

2

Force-field analysis: identifying forces for and against change

Richard Montgomery

• Introduction

This note describes the use of force-field analysis which I first came across during an ODA-commissioned institutional appraisal course. Originally, this technique was intended as a workshop tool for analysing a static situation (to identify the forces which keep an institution in its present state). However, during two recent project visits it was used in a modified form to provide a way of drawing staff and stake-holders into the planning process, defining possible objectives and how to attain them. The fact that the two examples described here are very different (a non-formal education project and an urban environmental improvement project) suggests that the method might be valuable in a variety of contexts including village PRAs, and be useful to those interested in participatory planning generally.

In both examples there was a need to reflect on the present situation ("*where we are now*"), to identify an ideal future ("*where we want to be*"), and to assess the factors which may determine the feasibility of attaining an objective ("*can we get there, and if so how?*"). In both examples, the exercise was carried out using a diagram drawn by participants (see figures below), and once the exercise was under way the facilitators stood back and were confined to an occasional prompting role.

• Assessing rural non-formal schools in Bangladesh

While undertaking an evaluation of Concern Worldwide's primary school programme in Bangladesh in early 1994 it became evident that there was a pressing need for more non-formal

education (NFE) schools in the *haor* (low-lying, flood prone) areas in the north-east. Concern already has five pilot NFE schools, but is thinking about extending their activities. Community PRAs, which included wealth-ranking of households with school-age children, clearly showed that poorer families are not being served by existing government schools. More flexible school timings and curricula are needed for this target group.

Concern's five teacher trainers regularly come into contact with all existing schools, and therefore have both local level and broader knowledge of the programme. This group is based in Dhaka, but individuals circulate between both rural and urban schools to give in-service training. Conducting a force-field analysis with them revealed a range of positive and negative factors which they deemed important for deciding on how to expand the NFE project.

We first discussed the present situation of the five existing NFE schools which had a total of 30 teachers (working in a three-shift system). Most of the teachers are quite well qualified which meant that many are not from the villages in which they are teaching, most are men, and are being paid well by local standards. This latter point means that the schools are relatively costly. The teacher trainers then outlined an ideal future sometime early in the next century where there would be 50 schools and 300 teachers.

The brief definitions of "*where we are now*" and "*where we want to be*" in the future were then scribbled onto opposite ends of a large sheet of paper, with an arrow linking the two (see Figure 1). The trainers then set about discussing and drawing in positive and negative

forces, using arrows to indicate the direction of the forces. The resulting diagram took about two hours to create.

Out of the exercise came a recognition by all participants that a major task lay ahead. False expectations were not being raised because negative forces were being clearly identified, but the trainers remained optimistic that expansion was possible. They concluded that some positive forces could be accentuated as long as some changes to the programme were made. For example, the training unit could be expanded, new training courses devised, community-school relations could be strengthened by recruiting more local people and more women onto the staff, and school effectiveness could be increased by liaising with local government officials in planning school sites.

Conversely, some of the negative forces could be countered. Financial resources could be used more efficiently by reducing school unit costs, especially if less highly qualified teachers were recruited. Existing staff, potentially unhappy at new staffing policy, could be absorbed slowly by creating new training posts, a head-teachership for the larger schools and finding work in other projects, for example the urban schools.

Overall, the exercise led the trainers to suggest that any expansion be carefully phased. New schools, employing local teachers, needed to be opened on a pilot basis, in areas away from the old NFE schools (partly so that existing staff have more time to be absorbed 'naturally'). Expanding the project in the original areas should be delayed for some years. Liaison with local education officials was also highlighted, to create a 'satellite' system, enabling class III

NFE graduates to continue in government schools if they wished.

Throughout the exercise detailed notes of the discussion were taken and the ideas generated by the trainers' analysis were incorporated into the final evaluation report which was then circulated amongst Concern's staff, and is still under consideration by the organisation.

• **Cleaning-up Calcutta's transport sector**

While working on an appraisal mission for an urban environmental programme in Calcutta we wanted to involve NGOs and individuals in the preliminary project planning. Given that urban environmental improvement implies a vast range of potential sectors, we chose just one - the transport sector - as a dry-run for participatory planning.

The exercise was too brief (and the problem too large) for a fully satisfying outcome. However, while concrete plans failed to materialise, the principle of NGO participation in the project gained importance. The exercise therefore played a useful strategic role.

Calcutta suffers, like any large metropolis, from poor transport services. Particular problems are inefficient bus services, a collapsing tram system, and congestion caused by taxis and the growing car-ownership amongst the middle classes. Traffic congestion leads to chronic air pollution which has major health implications, especially for the more vulnerable such as the poor and children. Major problems with enforcing existing legislation (eg. on vehicle emissions) are also evident.

Figure 1. Teacher trainers' force-field analysis for expanding a rural non-formal school programme in Bangladesh

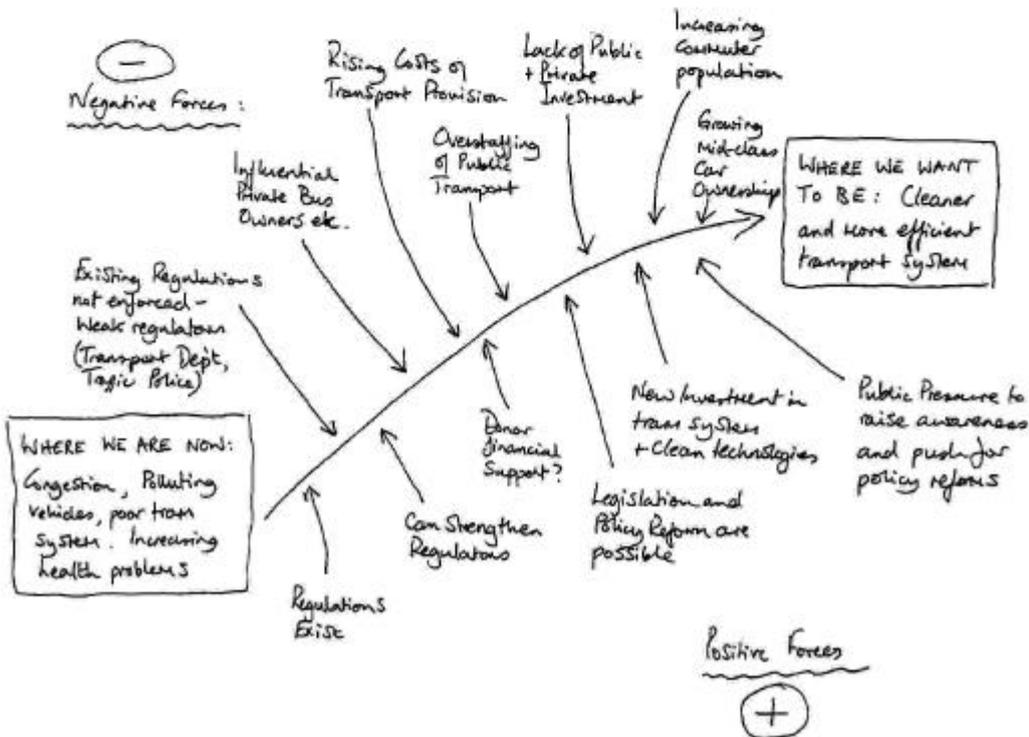
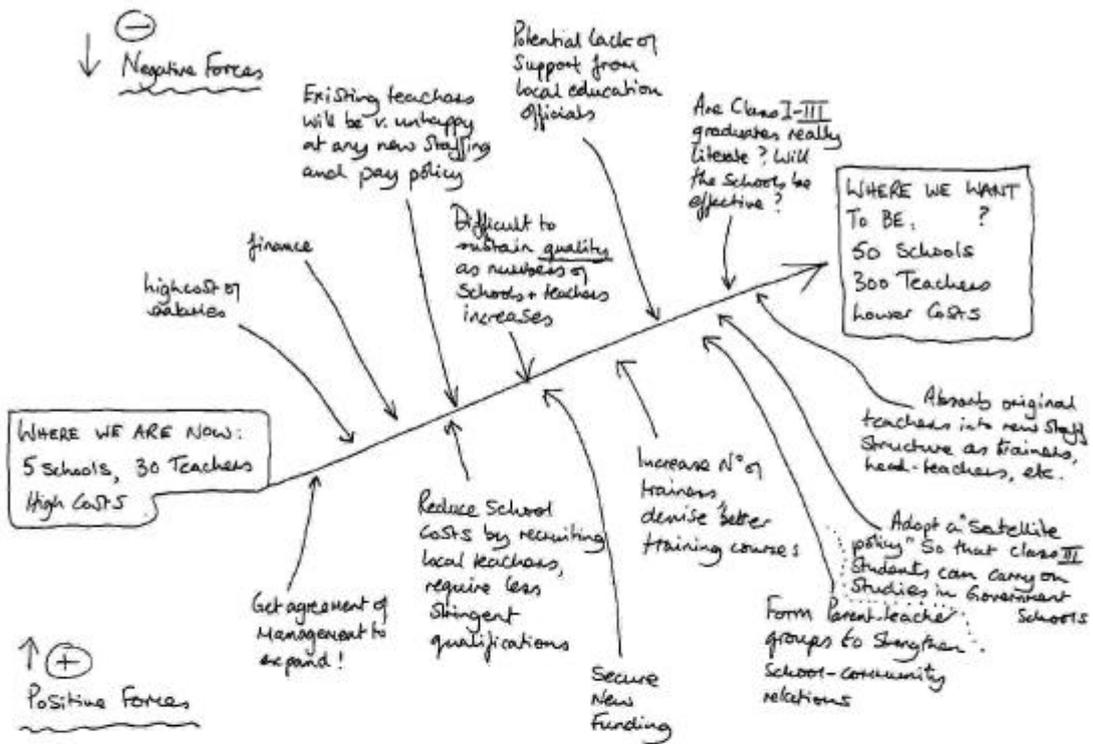


Figure 2. NGO and government representatives' analysis for cleaning-up Calcutta's transport system

This outline of the present situation was drawn up by a small group of both government and non-government organisation staff in a collective discussion. Both advocacy and development NGOs were represented in the group (people representing 'green' and low income groups' interests). All participants agreed that there was a serious need to develop a cleaner and more efficient metropolitan transport system over the next two decades. Forces acting for and against achieving this objective were then discussed and the outcome is shown in Figure 2.

Having outlined the various forces, the participants then considered how negative ones could be reduced, and the positive ones accentuated. Lack of finance could be off-set by attracting donor funds, devising local policies to attract private investment and create new pricing policies to encourage such investors. The need to increase the efficiency of the transport department was highlighted, so that existing legislation could be applied more effectively.

During the discussion the key role of public awareness (and pressure for change in policies) was highlighted. For this to be effectively stimulated more transparency in the Transport Department's planning process was suggested by NGO representatives. They pointed out that NGOs could contribute to this planning process, as well as to awareness-raising campaigns amongst various public constituencies and activities to gain the support of the press.

Out of this force-field analysis came a strong justification for NGO involvement in the improvement programme (not just transport sector planning), and a realisation that a formal consultative structure for NGO-government cooperation was needed. The exercise, by bringing together diverse interested groups, therefore appeared to further the principle of stakeholder participation in the overall project.

• **Variations on a theme**

The original force-field exercise outlined in the ODA course also suggested a checklist of questions for following up the initial analysis:

- What are the relative importance of the positive and negative forces (eg. can they

be ranked in terms of strength, ease of change or impact)?

- What are the reasons behind such rankings; and what implications do these have for the sort of action that can be taken?
- Which stakeholders have the most influence?
- What will happen if we don't achieve the desired objective(s)?

To these, one might add:

- Have the interests of other stakeholders (especially the less organised and more vulnerable) been taken into account during the analysis?
- Should the exercise be carried out with a different group of interested stakeholders to see what different objectives and perceptions they have?

• **Conclusions: wider applications of the exercise?**

Force-field analysis should not necessarily be confined to workshop situations. While both case studies above involved literate participants who could draw out the diagram themselves, there is no reason why people should not attempt to use the technique in other PRA situations. One analogy to illustrate this point is the use of time-lines. Force-field analysis is a little like doing a future time-line for forecasting the factors which will have to be considered if a desired objective is to be achieved. Just as time-lines can be constructed using symbols, counters or representative objects rather than text, so might force-field exercises be feasible for non-literate community groups.

In both the case studies, the final outcomes were not perfect by any means. In the Calcutta example the subject was very broad (the transport sector for 12 million people!), and difficult to handle in anything other than a general sense. In the Bangladesh example, the ideal objective also began to look a bit too grand, and it needed expanding from a simple

quantitative target to a more qualitative idea of what the schools should be trying to achieve. In fact, the discussion did lead to this. When the trainers started talking about school quality and the need to set up a satellite system with local government schools they were recognising that they should be developing their original objective. If we had had more time, perhaps the exercise could have been repeated with revised objectives in mind.

However, force-field analysis is a useful way of involving different people in the analysis of objectives and how they can be achieved (and not just the collection of data). It is therefore a potentially empowering tool. In the Bangladesh case study, the teacher trainers felt enthused by their contribution to the planning process. In the Calcutta case study the NGO participants felt that they had proved their importance to government representatives. Hopefully, the latter also increased their commitment to NGO involvement in the planning process.

If there are any *PLA Notes* readers with participatory planning tools similar to, or improving on, the above please drop me a line.

- **Richard Montgomery**, Centre for Development Studies, Singleton Park, Swansea SA2 8PP, UK.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Siddiqur Rahman, Education Programme Manager, Concern Worldwide (Bangladesh) and Ken Robson, independent institutional analyst, who helped facilitate the exercises in Bangladesh and Calcutta respectively.