

Article 10 – Managing change

How do you manage change? Are you pro-active or reactive? Do you rely on the stick or the carrot? Do you relish conflict or shy away from it? Do you rely on the power of your position or do you set more store by your knowledge and expertise? Do you press on regardless or do you seek to understand the motivations of those who might resist it?

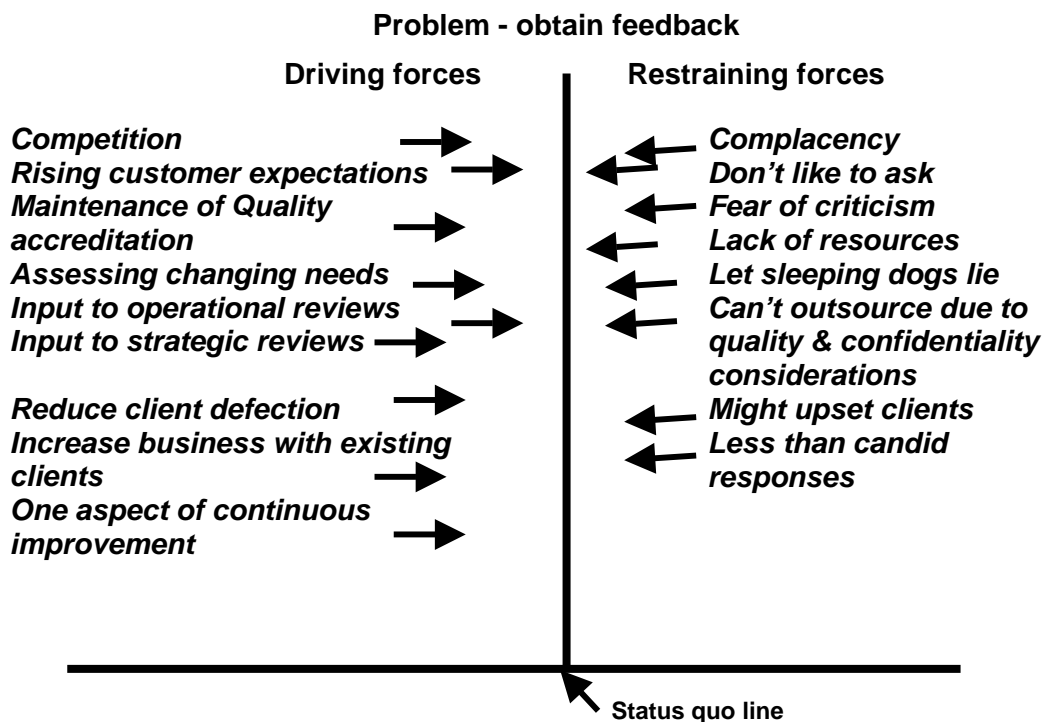
Whichever way you manage it, it's a pretty safe bet that achieving significant change is a lot harder than you ever imagined it would be. As someone once said – "no organisation is so screwed up that there isn't someone who likes it just the way it is"!

Many years ago, I worked for a large organisation that was struggling with that most fundamental of changes – cultural change. It was a painful process as the forces for and against waged an unremitting struggle. In my own sphere of work, I liked to see myself as an agent of change and I could never understand the depth of resistance with which many of my proposals were met.

Not that is until I became familiar with Force Field analysis.

Most business managers have heard of Frederick Taylor, the father of Scientific Management and Douglas McGregor, he of Theory X and Theory Y. Few have heard of Kurt Lewin, the Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany who believed that behaviour (B) was a function (f) of the person (p) and that person's environment (e) or $B = f(p,e)$. Lewin applied this formula to every kind of problem associated with the behaviour of individuals within organisations and it is on this theory that Force Field analysis is based.

Force Field Analysis



The problem chosen to illustrate Force Field analysis is that of encouraging prospective clients to conduct Customer Feedback Surveys. On the left are the forces for and on the right the forces against. These forces act in opposition to one another and dependent on their relative strength, they move the status quo line to the left or right. Lewin's observation was that where management represented the driving forces and employees the restraining ones, management's inclination was to attempt to move the status quo line by applying more and more force instead of achieving the same outcome by reducing the power of the restraining forces. The problem with this approach is that the forces opposing change do not weaken, they are simply overcome by the application of a greater force. However, unless that force can be permanently maintained, the longer term outcome is that as the driving forces diminish, the status quo line has a habit of returning to – or near – its original position. Although Lewin did not use this analogy, the status quo line resembles a door with a self-closing mechanism attached. In the first phase the driving forces are sufficiently strong to overcome the closing mechanism but as the force is removed when the door has been opened, the self-closing mechanism will shut it. Removing the closing mechanism is akin to reducing the restraining forces. The door will remain open or the status quo line will take up a new position on a permanent basis.

Thus in my example, effort would be far more effectively spent addressing the restraining forces rather than reinforcing the driving forces. I can show how the great majority of the client's customers will welcome the survey and be totally candid in their responses. Or that concern on the grounds of quality and confidentiality is groundless.

The key to the effective use of Force Field analysis is the ability of the proposer of change to understand the nature of the restraining forces that will oppose it and why. Once these have been determined, the next step is to devise the strategies that will reduce the resistance and the one strategy that is always effective is involving those whom you believe will oppose change in the change process itself.

As the consultant Rosabeth Moss-Kanter wrote in her book – *The Change Masters* – “It (change) is disturbing when it is done *to us*, exhilarating when done *by us*”.

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