11.25   Force Field Analysis

PURPOSE: To assess the various forces that may affect a decision regarding a social problem or issue.

DESCRIPTION: *Force field analysis* is a technique that helps to identify and assess significant factors that may promote or inhibit change in an organization or community. Five steps are involved in conducting a force field analysis:

1. *Clearly specify the desired objective.* Be very clear regarding what change you intend to achieve. Reduce this to a one-sentence statement, such as "The goal of this action is to establish a 'Clubhouse' program to serve adults in this community who are chronically mentally ill."

2. *Identify the people that will determine if the objective will be achieved.* These forces may be powerful individuals, groups, coalitions, organizations, or elected officials who have a personal stake in the issue. On the left side of a sheet of paper, list those who are expected to work for the objective as the *driving forces.* On the right side, list those who might be expected to oppose the initiative as the *restraining forces.* In the case of a Clubhouse initiative, the driving forces might be professionals who are familiar with this approach, parents of mentally ill persons, and mentally ill persons themselves. Restraining forces might be mental health professionals who favor more conventional therapeutic approaches and persons who oppose a tax increase to provide this service.

3. *Assess the strengths of each driving and restraining force.* At the heart of force field analysis is the determination of the relative strength of each driving and restraining force as a guide for developing the change strategy. Each force should be assessed on the basis of the following characteristics:

- *Potency:* the power of a particular force
- *Consistency:* the stability or constancy with which the force has taken this position
- *Amenability:* the openness of the force to outside influence and pressure

For each of these factors, a "high" or "low" rating is given. For example, a person who is mentally ill would likely have low potency (LP), whereas a county commissioner would have high potency (HP). Thus, the two lists prepared in step 2 will reflect the summary assessment of strength of each force on the three factors.

4. *Identify the actors that might attempt to influence the outcome.* The goal of making this assessment is to determine what individual or group might successfully counter a driving or restraining force and thereby alter its strength. Once the potential actor has been identified for each force, a rating of "high" or "low" strength can be recorded. In the Clubhouse example, support from the League of Women Voters might very well blunt the opposition of a county commissioner to the establishment of a program for the mentally ill.

5. *Select a strategy for change.* The sheet of paper with these assessments recorded thus becomes a tool to assist in planning a change strategy. The goal might be to strengthen the driving forces and weaken the restraining forces by enlisting the help of the influential actors.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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11.26 Community Decision-Making Analysis

PURPOSE: To assess the factors that influence the actions of elected officials and other decision makers.

DISCUSSION: As social workers seek to influence decisions that affect the quality of human services in a community, they must develop a strategy for convincing the person or persons in authority that a particular course of action is the best choice among the possible options. Ideally, decisions should be made on the merit of the proposal; in reality, however, decision makers usually respond to external pressures and various personal considerations. The social worker must be alert to the factors and forces that may sway a decision maker.

Research on community decision making and community power structures does not yield a consistent picture of the forces that lead to these decisions. However, several generalizations can be made regarding variables that at least partially explain why some communities tend to center the decision making in a small, elite group of people while others are more pluralistic and involve a broader spectrum of the community:

1. *Size.* Large cities tend to be pluralistic. They are likely to become more diverse and competitive as they grow, resulting in a greater range of people and interest groups involved in making decisions.

2. *Population diversity.* Communities that have more varied and complex class and ethnic structures develop more special interest groups and more community organizations that compete for power and resources. Consequently, there are more challenges to any dominant elite group and a tendency to increase pluralism in decision making.

3. *Economic diversity.* More diversified communities in terms of varied sources of employment, high levels of industrialization, and the presence of absentee-owned industry (as opposed to local people owning the major industries) all tend to make communities more pluralistic in how decisions are made.