CHAPTER 5

Workforce Forecasting and Planning

**Experiential Learning Activities (EL)**

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# EL 1: Case: Understanding the future job market using scenario planning

In this exercise, construct a story around each scenario describing what the economic environment and labour force will look like. Start with the Starship and then repeat the process for the Titanic, Bounty, and Windjammer. The goal is to understand each environment and define the strategies and objectives for each environment. With each scenario ask questions related to the characteristics of the environment. Before you begin, consider adapting some of the following questions or adding other ones that you feel are relevant to understanding the labour market you will face:

1. Identify jobs or the occupations you want to work in such as human resource manager, computer engineer or policing. What are the scenarios you will face if you wanted to work in one of these areas? What are the competencies and strategies that are important to finding a job in your field?

2. Define the dimensions (social and economic) and the possible scenarios that affect your recruitment in the labour market.

## Added information and questions for Scenario Exercise

Assume you were allowed to ask four questions of the future. These questions should be relevant to the purpose of the scenario exercise which is to understand the different environments that might unfold and the skills and abilities students will need. What four questions would you ask to give you a better understanding of the future?

Some of the questions you ask might concern technological changes, the conflicts and terrorist events around the world, and the ability of economies to sustain health care and pension systems. In responding to these questions a number of uncertainties will arise such as the role of unions in the public sector, whether the education system can provide the right skills, how long the jobless rate will continue in certain sectors, and the degree of polarization in the distribution of wealth and income. It might be possible to define statistics indicating fiscal pressures, the rate of economic change, biases in hiring, and the shrinking of government services.

The scenario building might begin by writing short mini-snippet’s (stories) which combine 2-3 events and then mega-snippet’s. For example, some of the stories might describe “dark days” where people are not getting jobs or “deteriorating educational standards” where government and companies are not recognizing the quality of educational degrees. These stories from various people provide a rich array of different types of scenarios and each of them can be used in providing a perspective on the future. However, the magic is to provide some way to group the stories to identify key dimensions that might be useful for further explanation.

1. You might prepare a powerpoint presentation and report. It is useful to summarize your findings using the following structure:

* + Introduction describing the issue
  + Review of the framework describing social and economic dimensions
  + Review characteristics of different scenarios
  + Method
  + Findings 1: What would the world look like within each scenario
  + Findings 2: What competencies and strategies would practitioners and students need in each scenario
  + Discussion: Rating of the scenarios which are most likely. What would be useful vision, competencies, and strategies for responding.

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# EL 2. Applying the force-field framework

The force-field framework suggests that many organizational events can be best understood by recognizing the forces affecting them. That is, with any change, there are a range of enhancing/facilitating and inhibiting forces, each affect each other. The interacting facilitating and restraining forces are in a *state of equilibrium,* [[1]](#endnote-1)and they are relatively stable within themselves.

The idea of the force field originates from Kurt Lewin and his ideas on field theory which indicates that to understand and predict behavior ‘the person and the environment have to be considered as one constellation of independent factors.’ [[2]](#endnote-2) Using field theory ideas, Lewin and others developed topographical maps, or egg shaped diagrams showing interrelated areas, and arrows indicating the direction of a force toward and away from a goal.

The force field framework illustrating enhancing and inhibiting forces in relation to a goal was later used by others as a way to illustrate Lewin’s field theory idea illustrating interacting forces in relationship to a goal. In the model below, the length of the arrows is a proxy indicator of the strengths of a force.



For example, if we want to understand the competencies needed in the future (the goal), we might recognize that there are trends/forces which enhance and inhibit the need or importance of certain competencies. For example, in getting a job in a key European (or other country such as Australia) organization, there are two types of trends/forces:

* + Facilitating forces/trends affecting **demand** for student employability
  + Impeding forces/trends encouraging student **supply** or employability

The force field framework is a way of illustrating the array of forces and their strengths. When we recognize these forces, we can take steps to respond to them.

The force field framework suggests that the facilitating and impeding forces exist in a quasi-stationary equilibrium. The *equilibrium principle is* partially explained by laws of physics which suggest that a body will remain at rest when the sum of all the forces operating upon it is zero. To get motion or change, forces have to be set in motion to move it in a certain direction and it will likely do so if the restraining forces are not overwhelming. In the same way, if we want to respond to some of the trends affecting employability, we have to recognize that there are facilitating and inhibiting forces. So, while there are forces enhancing our employability, there are also forces impeding employability.

In order to effectively implement our goal, we have to deal with the forces. Otherwise, the goal will not get implemented. Social scientists use this principle in understanding the process of change in organizations. In organizations, there is constant inertia or resistance to new changes that affect individual habits and group norms. This does not mean that organizational systems (or individuals) are never modified by change, but that they are continually adjusting to the forces surrounding the change.

In thinking of the force field framework for implementing an organization’s strategies and objectives, there is a need to take into account the stresses and strains (forces) which disrupt the normal equilibrium. Some these forces will act in impeding the implementation of the goal and other might be helpful in facilitating the change.

The force field model might be applied through the following steps:

1. Identify the strategic theme or goal.

2. Identify the facilitating and impeding forces that affect the implementation of a goal (i.e., such as getting a job in a certain area). Facilitating forces are those that enhance your implementation. Impeding or restraining forces are those which inhibit or make it more difficult to implement the goal.

3. Identify the strengths of each facilitating and impeding force. You can indicate this by the length of the arrows. (Longer arrows indicate more important or stronger forces.)

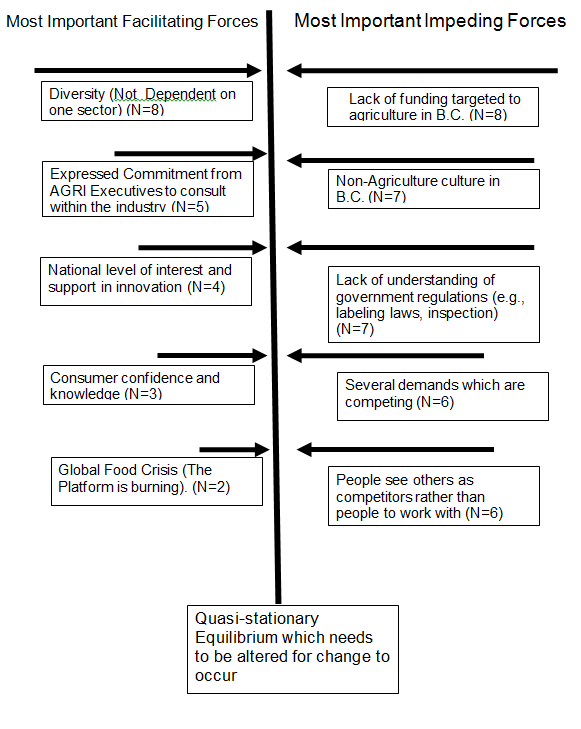
4. Identify ways to reduce or redirect the restraining forces. For example, an over supply of competitive degrees might be a restraining force.

5. Generate ideas to reduce the strength of key restraining forces. That is, in change theory, it is often more productive to reduce the strength of restraining forces.

6. Identify ways to increase the facilitating forces and reducethe effect of restraining forces.

In introducing a strategic objective for improving innovation in the Ministry of Agriculture, participants identified impeding forces related to lack of funding, a non-agricultural culture, lack of understanding of government regulations, competing demands, and the fact that people are working competitively rather than cooperatively. They also suggested that there were several forces that were working in their favour and which might assist them in implementing this strategy. These relate to the diversity of talent, the expressed commitment of the Agriculture executive, national interest and support for innovation, consumer confidence and knowledge, and the fact that there is an impending food crisis. These forces might be described in a state of quasi-stationary equilibrium as is illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2: Facilitating and impeding forces affecting the implementation of innovation strategy



The equilibrium of the forces in figure 2 can also be described as something like the equilibrium that exists in our body when it is disrupted by the stress of an injury. For example, adrenalin and white corpuscles respond immediately to injury or illness, or the body’s internal thermostat helps adjust to changes in temperature through shivering or sweating.

In physics, the balance of facilitating andimpeding forces determines the possibilities of change. In the same way, the facilitating and impeding forces affecting the implementation of innovation in agriculture will affect the degree and pace of change. As in physics, the forces are not at the same magnitude. The forces in figure 1 and 2 are a series of opposing forces of varying strengths (represented by varying lengths and number of votes that people gave to the force). There are three possible ways to adjust the forces (i) reducing the strengths of the impeding forces, (ii) increasing the strength of facilitating forces, and (iii) reversing the direction of impeding forces.

(i) Changes you accomplish by reducing the impeding forces are likely to have more impact on you than changes you induce by adding or strengthening facilitating forces. If impeding forces are removed from a person’s force field, the person will not be as likely to return to old behaviours and ways of doing things. As a general principle attempts to induce change by removing or diminishing impeding forces will result in a lower degree of tension. Participants felt that a force that required their immediate attention related to the fact that there was a non-agriculture culture in the province and this would have to change if innovation was to be successful. Figure 3 summarized several of the participants’ suggestions for reducing the impact of the non-agriculture culture (impeding force #2).

Figure 3: Ideas for changing the culture



(ii) If changes come about only through the strengthening of facilitating forces, the forces supporting the new level will not be as powerful. For example, many individuals who are part of work groups are stimulated towards new ways of working together, only to find their former behaviours and habits re-emerging shortly after they return to their day-to-day job. If the change started by the learning and enthusiasm of working together is to continue after the session, some other facilitating force must be ready to take the place of the initial stimulation.

(iii) Another efficient way to encourage change is to reverse the direction of one of the impeding forces. In our example, one of the impeding forces was the fact that people were not working together and saw themselves as competitors. This impeding force seems to be based on incorrect assumptions that there needs to be competition among agriculture industries. Thus, the removal of a powerful impeding force (competition) becomes an additional strong facilitating force (developing mechanism for cooperation) to assist the change.

The difficulties and possible resistances in change result when the forces are in a state of quasi-stationary equilibrium where the facilitating forces are at the same strength as the impeding forces. Change is more likely to occur in implementing the agriculture strategy if the forces are modified so that her new equilibrium can establish itself at a different level. The equilibrium can be changed by: (i) strengthening or adding forces in the direction of change, (ii) reducing or removing some of the impeding or restraining forces, and (iii) changing the direction of the forces, for example, reversing the direction of an impeding force so that it enhances the possibilities of change.

**Task**

Use the force field framework for defining enhancing and inhibiting forces that affect an organization’s need to outsource jobs in HR. Organizations may outsource some or all of their human resource management functions. In your force field report, you should investigate the outsourcing of the human resources function. You should review the literature about outsourcing services and describe the different ways in which the human resource management function is and can be outsourced. You should also identify the facilitating and inhibiting forces of outsourcing and illustrate this in a force field framework.

In your report, you might explain under what conditions you think outsourcing would be beneficial to public sector organizations. To make this relevant, we would like you to address this issue in reference to a specific context such as public sector or not-for-profit organizations. You might wish to review the relevance of the outsourcing model for an organization like the Cool Aid Society in Chapter 2. However, you might wish to situate your work in another organization you are familiar with. Or, you might wish to review and provide recommendations for public sector organizations generally.

# EL 3. Workforce Planning Metrics in Using the HR Scorecard

HR can be helpful in assisting managers in workforce planning. In this chapter, we have defined various activities related to forecasting the labour market and developing a workforce plan. Some of the key activities include:

- Reviewing the organization's strategic position

- Analyzing the gap between demand and supply of labour

- Defining the workforce plan's strategic themes

- Setting objectives after reviewing demand and supply forecasts

- Developing initiatives for accomplishing objectives

- Defining ownership and measures of success

Define how these activities can be useful in responding to the general strategic themes of: 1) improving customer or client service and market share; 2) improving workplace satisfaction, health, career development and, 3) improving efficiency and effectiveness in operations.

1. For each of the three strategic themes, what would each of the internal clients (employees and other managers) want HR to do in implementing these workplace planning activities so that they are helpful in their work and achieving their objectives?

Strategic theme 1: Improving customer and client services

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Strategic theme 2: Improving workplace satisfaction, health, career development

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Strategic theme 3: Improving efficiency and effectiveness

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2. For each of the three strategic themes, what would each of the internal clients (employees and other managers) **not** want HR to do in implementing the recruiting activities which they would find **unhelpful** in their work and achieving their objectives?

Strategic theme 1: Improving customer and client services

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Strategic theme 2: Improving workplace satisfaction, health, career development

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Strategic theme 3: Improving efficiency and effectiveness

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3. What ideas do you have for making workforce planning more responsive to managers and employees in assisting them in their work?

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# EL 4. What are the Top Human Capital Challenges?

The Conference Board of Canada recently asked key organizations to identify the top human capital challenges facing them.[[3]](#endnote-3) They asked human resource managers in small, medium-sized and large organizations to identify their organization's top three human resource challenges in the medium term (next 12-18 months) and long term (next 3-5 years). The 166 organizations responding to the survey represented all the major regions and industry categories in Canada.

Below is the list of the challenges they were asked to rank. Your task is to rank order these challenges in the order of importance to Canadian organizations.

1. Individually, rank the following list of 15 factors in their order of importance of these challenges. Place the number 1 beside the item which you think is the greatest challenge for Canadian organizations. Place the number 2 beside the item which is the next most important challenge.

2. Break into small groups and rank each item individually, then together develop a single rank ordering by consensus based upon discussion with your group, using the nominal group method discussed above. Observe the following norms in coming to a consensus.

*Norms:*

In group decision making, consensus can be difficult to reach and not every ranking decision meets with every group member’s complete approval. It’s not necessary to be unanimous in your group rankings but each individual needs to be fairly satisfied with the group rankings. If an individual feels strongly that an item needs to be ranked differently than the group, the individual has the ability to block the group’s ranking for that item. Groups working on such tasks can benefit from some ground rules:

1. Avoid arguing to have your ranking accepted. Instead, put forward your position logically and consider the group’s reaction if you feel the need to restate your opinion.

2. Avoid “win-lose” statements. If your group can’t completely agree on a ranking, look for a solution that is the most acceptable option for all members.

3. Avoid changing your ranking to match the group’s, just to avoid conflict. Discuss with the group thoughtfully why you’ve chosen the ranking you have.

4. Avoid techniques that solve conflict artificially such as voting, averaging, bargaining and coin-tossing. Differences in opinion should be considered an opportunity to explore alternative ideas and rationale, providing a richer set of ideas to consider.

**Your Ranking**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Challenges | Key challenges in the short term  (Next 12-18 months) | Key challenges in the long term (Next 3-5 years) |
| 1. Skills shortage | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
| 2. Impact of technological change | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
| 3. Employee engagement | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
| 4. Increasingly diverse workforce | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
| 5. Capacity to innovate | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
| 6. Health benefits costs | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
| 7. Labour cost containment | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
| 8. Productivity improvement | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
| 9. Leadership capability | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
| 10. Capacity to respond to change | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
| 11. Structural change | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
| 12. Learning capability | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
| 13. Aging workforce | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
| 14. Disasters/threats | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
| 15. Other | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |

5. Share the ranking with others in the class and discuss the differences in rankings. How did the rankings differ from individual scores to group scores? Did the composition of the group make a difference?

6. Compare your rankings with the Conference Board results in the quiz results section.

**References**

1. Lewin, K., 1969. Quasi-stationary social equibria and the problem of permanent change. In Bennis, W.G., Benne, K.D., & Chin, R. (eds.), The Planning of Change.

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2. Lewin, K. (2008) [1946]. Resolving social conflicts & Field theory in social science. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, p. 338. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Wright, R. (2006) The strategic value of people: Human resource trends and metrics, Ottawa, The Conference Board of Canada, Conference Board of Canada (2006).This study was carried out in May, 2005. See: www.conferenceboard.ca. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)