

Lake Washington Human Resource Association

**2011 Symposium**

***The Transformative HR Leader***

# **COMMON TRAPS OF INFLUENCE LEADERS**

A presentation by

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## Treating an adaptive challenge as a technical problem

### Background

Companies and organizations wrestle with two kinds of problems: technical problems and adaptive challenges. Technical problems are those familiar problems for which the organization already has tools to solve. Examples include handling customer complaints or dealing with a supply problem. Adaptive challenges are the more difficult problems that require a change in “business-as-usual.” They require changes in behaviors, values, roles and approaches to work. Examples of adaptive challenges include a new, major threat to the organization or entry into a new, unfamiliar market.

Addressing adaptive challenges often fundamentally changes the company or organization.

Influence leaders are accustomed to handling technical problems, but the hardest—and most important—work is in addressing adaptive challenges.

The single biggest failure of leadership is to treat adaptive challenges like technical problems. If facing an adaptive challenge, the influence leader must influence and lead using adaptive leadership principles.

### Strategies

1. “Get on the balcony”
2. Diagnose the nature of the problem (Technical? Adaptive? Both?)
3. Maintain disciplined attention
4. Give the work back to the people

### Background

Anyone acting in any role is authorized to do some things and not others. *Formal authorization* comes from the people above you in the hierarchy. *Informal authorization* comes from peers and subordinates who want you to step into some kind of role or perform some function or task.

Authorization is *passive* if general tasks or areas of responsibility are just “expected” of someone in your position. *Active* authorization means you have the authority to do specific, and often risky, tasks.

Because the influence leader seeks to improve the organization and its performance overall, the influence leader often acts on the edges of their authorization. But they get into trouble if they stray too far from their formal and informal authorization, or if they confuse passive authorization for active authorization.

### Strategies

1. Seek authorization. Ask for explicit authorization, expressly identifying what you’re authorized to do and what you’re not
2. Clarify roles with the sponsor

### Background

In US culture, we have a bias toward action. Unfortunately, this “ready-fire-aim” approach wastes resources, energy and goodwill. In order to take effective action, the influence leader needs to find the right levers and pressure points.

To find those levers and pressure points, the need to act must be balanced with clear-eyed analysis. This does not mean getting mired in “analysis paralysis” but more like a 15-30 minute back of the envelope exercise to help you make sure you are making investments of time, money and effort in changing things that will pay off in real results.

### Strategies

1. Force field analysis
2. Remove/reduce restraints
3. Add/increase drivers
4. Convert restraints to drivers

## Background

As important as tangible results are, they are rarely worth damaging relationships that you need to achieve future results. As an influence leader, you need to attend to both *results* (the “what” or “content”) as well as *relationships and goodwill* (the “how” or “process”).

People want to be treated with respect. They need to be given information. They want their concerns to be heard and addressed. People need to be given the opportunity to influence what happens to them. And, they should clearly understand what’s expected of them.

## Strategies

1. Recognize and address process complaints
2. Clarify who’s deciding
3. Close the loop with people who give input
4. Give the rationale for the decision
5. Explain expectations and implications of decisions

## Background

One of the common errors people make is to assume that others understand a situation or need as well as they do. Usually this is *not* the case.

The belief that others see the world like you do is called the “false consensus effect” in cognitive psychology.

Influence leaders must invest time in talking to people. On the one hand, they need to learn the context as others see it by collecting data and observing patterns. On the other hand, they need to explain the context—as they see it—to others.

A key role of influence leaders is to identify the trends, crises, potential crises, or major opportunities confronting the company or organization.

Other people will not support your ideas unless they know **why**—*Why do we need to change?* People need to be given a chance to understand the organizational, political and economic realities.

## Strategies

1. Lay out the situation as you see it
2. Invest in educating others—especially your authorizers
3. Get them in direct contact with the “problem”

## Background

When we observe anything (data, behavior, words or body language) we also interpret it. We decide what it means; we give it meaning. We make judgments; we come to conclusions. All these interpretations, judgments, conclusions, or assumptions are our “story.” What we observe doesn’t come with a story; it has only the story we give it.

Naturally, we react to and act upon the stories we tell ourselves. Most of the time, this works out fine. However, for the influence leader, there is a big danger: We can get *too attached* to our story. We start to see our story as “fact” when it’s just a “story.”

Stories cause us to filter out critical, helpful data. We don’t see their influence on our emotions; we take action too quickly. If the story “makes sense” we don’t examine it further; we get too confident about our story.

If you keep telling yourself the same story, if you keep telling others the same story, if you resist others’ attempts to question your story—*your story is limiting your effectiveness.*

## Strategies

1. Separate the facts from the stories
2. Tell the rest of the story
3. Encourage testing; be open to revising your story
4. Lead with the facts, then the story

# TECHNICAL PROBLEMS VS. ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES

*The single biggest failure of leadership is to treat adaptive challenges like technical problems.*

## TECHNICAL PROBLEMS

1. Easy to identify
2. Often lend themselves to routine solutions using skills and experience readily available
3. Often solved by an authority or expert
4. Require change in just one or a few places; often contained within organizational boundaries
5. People are generally receptive to technical solutions
6. Solutions can often be implemented quickly—even by edict

## ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES

1. Difficult to identify (easy to deny)
2. Require changes in values, beliefs, roles, relationships, and approaches to work
3. People with the problem do the work of solving it
4. Require change in numerous places; usually cross organizational boundaries
5. People try to avoid the work of “solving” the adaptive challenge
6. “Solutions” require experiments and new discoveries; they can take a long time to implement and cannot be implemented by edict

## EXAMPLES

- Take medication to lower blood pressure
- Implement electronic ordering and dispensing of medications in hospitals to reduce errors and drug interactions
- Increase penalty for drunk driving
- Change lifestyle to eat healthy, get more exercise and lower stress
- Encourage nurses and pharmacists to question and even challenge illegible or dangerous prescriptions by physicians
- Raise teens’ awareness of the dangers and effects of drunk driving and use peer pressure

Adapted from Ronald A. Heifetz & Donald L. Laurie, “The Work of Leadership,” *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 1997; and Ronald A. Heifetz & Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, Harvard Business School Press, 2002

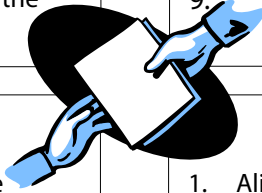
# ROLES IN CHANGE

## EXECUTIVE SPONSOR

1. Relentlessly communicates a clear vision, direction and goals, as well as the importance and scope of the change
2. Grasps the organizational and human impact of the change
3. Strengthens and builds key relationships (e.g., listening to needs and concerns) while maintaining focus on the vision, direction and goals
4. Clarifies roles, responsibilities and decision making
5. Provides resources
6. Monitors progress
7. Able and willing to deliver consequences (both positive and negative) if necessary
8. Remains tenacious and resilient; in it for the long haul

## SUSTAINING SPONSOR

1. Aligns with the purpose and goals of the change
2. Asks questions, shares reactions and gives input
3. Commits to and reinforces the change publicly and privately
4. Seeks clarity about their own role, authority, responsibilities, and decision making
5. Communicates expectations and gives direction to implementers
6. Provides resources
7. Monitors progress
8. Able and willing to deliver consequences (both positive and negative) if necessary
9. Remains tenacious and resilient; in it for the long haul



## IMPLEMENTER

1. Aligns with the purpose and goals of the change; aligns with executive and sustaining sponsors
2. Seeks clarity about their own role and responsibilities, and decision making
3. Communicates needs and concerns to sponsors, including information about issues that block or impede progress
4. Shows initiative and takes action to implement the change

## CHANGE AGENT

1. Aligns with the purpose and goals of the change; aligns with executive sponsor
2. Asks questions, shares reactions and gives input
3. Seeks clarity about their own role and responsibilities, and decision making
4. Communicates needs and concerns to sponsors, including information about issues that block or impede progress
5. Provokes action by pointing out gaps between the current state and the desired state; stimulates thinking and action by sponsors and implementers
6. Builds strong relationships with and among everyone involved in the change

## ADVOCATE

1. Identifies needs or opportunities for better results
2. Seeks a sponsor to support and implement the idea

Adapted from the paper *Alignment of Roles in Change* by Judy Heinrich, which was adapted in turn from the work of Daryl Conner, *Managing at the Speed of Change*, Random House, 2006

# FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS

Kurt Lewin

## Instructions

### PURPOSE

Identify which forces are most important to focus on as you work to achieve your vision.

### STEPS

1. Identify the goal or desired state and write it in the right side of the diagram.
2. Without editing or censoring yourself, quickly brainstorm the driving and restraining forces on a sheet of paper (or flip chart) divided down the middle. On the left, write driving forces that advance you toward your vision. On the right, write restraining forces that keep you from achieving it. (The line down the center represents the status quo; the driving and restraining forces are pushing against each other, holding you in place.)
3. Make sure you've got everything: individual, group, organizational, system-level, community, political, economic, behaviors, attitudes, etc. Add additional forces throughout the exercise.
4. Combine similar items; start on a new sheet of paper if necessary.
5. Circle or underline the *most significant* driving and restraining forces.
6. Analyze your diagram:
  - a. Which existing driving forces could be increased?
  - b. What new driving forces could be brought into play?
  - c. Which restraining forces could be decreased?
  - d. Which restraining forces could be removed entirely?
  - e. Can any restraining forces be converted into driving forces?
  - f. Which new restraining forces might come into play (and for which you should prepare)?

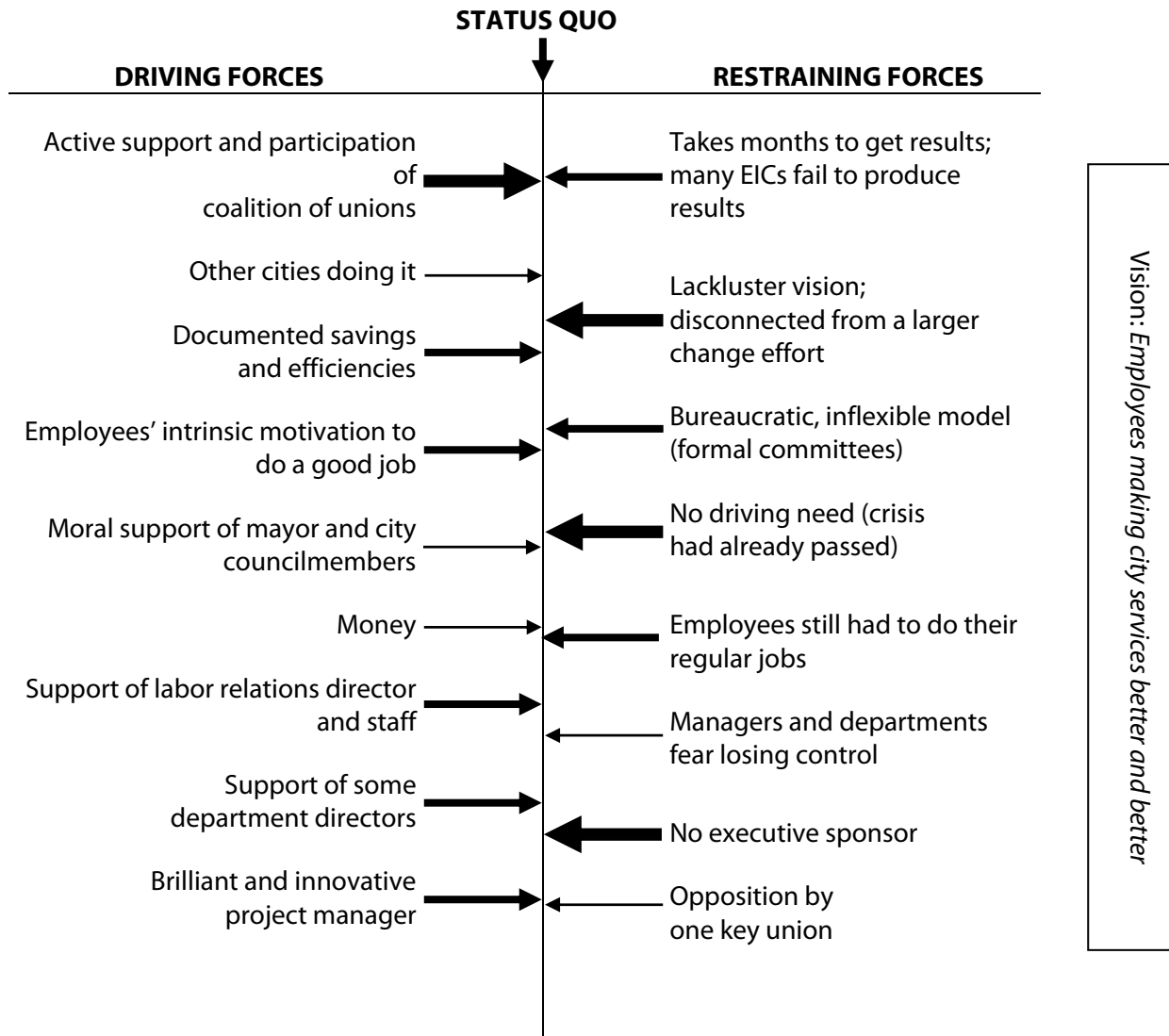
### NOTE

- You need not remove all the restraining forces to move forward; only a few changes may be needed to tip the balance.

# FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS EXAMPLE

Kurt Lewin

## Employee Involvement Program



# EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT™ MODEL

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## **1** Share the context and problem

- a. Give people the whole story
- b. Allow for people's learning curve
- c. State who will make the decision and when
- d. Prepare to hear alternative problems or data

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## **2** Gather input

- a. Know what kind of input you want
- b. Craft open and neutral questions
- c. Choose who to involve
- d. Create forum(s) to collect and analyze the input
- e. Summarize the input and feed it back

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## **3** Make the decision

- a. Adhere to the timeline and designated decision maker
- b. Prepare a rationale based on the input

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## **4** Present your decision and rationale

- a. Take people through your thought process
- b. Provide ample opportunity to ask questions
- c. Float no trial balloons
- d. Respond constructively to challenges and complaints

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## **5** Describe your expectations and the implications

- a. Tell people what happens now that the decision is made
  - b. Expect "rubs" to emerge
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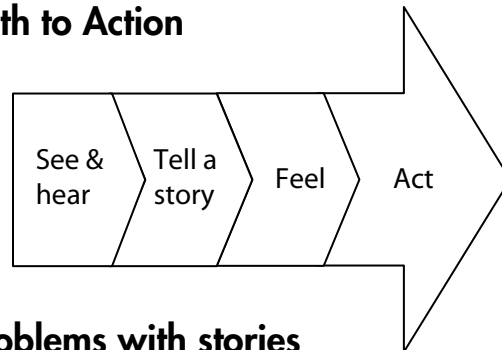
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# MASTER YOUR STORIES

*Others don't make you mad; YOU make you mad.*

## Path to Action



*If we can find a way to tell a different story, we can feel differently and act differently.*

## Problems with stories

1. They cause us to filter out critical, helpful data
2. We don't see their influence on our emotions; we move through Path to Action too quickly
3. When in doubt, we tend to jump to the worst conclusion: *What's the worst, most hurtful way I can take this?*
4. If the story "makes sense" we don't examine it further; we get too confident about our story

## You know you're the problem when...

- You're stuck in anger, self-justification, and blame.
- You keep telling yourself the same story.
- You keep telling others the same story.
- You resist others' attempts to question your story.

*You can either act on your emotions or have them act on you. Master them or be held hostage by them.*

*Stories include:*

- *Conclusions*
- *Judgments*
- *Assumptions*
- *Attributions*

## FIRST TASK: Separate facts from the story

- Not as easy as it sounds; we are fond of our stories
- Facts are behaviors (words, gestures, etc.) or physical data *that could be captured on videotape*
- Everything else is part of your story

Adapted from the *Crucial Conversations Mastery Course* and Kerry Patterson, et al., *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High*, McGraw Hill, 2002, ISBN 0-07-140194-6. Visit [www.crucialconversations.com](http://www.crucialconversations.com).

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# ERIC SVAREN

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Eric Svaren is founder and principal of Groupsmith, a Seattle-based firm specializing in helping leaders and teams *get traction*—by facilitating change, clarifying strategy, strengthening trust, and improving communication. He helps individuals, teams and entire enterprises achieve breakthrough results. Eric is particularly known for his work in *team rescue* (intensive intervention with teams and groups of all sizes) and *influence leadership*.

A master facilitator, Eric also designs and facilitates retreats and off-sites, conflict resolution, teambuilding, regulation negotiation, and labor contract bargaining.

In addition to his consulting and facilitation work, Eric teaches mid-career professionals for the Cascade Center for Public Service and the Executive Masters of Public Affairs program both at the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs at the University of Washington. He has developed unique workshops on Leading without Authority and Dangerous Decisions (how to involve people in decision making).

Clients include a wide array of companies, higher education institutions, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and health care providers. Among them are the City of Seattle, Eddie Bauer, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Harborview Medical Center, Housing Development Consortium, Housing Resources Group, Johnson & Johnson, King County, Law Enforcement Support Agency (LESA), Lifelong AIDS Alliance, NPower, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Port of Seattle, Seattle Housing Authority, The Seattle Public Library, Sound Transit, State of Washington, Teamsters Local 117, Unitus, University of Washington, Washington State University, Weyerhaeuser, and Woodland Park Zoo. He has also presented at dozens of conferences, such as the National Labor Management Conference, the Housing Washington conference, and the Public Sector Performance Conference.

Before launching Groupsmith in 2000, Svaren managed a joint labor-management program for the City of Seattle designed to increase employee participation in the improvement of service delivery. He also worked as a public policy analyst for Seattle city councilmember Tom Weeks and city departments, and as a human services planner for a regional nonprofit. He earned his Master's Degree in organizational sociology and social psychology from the University of Washington.

Eric has served as board member and officer for several non-profit organizations. He was chair of curriculum and programs at Leadership Eastside and is a founding faculty member. He also provides pro bono services to non-profit organizations.

Eric lives with his wife, Alice Shobe, and their sons, Carl and Beck.