Quality and Service Improvement Tools

Force Field Analysis

For any current queries about clinical practice included in this publication please check with your senior clinical lead.

What is it and how can it help me?
Force Field Analysis is a method for listing, discussing, and assessing the various forces for and against a proposed change. It helps you look at the big picture by analysing all of the forces impacting on the change and weighing up the pros and cons. Having identified these, you can then develop strategies to reduce the impact of the opposing forces and strengthen the supporting forces. An effective team building tool, it is especially useful when you want to overcome resistance to change.

Forces that help you achieve the change are called ‘driving forces’. Forces that work against the change are called ‘restraining forces’.

Force Field Analysis can be used to develop an action plan to implement change. Specifically it can:
- Determine if a proposed change can get support.
- Identify obstacles to potential successful solutions.
- Suggest actions to reduce the strength of the obstacles.

Some types of forces to consider:
- Available resources.
- Traditions.
- Vested interests.
- Organisational structures.
- Relationships.
- Social or organisational trends.
- Attitudes of people.
- Regulations.
- Personal or group needs.
- Present or past practices.
- Institutional policies or norms.
- Agencies.
- Values.
- Desires.
- Costs.
- People.
- Events.

When does it work best?
Why do so many of our good ideas for making things better not work out? It’s often down to people or systems getting in the way. By spending a bit of time looking ahead and anticipating these problems, you can change or work with or around some of the barriers. You may also find out which things really make a difference to implementing change successfully. Force Field Analysis can help you quickly identify people, issues or things that may get in the way of any improvements you are planning. It can also help you find allies to support you. To make it work, you do need to act on some of the forces that you identify.

How to use it
What does it do?
- Investigates the balance of power in an issue.
- Identifies the most important people (stakeholders) and groups involved or affected.
- Identifies opponents and allies.
- Identifies how to influence the target group through action planning.

How do I do it?
- Using adjectives and phrases, describe the current situation as it is now and the desired situation as the vision for the future.
- Identify what will happen if there is no action taken.
- List all the driving and restraining forces for the change.
- Discuss the key restraining forces and determine their severity.
- Discuss the key driving forces and determine their strength.
- Allocate a score to each using a numerical scale where 1 is very weak and 10 is very strong.
- Chart the forces by listing, in strength scale, the driving forces on the left and the restraining forces on the right.
- Explore the restraining forces and the best way to address them.
• Explore the driving forces and the best way of advancing them.
• Identify priorities and produce an action plan.

Tips for implementation
Once you have carried out an analysis, you can decide whether the project or change is viable. If the project has to be delivered to meet a target, the results of the Force Field Analysis can help you to work out how to improve the probability of success.

Here you have two choices:
To reduce the strength of the forces opposing a project or to increase the forces pushing a project

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

Examples
Increasing Theatre Capacity to Reduce Delays

Resulting analysis using above diagram
After reviewing theatre capacity with staff it was agreed to reorganise some of the lists to all day and to start at 8.30am. With 30 minutes extra at the start of the day and 60 minutes extra instead of lunch (break eliminated) the patients who had been waiting a long time for treatment could be accommodated. The slight change in staff working pattern was agreed when all could appreciate the benefits of the extra productivity.

What next?
Now that you’ve identified those things that may help or hinder your project or planned changes, the next step is to make sure you use this knowledge to drive the project. Ask yourself: 'What can and are we going to do about the things that will help and hinder our project / planned changes?'.

You can then focus on those things that you can influence. If you find this bit difficult, you could use a technique like brainstorming or six thinking hats which may help you to think of alternative ideas to try out.

Some people prefer to incorporate the detail of what they are going to do about their Force Field Analysis into a project plan; others prefer a lighter planning touch. If you are in the latter group, one way to make sure you use the knowledge is to build in reminders to check the analysis again. This ensures that you take time out to reflect on the forces, what you’ve already done, how it has worked, what you should carry on doing, and what you should stop doing.

Additional resources

Books:

Background
Force Field Analysis is a management technique for diagnosing situations, developed by Kurt Lewin, a pioneer in the field of social sciences.

Acknowledgements/sources
Dr Roddy Nash, East Midlands Improvement Network (formerly TIN) and Dave Young.

This guide originates from work published by NHS Institute for Innovation and Improvement, which closed in March 2013. NHS Improving Quality is the organisation now responsible for driving improvement across the NHS.