

Force Field Analysis - Kurt Lewin's model

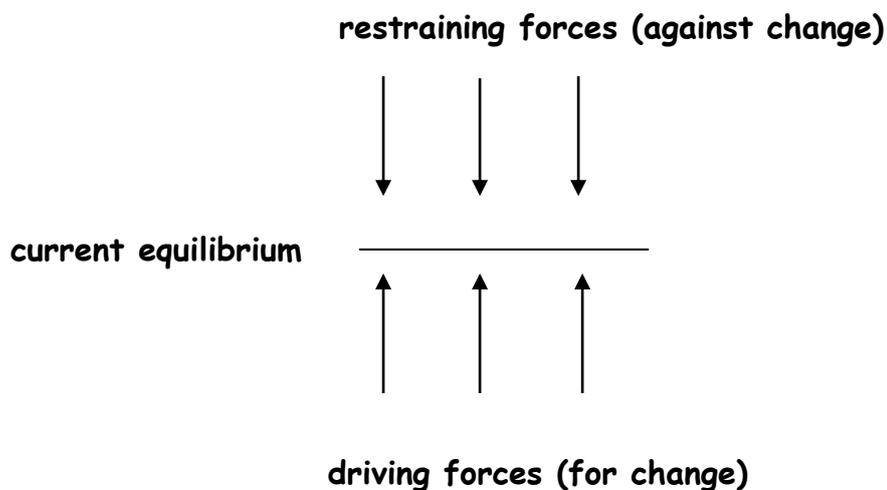
Sociologist Kurt Lewin developed a 'force field analysis' model (1951) which describes any current level of performance or being as a *state of equilibrium between the driving forces that encourage upward movement and the restraining forces that discourage it*. Essentially this means that a current equilibrium exists because the forces acting for change are balanced by the forces acting against change.

The **driving forces** are (usually) positive, reasonable, logical, conscious and economic.

The **restraining forces** are (usually) negative, emotional, illogical, unconscious and social/psychological.

Both sets of forces are very real and need to be taken into account when dealing with change, or managing change, or reacting to change.

Force field Analysis



Increasing the driving forces is not enough for change, as the restraining forces remain in place, and as long as they remain in place it becomes harder to use the driving forces. An analogy is when you push against a spring; the more you push, the harder it becomes and as soon as you stop pushing the spring reverts to its previous position (after having sprung past that point). Therefore unless both the driving and restraining forces are balanced a kind of yo-yo effect results; a change and then a reversion back, and then a change, and then a reversion back, and then a change, et cetera, et cetera. It's important to note that the restraining forces may not be conscious - i.e. they should not be regarded as being deliberate attempts to subvert change (although they may be).

Lewin suggested that change would be easier and longer lasting if the forces against change were reduced, rather than the forces for change being increased.

Lewin suggested that modifying the forces which maintain the status quo may be easier than increasing the forces for change.

Lewin's change model

Lewin's model has 3 steps:

1. **unfreezing** - reducing strength of forces which maintain current equilibrium
2. **moving** - developing new organisational values, attitudes and behaviours to help move the organisation on
3. **refreezing** - stabilizing after the changes have been made so that there's a new equilibrium.

Sometimes criticised because what if the organisation is in a fast moving environment and cannot afford to 'refreeze'? And does refreezing lead to it rapidly becoming staid and stale. Or what if it was already 'moving' and lacked stability? Lewin counters this by saying that the refreezing shouldn't be seen as being permanent, it may be very short term, but it's important to do it in order to bring some kind of stability to the organisation.