 3 an optional category – neutral forces, that might swing toward either the helping or the hindering category.

Note that although the helping and hindering forces are listed in a Table there is not necessarily a one-to-one correspondence between a force listed on the right side of the Table and the cell on the same line listed on the left-side of the Table. The Table is used only to format data in a readable manner. Also note that the task force made an attempt to prioritize each of the forces as shown in the Table using categories of high, medium and low impact.

To generate the analysis shown in Table I, the facilitator prompted participants with the 7S categories. The technique of affinity diagramming was used to generate this input (Kelly, 2000). Participants were given “Post-It<sup>®</sup>” notes and asked to identify helping and hindering forces in relation to the problem being examined. Colors were used to separate helping and hindering factors. These colors might also be used to encode other categorical features if needed. Participants were encouraged to think of at least one item for each of the 7S categories. On each “Post-It<sup>®</sup>” note, they were instructed to write only one factor and to label it at the top using the 7S categories that seemed most germane (one could also use seven different colors of notes for this purpose or one could pre-print category labels in advance). Also, participants were asked to place a rating of low, medium or high impact on each of the notes. Following their individual brainstorming on the notes, these notes were collected and organized on a wall surface where such “sticky-notes” can be placed. This activity of organizing the notes can be a pleasant group energizer along with promoting useful discussion about the items listed. A selected sample of these analytical results is shown in Table I.

#### **List and discuss the neutral-latent forces**

Neutral forces are those factors that are now latent in their impact, yet, might have a significant influence if conditions change. Some examples of such forces identified in the CivCo case are listed below:

- Recently an organization has been formed in Brazil known as the Institute for Infrastructure Development. This Institute has published a mission statement that notes their desire to build better relations with non-Brazilian firms. As this organization has only recently been formed, the firm has little knowledge as to how the institute might influence CivCo efforts. At present, this is an unknown factor, yet, offers some potential to promote CivCo interests (structure).
- Other groups within the firm are attempting similar efforts at building better in-country relations. This is shown as a latent force because it remains to be seen if there will be any cross-fertilization between these other project groups and the present project group. Participants saw potential here, but, due to their project oriented structure, they found that they communicated poorly with these other groups (structure, strategy).

#### **Step six: action planning**

The next step in this technique is to identify actions responsive to the factors listed in the analysis. Planned actions should be designed to reduce the impact of the hindering factors and reinforce the impact of the helping factors. Depending on the scope of this effort, and time available, the planning team might want to develop a separate set of actions and tactics for each of the forces listed. This might be accomplished using small groups focusing on selected high impact forces. In addition, one would want to make sure that the neutral-latent forces are closely monitored. Efforts should be made to influence these latent factors such that the force shown can be enlisted as a helping influence or at least maintained as a neutral force.

The CivCo case will now be used to illustrate the critical need for a conceptual linkage between the force field analysis and subsequent action planning. The next section highlights selected examples where action plans were developed in light of the force field analysis. Although actions were devised in relation to most of the factors listed in Table I, only a few select examples are provided to illustrate the way in which one develops actions plans based upon the analysis.

The first example illustrates how actions were taken to leverage an existing helping force. As noted in Table I, the Brazilian director of commercial development was

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listed as a positive force given his expressed commitment to further developing relationships with foreign firms. To reinforce this effort, the planning team decided to host a dinner for the Brazilian director and other key staff. This provided a context for CivCo project managers to become better acquainted with a number of Brazilian staff. Given the reluctance of many project managers to become involved in these types of events, the planning team established a limited schedule of such events and promoted

them as key elements in CivCo's in-country strategy. Attendance was taken in these meetings.

Relationship building was also addressed by planning an information sharing session with the directorate of infrastructure staff. Here it was stressed that CivCo's sole purpose in the session was listening to the directorate's plans and vision in regard to their long-term future. These communication processes were first steps aimed at minimizing the influence of many of the

**Table I**

Drivers/helping forces	Category	Impact of force	Restraining/hindering forces	Category	Impact of force
<b>Brazilian government has created a new agency for commercial development. The director of this agency has publicly stated that he wishes to assist foreign contractors in their working relations with Brazilian bureaucracy</b>	Structure	High	Key project managers are not committed to expanding their role to improve informal social contact with Brazilian nationals. They see this activity as a waste of time that draws them away from their "real" engineering jobs	Shared values, style	Medium
<b>Top management has recognized this problem and has organized a highly competent task force to address the issue</b>	Skills, strategy	High	A key executive in CivCo top management has gone on record as stating that Brazilian nationals need to learn how to do things the "American way" if they want progress	Style	High
<b>A number of key project managers have been hired with Portuguese language skills appropriate to these foreign assignments</b>	Skills, staff	Medium	Corporation HQ consistently assigned the best technically qualified engineers to bidding and other contract activities with little attention to their cross-cultural acumen	Staffing	High
<b>The firm recently established an information system (Agencytrack) that helps project managers track political changes and public policy issues within the foreign country. Some project managers have used this system</b>	Systems	Medium	A number of these Brazilian nationals in the network are known also be to serving competitor firms in the nation. At times they have acted in the interests of competitor firms	Structure, shared values	Medium
<b>A new multi-project program manager was recently hired who truly values communication and stakeholder involvement</b>	Style	Medium	Most project managers see negotiation training as an unnecessary activity. They have noted: "My job is building the system not playing touchy-feely with the Brazilians"	Skills, style	Medium
<b>Last year the firm established a database on Brazilian nationals who have extensive contacts with vendors, agency officials, etc.</b>	Structure, systems	Low	The director of finance is known to be skeptical about a proposed satellite based training approach and has warned that the firm needs to see immediate results or she will pull the plug on the system	Systems	Low
<b>Task force has been assigned to conduct this force field analysis and develop an implementation plan in light of the analysis</b>	Strategy	High	Division president mandated this new attention to nurturing Brazilian contacts, yet, did not seek any input from project managers regarding the effort. This has resulted in resentment on the part of these managers. They believe the CEO has little appreciation for the stress they experience in this role and note that the CEO never had to take on a foreign assignment	Style	Medium
<b>The executive committee of the firm recently approved a training budget to support cross-cultural negotiation training for all project managers</b>	Strategy	Medium	Given the firm's structure and emphasis on "the project" as the key focus of all managerial activity, there are few mechanisms to diffuse learnings from any given project	Skills, systems, structure	Medium
<b>The firm has recently purchased transponder time on a satellite that would allow them to train staff in Brazil without bringing them back to the States</b>	Systems	Low	The personnel below the Brazilian director of infrastructure development are known to be highly suspicious of our efforts. They see these activities on the part of "ugly Americans" to manipulate their government agency	Shared values	High



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hindering factors and built on the existing helping forces.

Other action planning focused on mitigating specific hindering factors. One such hindering factor shown in Table I stated:

Given the firm's structure and emphasis on "the project" as the key focus of all managerial activity, there are few mechanisms to diffuse learnings from any given project, especially as these relate to improving relationships with Brazilian regulatory agencies.

In response to this challenge, the planning group decided to redesign their project debriefing process. Particular emphasis was given to highlighting and recognizing collaboration with regulatory agencies. Even small steps were to be noticed and reinforced. This action built on an existing helping factor (the Agencytrack system) and also emphasized that such collaboration was an important aspect of the project manager's role. As noted above, action plans should be focused on all key forces identified.

#### **Summary guidelines for conducting force field analysis**

- Be as specific as possible when listing forces.
- Use some kind of conceptual organizational model to guide identification of forces.
- Conduct the analysis with key stakeholders involved in the change or problem solving effort.
- Use some kind of documenting technology in your group analysis process. This technology can be as simple as a flip chart or as complicated as a threaded online discussion group.
- Use a group facilitator familiar with the technique in the process.
- Consider iterating the analysis recursively. For example, one might initially want to develop an analysis that focuses on a broad issue of change (e.g. globalization of operations). On completing this analysis, one might want to break this goal down into several sub-goals, each being analyzed with the force field technique.
- Think about using some kind of weighting scheme to indicate the relative impact of each force.
- Avoid listing helping forces that do not now exist. This is a frequent error in the use of the technique. When the facilitator does not stress this point in the planning session, groups will begin to place solutions in the force field chart versus forces, e.g. "We should purchase a new Techno9000 versus we have already

purchased a Techno9000". This is an important point because this technique consciously separates the diagnostic process of gap analysis from solution generation.

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#### **When might the technique be inappropriate?**

This technique relies on logical analysis to explore planning issues and develop action responses. The technique is most effective in situations where at least some relatively predictable cause and effect relationships govern the system in question. On the other hand, there are some planning contexts where total uncertainty, chaos and nonlinearity rule. In these instances, specific action planning that relies on these deterministic cause and effect relationships will yield poor results given the fundamentally indeterminate environment. Examples of such planning contexts include radically new market introductions in virtually unknown markets, mitigating complex new problems with which the organization has virtually no experience, or other situations where the "rules of the game" are in a state of extreme flux (e.g. e-commerce in the post dot.com "meltdown"). In these vastly more uncertain contexts, the science of complexity and its associated leadership tools are likely to be of greater assistance (Goldstein, 1994; Stacey, 1996).

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#### **Value of technique as judged by participants**

Judging from the case example shown, one might conclude that a thoughtful planning team would inevitably arrive at such actions without the encumbrance of the force field technique. In this respect, the author would not argue that many planning teams routinely identify problems and suggest solutions to these problems. In response to this critique, however, the following quotes taken from previous session participants reflect the value they perceived from this technique in contrast to their existing approaches:

Our usual methods cause us to jump around too much and fixate on someone's "pet solution". This method caused us to better understand and address the whole problem.

As an engineer, this technique (especially the 7S model) caused me to think about issues I normally would not consider. It's like I put on a new set of lenses . . .

The technique's use of affinity diagramming helped gain input from those who are typically quiet in such sessions . . . they actually offered a lot of insight.

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Our action plan was much more multi-dimensional than is typical for our group.

We frequently do not consider the factors driving stakeholder behavior ... this caused us to examine their motives.

This session has really helped our group gain commitment to our plan.

I have tried this with my staff and found that it helps us tackle improvement efforts in a logical and organized fashion.

Such responses are typical of the kind of feedback the author has received in numerous planning sessions using the approach.

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### Conclusion

In this paper, the use of an improved version of force field analysis has been reviewed and shown to help the OD practitioner identify and validate tactics for planned change efforts. This technique begins with a characterization of the gap between the present situation and the desired future situation. Based on this gap analysis, a carefully selected team begins a shared exploration of the forces that either help or hinder progress toward the goal. Prompting techniques (e.g. 7S model) are used to optimize the depth and breadth of this analysis.

Following this analysis, the planning group then develops action plans closely linked to the analysis. Where a particular action plan appears complex and potentially difficult to implement, one might again use force field analysis to analyze these "nested" implementation issues. As in all planning and problem solving, a desirable closure step involves evaluation of the outcomes of the implementation effort. This assessment explores whether action plans actually moved the organization closer to the desired goals. This outcome evaluation may cause planners to specify a new present situation and thus iterate the planning process.

The modified force field technique can be a tool of considerable value to leaders and OD practitioners. The process is quite useful in promoting focused discussion among key stakeholders regarding any initiative or problem solving activity. The technique provides a written analysis that can be distributed to others in the organization. As the analytical technique is relatively easy to follow, this documentation can usually be understood with little explanation.

The approach also helps groups to avoid an overly simplistic or mono-dimensional view of a change effort. In particular, the addition of the prompting techniques to the

traditional force field tool contributes to the practice of organizational development by improving intervention processes focusing on problem definition, externalization of mental models and building a shared understanding of the system within which change is to occur. This is particularly important in situations where technically-oriented managers may not naturally consider some of the human dimensions of change.

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