

# FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS

## Introduction

Force Field Analysis is a systematic, transparent, objective and participative methodology that is effective in helping to identify forces that can constrain or promote change. A force field analysis is often a very helpful tool at the stage of project planning or identification. It is also a good tool for school based development planning.



Positive forces (sometimes referred to as "driving forces") promote change in the desired direction. Negative forces (sometimes referred to as "restraining forces") hold back change in the desired direction or can even reverse it.

Every force identified has the potential to suggest a future activity: whether a project activity, or an activity within, for example, a school development plan:

- What activity can we identify that will make a positive force stronger?
- What activity can we identify that will eliminate a negative force or reduce its strength?

Both of these approaches will lead to change in the desired direction.

Force Field Analysis can be a great workshop activity. Typically participants can attempt a force field analysis of a given situation in small groups (4 to 8 persons is ideal. It is better to split groups of more than 8 persons into two smaller groups). Groups can report back to a plenary session or display their work for others to view and comment on. It may be wished to produce a synthesis Force Field Analysis in plenary that incorporates the ideas of all groups.

## Practical Steps (How to conduct a Force Field Analysis):

The following step-by-step approach works extremely well in a workshop situation.

To make the explanation easier, "School Attendance" has been chosen as the topic for Force Field Analysis on this occasion. The technique will work for almost any area of investigation, however.

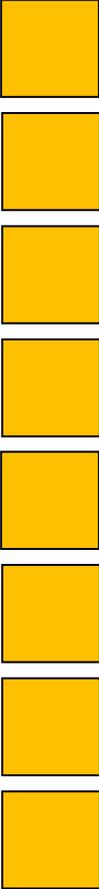
**Materials required:** flipchart paper, marker pens, post-its, "blutak" or other adhesive for displaying results.

### Stage 1:

Draw the matrix shown in Figure 1 on the next page on Flipchart paper. Use the whole of the sheet.

As a group activity, use "post-its" to brainstorm both the driving forces that promote school attendance and the restraining forces that undermine school attendance. Use one post-it for each force identified. Simply place the post-its in the left-hand or right-hand columns of the grid, as shown in Figure 1. (This activity usually takes 10-20 minutes).

*Figure 1: Stage 1 - Yellow squares represent "post-its"*

Restraining Forces	Driving Forces
 <p data-bbox="464 1563 512 1592">Etc</p>	 <p data-bbox="1082 1339 1129 1368">Etc</p>

## Stage 2:

After initial brainstorming has run out of steam, move the "post-its" close to either side of the centre line as shown in Figure 2 on the next page. Then, through, negotiation, try to agree the strength of each force and show the strength using an arrow: as also shown in Figure 2 on the next page.

## Interpreting and Acting on Results

Three types of situation can result when Stage 2 is completed:

On balance:

- Driving forces outweigh restraining forces = an improving situation;
- Restraining forces outweigh driving forces = a deteriorating situation;
- Restraining forces and driving forces are approximately equal: a static situation.

All three situations can be addressed by a project or through a school development plan. (For example, we may not be satisfied with the rate of improvement and want to accelerate this).

A Force Field Analysis is a particularly good technique for two reasons:

1. It highlights that there is more than one strategy available for promoting change: either reduce the strength of a restraining force; or increase the strength of a driving force. Both strategies will have the same result: increasing forward momentum.
2. It highlights that it is not necessary to solve everything to bring about change. Just adjusting one of the forces through a project intervention can be enough to shift the balance and bring about change.

A weakness of Force Field Analysis as conventionally practised is that it does not identify how easy or difficult it is to change the strength of the forces identified.

However, this weakness is easily overcome by the introduction of a third stage in the process:

## Stage 3:

Use the technique of "dotmocracy" (voting using dots) to identify forces that are good candidates for change. (For a further explanation of the "dotmocracy" technique, see separate guidance notes on "Dotmocracy". These can be found at [www.davidsmawfield.com/resources-practitioners](http://www.davidsmawfield.com/resources-practitioners)).

Give each group member, say, three votes. These can then be exercised by the placing of three dots. Let each group member choose the three forces (they can be either driving or restraining

forces or a combination of both) that he or she thinks are most susceptible to being changed through a project intervention or as part of a school development plan.

After everyone has voted, the force with the most number of dots is judged to be the best candidate for change. If there are only enough resources and time to focus on changing one force this is the one to choose. If there are enough resources and time to address two forces, select the force with the highest number of votes and the force that got the second highest number of votes, and so on.

In the context of a workshop, further discussion could ensue about what particular interventions could be used to bring about the changes that participants believe are possible.

Figure 3, at the end of these guidance notes, provides a partially worked example showing factors (i.e. forces) affecting "School Attendance". The forces identified, and the strength of these forces, are for illustration purposes only.

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Figure 2: Stage 2

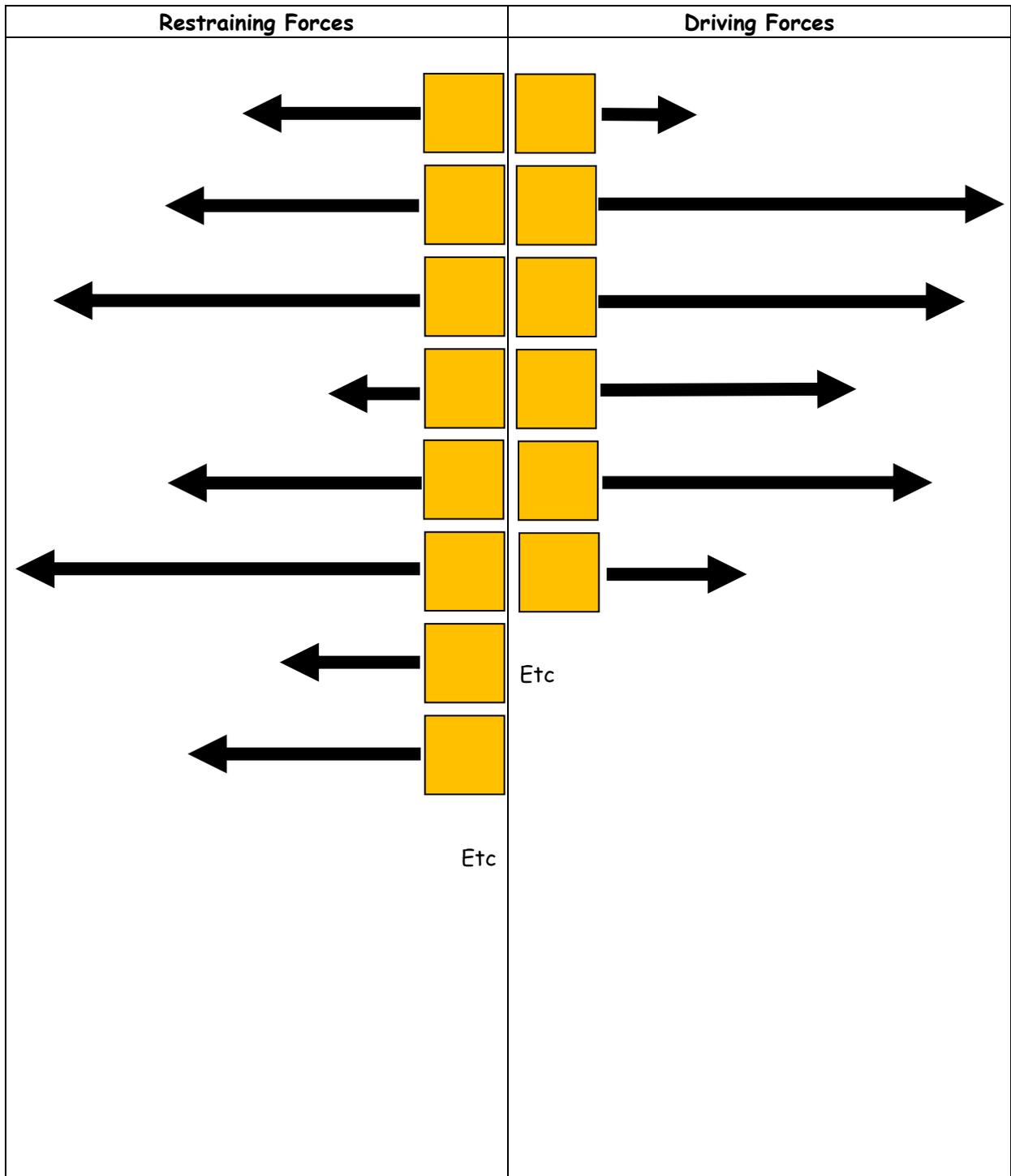


Figure 3: Partially Worked Example

