

Using Force Field Analysis in Negotiation Planning

James L. Patterson, Ph.D., C.P.M., A.P.P., Associate Professor of Management
Western Illinois University – Quad Cities
309/762-9481; JL-Patterson2@wiu.edu

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Abstract. Professional negotiators have long sought more efficient and effective tools and techniques to provide a competitive advantage at the negotiating table. Using the long-established and well-recognized technique of force field analysis (FFA), which has its roots in the field of psychology, a new application is developed to assist negotiators in preplanning and implementing successful negotiation strategies. A brief background of FFA is presented, followed by a description of how this change management technique can be effectively utilized to facilitate the pre-negotiation planning phase, resulting in more favorable negotiation results and outcomes. FFA can be successfully used to identify, analyze, and prioritize the influencing forces driving and opposing a negotiation settlement and their potential effects in order to develop appropriate negotiation strategies and tactics in order to maximize positive influences and mitigate negative ones.

Background. Negotiation is something that all people, personally and professionally, perform daily in a wide variety of settings. Children negotiate with their parents. Buyers negotiate with suppliers. Governments negotiate trade agreements and political pacts with other countries. Labor negotiates with management. Even though the context may vary depending on the situation, many of the basic elements of negotiation are generally consistent. Each negotiating party has something that the other party needs or wants.

Negotiation has been defined in a number of ways. "Negotiation is a basic means of getting what you want from others. It is back-and-forth communication designed to reach an agreement when you and the other side have some interests that are shared and others that are opposed" (Fisher et al, p. xvii). "[B]argaining is like the competitive haggling over price that happens during a yard sale or flea market, whereas negotiation is a more formal process that occurs when parties are trying to find a mutually acceptable solution to a complex conflict" (Lewicki et al, pp. 5-6). "Negotiation is a decision-making process by which two or more people agree how to allocate scarce resources" (Thompson, p. 2).

As can be seen in the above definitions, conflict, or the presence of opposing interests, is at the very center of any negotiation. Conflict, therefore, can be defined as a condition of the relationship between the parties in which one or more of the parties' expectations regarding the relationship are not being achieved or are reasonably not expected to be achieved in the foreseeable future. Negotiation involves seeking information regarding the other party's stated position and the interests underlying them through an iterative process of discovery and due diligence.

The problem is that only one side in a negotiation has "known" information; the needs, wants, and interests of the other side must be assumed and estimated, hence the basis of the conflict between the parties. For many negotiators, the requisite skills to identify and resolve this inherent conflict are neither readily apparent nor easily recognized. This requires that an

effective negotiator engage in significant preparation activity and fact-finding prior to the actual negotiation in order to develop appropriate and useful data to offset this lack of knowledge of the other party. Failure to do so can be catastrophic to the outcome of the negotiation.

Paraphrasing a principle commonly espoused in real estate, the three most important things in any negotiation are: preparation, preparation, and preparation. However, for a host of reasons most negotiators find it difficult to devote the time necessary to prepare adequately (Shell). Therefore, negotiators seek out those tools and techniques that allow them to more effectively utilize the preparation time and effort they do have in order to reach acceptable negotiation outcomes.

This paper suggests one such useful technique, force field analysis, to accomplish this. The basic premise of FFA is that, for every actual or perceived outcome in a negotiation, there are certain forces or influences that drive or promote the desired outcome, while there are other forces that serve to resist, alter, or delay the desired outcome. FFA is essentially a derivative of Newton's second law which states "That for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction." Using FFA can help the negotiator anticipate missing information and prepare appropriate strategies to uncover and/or confirm it.

One can easily think of negotiation as a change management process. Successfully negotiated outcomes often require the parties to change their stated positions or reconsider their underlying interests in order to reach a favorable settlement. To effectively manage this process, one should consider undertaking the following series of steps when working towards the desired outcome(s). To accomplish change effectively, the negotiator must also consider the key stakeholders that will naturally be affected by any negotiated agreement. FFA can be an effective preparation tool to consider the forces driving and resisting attainment of the desired outcome, as well as their possible effects on the negotiation process and the parties involved with or affected by the agreement.

Generally accepted change processes include three stages or sets of activities (Evans and Lindsay). These serve as the basis for using FFA as an effective change management technique. First, the existing state of affairs (or baseline case) must be established, and the desired state or outcome needs to be clearly defined, in addition to identifying those forces favoring the change and those opposing the desired state. The next set of activities involves managing the inherent resistance that is likely to be encountered while seeking the desired negotiated outcome. Lastly, this desired outcome (agreement) must then be institutionalized and perpetuated by getting the other party to commit to and follow up on what was agreed.

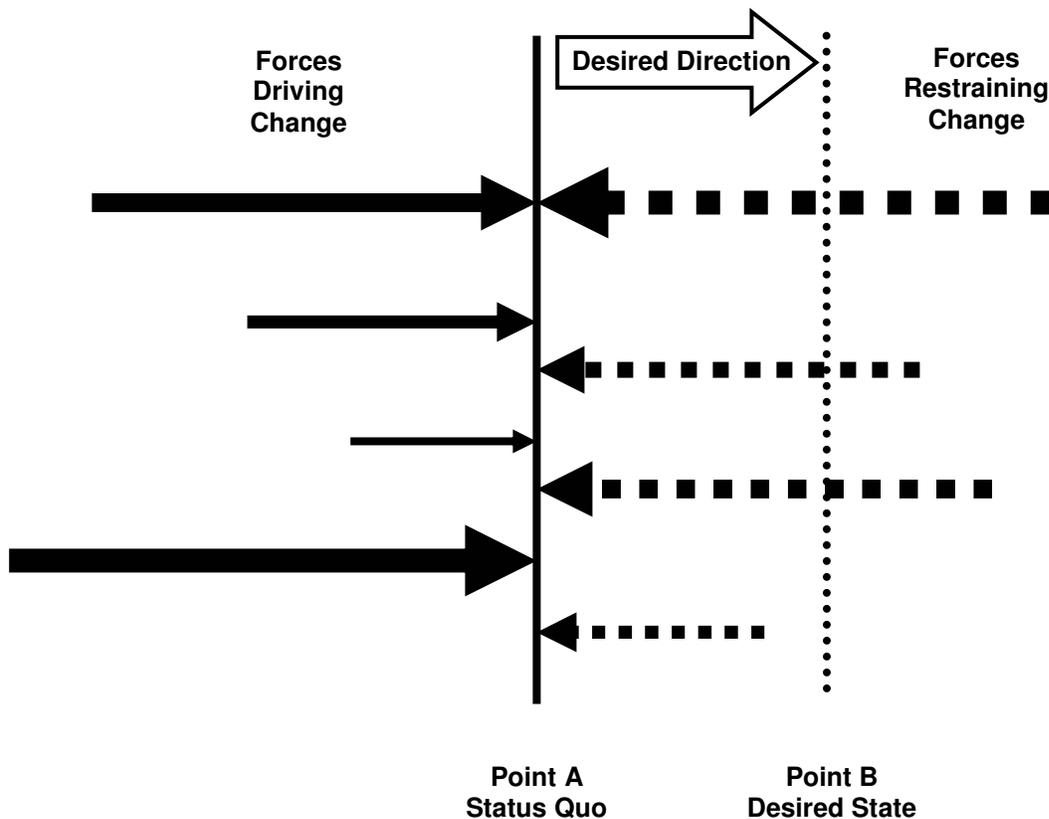
People resist change for three primary reasons. The first is uncertainty. When a negotiated proposal is put forth, it likely threatens the status quo of the relationship with ambiguity and the unfamiliar. Since change causes deviation from the known or expected, the other party may react negatively and resist the change. The second cause of resistance to change is concerned with the risk of losing something of value to which the negotiator already has access. The greater the perceived risk within the status quo, the greater resistance that will be exhibited by the other party. The final cause of resistance to change refers to the negotiator believing that the proposed change will not be in the best interests of the negotiator's organization or relationship between the negotiators. Incompatibility with the negotiator's

organizational beliefs, norms, resources, or procedures will lead to resistance to the proposed change.

Description of the FFA Technique in Negotiation. Force field analysis is essentially a visual representation of the forces favoring or opposing a specific change or a method of weighing the various pros and cons of a preferred negotiation outcome on a given issue. In the FFA model, a force is defined as the representation of the various influences, i.e., personal, interpersonal, situational, and environmental, that surrounds the interaction between the negotiating parties, not any physical manifestation.

All negotiation situations can be viewed as being in temporary equilibrium, a delicate balance between driving and opposing forces. A negotiation attempts to adjust or mitigate the balance between these forces to move towards an acceptable outcome to which all parties can agree. A successful outcome on any given negotiated issue (i.e., change) involves ensuring that the driving forces outweigh the opposing forces or barriers (see Figure 1) in such a way that the preferred outcome (or a new state of equilibrium) is achieved (Moody). Various negotiation influence strategies and tactics can then be employed to build up or support the driving forces while eliminating or mitigating the opposing forces from the other side of the negotiation.

Figure 1
The Basic Force Field Analysis Diagram



Driving and restraining forces in a commercial negotiation setting could include such external or situational influences as change in the marketplace, time available, relative economic power of the negotiating parties, generally known or third-party verified facts, and visibility of the negotiation to key stakeholders. Interpersonal or individual influences could include the negotiator's personality type, position in the organization, physical presence, reputation, age, experience, gender, personal power, or team membership if a negotiating team structure is utilized.

How to Use FFA to Prepare for a Negotiation. Using the FFA technique allows a negotiator to identify and focus on what forces support a given issue and what forces resist it. It is very useful in addressing the subjective issues typically found in a negotiation and determining what appropriate strategies, tactics, and information are likely to work to reach the desired outcome for that issue. However, a negotiator must realize that the other party also has its driving forces pushing for its own preferred outcomes and needs to anticipate and prepare for them.

Effectively using FFA involves a series of steps for each negotiation issue. The greater the number of negotiation issues, the greater the number of driving and opposing forces that must be considered. Note that each individual issue can have its own FFA. First of all, the negotiator must identify and clearly state the current situation, baseline case, and desired outcome. Be specific, and write it down. Then the negotiator needs to identify each of the forces that is either driving or resisting the proposed outcome. Thirdly, the negotiator must analyze each force thoroughly, asking the following questions. "Is the force valid?" "What is the impetus (interest) underlying the apparent force?" "How could it be changed or overcome?"

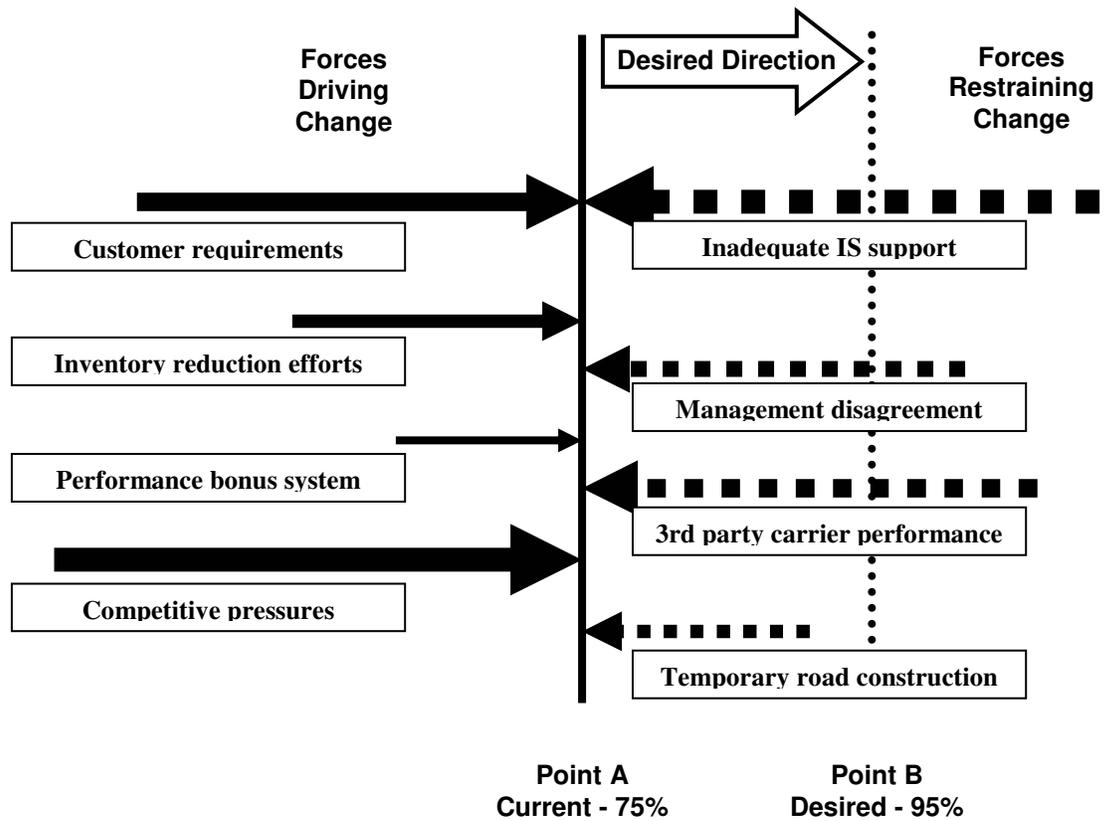
Once this identification process is completed, the negotiator must then determine the relative strength of each force (driving and opposing) using a Likert-type (from 1 to 7) or a low-medium-high scale to determine the relative importance or priority of each force. Here, the FFA's graphical representation of the various forces is useful in helping the negotiator visualize both the positive and negative influences that are likely to affect each negotiation issue faced at the table, as well as their relative strength or influence. In Figure 1, larger, longer, and/or wider arrows represent the strength of each force.

Figure 2 is an example of some of the various driving and opposing forces that could be faced in a typical supplier performance negotiation between a buyer and a supplier. The same kind of analysis can be applied in virtually any kind of commercial negotiation. In this case, one can easily see the most important and/or critical forces that must be addressed if the desired negotiated outcome is to be achieved. Point A represents the status quo or current condition where the supplier's on-time delivery performance of 75% needs improvement. Point B represents the desired on-time delivery performance level of 95%. Note that the negotiator must consider the actual positions that may be presented at the table, as well as their underlying interests, when analyzing the various forces.

Once the negotiator has listed and adequately analyzed each of the driving and opposing forces for a given issue, he/she should then develop appropriate strategies to either bolster or increase the driving forces while reducing or mitigating the opposing ones. One of the benefits of FFA is that the visual diagram allows the negotiator to easily summarize all of the various influences facing a given issue in a negotiation. It also serves as a written reminder of the

predetermined goals and objectives to the negotiator during the negotiation itself. As new information is uncovered during the process of negotiating, it is not difficult to update the FFA diagram.

Figure 2
FFA for Supplier On-Time Delivery Performance Negotiation



However, there are several caveats that the proactive negotiation planner must consider in order to effectively use the FFA technique. For example, the negotiator must ensure that all significant forces and influences (both positive and negative) are included. This may involve some type of cross-functional, team-based brainstorming session to adequately flesh out all of the relevant influences affecting the negotiation. Omitting even one can have deleterious effect on the proposed outcome.

Likewise, simply bolstering the existing driving forces can strengthen existing or develop new restraining forces. Therefore, it is very important to find the appropriate strategies and tactics needed to reduce the restraining forces rather than just simply overpowering them. Since negotiation is always between people, one must always consider the reactions of the other negotiator when developing strategies and tactics to deal with these forces. Developing FFA skills can make any negotiator better prepared and more confident because of the greater knowledge of the circumstances and other party that are developed through the planning process.

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